EPISTEMIC RUPTURES IN SOUTH AFRICAN STANDPOINT KNOWLEDGE-MAKING: ACADEMIC FEMINISM AND THE #FEESMUSTFALL MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Alongside the many structural and political processes generated by the #FeesMustFall student protests between 2015 and 2016 were narratives and discourses about revitalising the transformation of universities throughout South Africa. It was the very notion of "transformation," diluted by neo-liberal macro-economic restructuring from the late 1990s, that students jettisoned as they increasingly embraced the importance of "decolonisation." By exploring some of the key debates and interventions driven by the #FeesMustFall movement, we consider how earlier trajectories of feminist knowledge-making resonate with these. The article also reflects on how aspects of intellectual activism within the student protests can deepen and push back the frontiers of contemporary South African academic feminism. In so doing, it explores how radical knowledge-making at, and about, universities, has contributed to radical political thought in South Africa.

Keywords: #FeesMustFall; student politics; standpoint theory; feminist knowledge production; higher education

INTRODUCTION

The structural and political processes generated by the #FeesMustFall (FMF) student protests have played a key role in revitalising debates about the transformation of universities in South Africa. Students rejected the notion of "transformation," diluted by decades of neo-liberal macro-economic restructuring in the country, and embraced the importance of "decolonisation" as a more comprehensive and revolutionary process of change. The impact of these protests was far-reaching, and as Susan Booysen demonstrates, the students unleashed "social and political power that brought university management to heel, and changed the social fabric of universities and parts of our society" (2016, 22).

The student struggles focused on political, structural and epistemic issues: in addition to addressing the need for institutional changes, they foregrounded attention to the politics of knowledge-production, the status of canonised academic knowledge, the marginalisation of certain knowledge-making, and the form and content of what "radical" knowledge in post-apartheid South Africa could and should entail. The movement galvanised a broad spectrum of students, academic staff and workers, as well as their allies in civil society, and often employed dramatic tactics to confront the state and university management. This made the movement the "most inspiring and surprising social movement to shake the South African state since the Treatment Action Campaign of the early 2000s" (Bond 2016, 192). The rich conversations and debates that this movement generated about decolonisation have contributed significantly to renewing radical political thought in South Africa.

The nature and impact of the revolt, as well as the broader contours of decoloniality, have been the focus of many analyses by social scientists (see, for example, Mbembe 2015; Bond 2016; Booysen 2016 and Langa 2016). This article, however, focuses on some aspects of the philosophising that these student struggles generated.[1] As academics who have participated in seminars, debates and/or on public platforms about decolonisation, and at times worked with Fallist students, we have been struck by how the ideas generated by, and experiences of, the Fallist movement echo our own and others' past feminist experiences of seeking to transform curricula and traditions of knowledge-making, and to unsettle prevailing racialised and masculinist institutional cultures. We argue that the discourses and narratives underpinning the Fallist movement resonate significantly with those that drove feminist interventions into the academy from the late 1980s: changing racial and gender power relations, transforming institutional cultures, and making visible previously marginalised scholarship and knowledge systems.

The demands of the Fallist movement have reverberated in governance, policy-making and public domains in ways that academy-based feminism clearly did not. For example, students publicly challenged the Minister of Higher Education; their activism

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1   The information generated has been vast. Our analysis provides a very selective approach to themes.

led to the closure of many universities; and pitched battles on many campuses occurred between students on the one hand and management and police or outsourced security firms on the other. By contrast, the localised feminist academic struggles of the 1980s and 1990s centred mainly around faculty board and senate discussions, or caucusing and advocacy on campus and among individuals on different campuses.

Despite these differences, plotting similarities and discontinuities may contribute to understanding traditions of radical political thought and praxis in South Africa. As revealed in the work and activism of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in South Africa, struggles in the higher education (HE) sector and at university institutions have played significant roles in shaping distinct traditions of radical political philosophy. We contribute to exploring this tradition by reflecting on past struggles of feminism in the academy and the present day #FMF movement. Far from defining feminism as a grand narrative that subsumes or determines later struggles in the HE sector, we analyse similarities in the trajectories of political thought. We consider how #FMF and feminist struggles interact as conjunctural struggles for social justice at different moments. In pursuing this analysis, the article focuses on the South African and global resonance of the notion of "standpoint knowledge" to unravel the philosophical underpinnings of feminist and Fallist knowledge-making as epistemological ruptures.

STRUGGLES IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR

Student struggles in the South African higher education system clearly predate the emergence of the #FMF movement in October 2015, and we can trace protests in the South African schooling system way back to the 1920s. It was, however, the student protests of the 1970s that garnered world-wide attention. Although comprising mainly schoolchildren resisting the imposition of Afrikaans as the language of instruction at schools, the protests included large numbers of university students and progressive academics who opposed the government's use of primary, secondary and higher education in its apartheid state's social engineering. Through formations like the South African Students Movement and the South African Students Organisation, students were mobilised across the country to challenge white supremacy (See South African History Online 2016). Concerted opposition to apartheid education intensified again in the 1980s, when students participated in broader anti-apartheid mobilisation and resistance and targeted the instrumentalising of education in maintaining white privilege and hegemony. After 1994, students continued to wage protests against fee hikes and exclusions in the public education system. But these were largely sporadic, issue-driven, uncoordinated and predominantly located in the formerly disadvantaged higher education institutions.

The scale of student revolts in 2015/2016 revived the central role of youth in national political struggles. The revolts were distinctive in the way that students formulated

innovative registers of protest. The communication, knowledge dissemination, and archiving of information—facilitated by social media—was driven by the goal of radically transcending existing discourses of "transformation" and driving processes of "decolonisation."

Insofar as the Fallist movement involved comprehensive efforts to reinvigorate and develop registers, knowledge genres and knowledge traditions, it bears strong affinities with feminist struggles in the academy between the late 1980s and the late 1990s. In many ways, academy-based feminism in South Africa then mirrored what has come to be known as "decoloniality" in its emphasis on challenging hegemonic archives, drawing links between knowledge and power, and seeking to introduce alternative conceptualisations of disciplines and forge new methods of teaching and knowledge production. Feminist passions and energies therefore inflected knowledge production and mobilisation strategies in ways that now reverberate in Fallist philosophy.

Nevertheless, many feminists who were involved in struggles during the 1990s have shifted away from the radicalism that marked their earlier engagements with university governance, institutional structures and research and teaching conventions. The anger and determination that drove them to challenge managers and bureaucrats, to combine unrecognised teaching with their acknowledged loads in "home departments," to dedicate effort to knowledge-making that was marginalised by the academic mainstream, to initiate and build groups for challenging patriarchalism in the academy, or to invest in community work beyond the academy, now seem quite remote. One reason for this is that the comprehensive restructuring of universities since the mid-1990s increasingly led to academics' (including feminist academics') alignment with university management and governance (see Lewis 2016). Another is that the growing recognition of research and teaching on gender and sexuality have made these subjects less controversial than they used to be. South African feminist students and academics today do not, therefore, fight for the recognition of their research or politics in the way that feminists in the academy previously did. The last two decades of restructuring in the academy have therefore militated against academy-based feminists demonstrating the passion, intensity and militancy that previously characterised their work.

Despite these considerations, the analysis that follows suggests that an overemphasis on the differences between feminists of the 1990s and today's Fallists might neglect the shared attributes between academy-based feminism in the 80s and 90s and the spirit of the Fallist movement. In exploring the connections between academic feminism and Fallism, we are therefore attentive both to philosophical and theoretical connections, as well as to affective dimensions of politics that inflect thought and political consciousness in specific ways.

STANDPOINT KNOWLEDGES: FEMINIST LEGACIES OF THE 1990S AND RECENT STUDENT PROTESTS

In a provocative discussion of the relationship between older South African feminism and current feminists within the Fallist movement, "the new African women," Darlene Miller (2016, 271) traces the ways in which feminists in the present have deviated from the political orthodoxies and thought of an earlier generation of intellectual activists. Defining this rupture as "generational blues" (2016, 275), she reflects on how feminist activism of the 1980s/1990s resisted patriarchal and authoritarian knowledges, although the epistemic impact of this activism has remained under-theorised. Apart from her chapter providing insights into feminism and radical processes of transforming knowledge and power, her self-reflexivity highlights her own and others' positioning as producers of situated knowledge. The writer self-consciously locates herself as an older feminist seeking to bridge a generational divide and to draw attention to how similar strategies of resistance emerged among groups whose marginality engendered their sense of injustice and revolutionary determination.

The powerful yet extremely simple idea that embodied experience *matters* in determining what we know, how we come to know what we know, and who can be a legitimate knower has been as influential in the feminist movement as it has been in the #FMF movement. Both movements focused squarely on questioning processes, discourses and practices within the academy with reference to the positioned knowledge of subjects who experience it in alienating, oppressive and/or unjust ways.

Often recognised as one of the most path-breaking epistemological interventions to emerge out of second-wave feminist scholarship, standpoint feminist theorising has powerfully underpinned the work of feminists in the global North, such as Sandra Harding (1991; 1998; 2004) and Nancy Hartsock (1998), and Patricia Hill Collins's (2000) work on black women's standpoints. South African feminism did not explicitly invoke the concept of standpoint; nor did it always draw on traditions of standpoint in the North. However, the energies of feminist knowledge-making in South Africa from the 1980s onwards were emphatically rooted in unravelling women's gendered experiences relative to men's, posing a challenge to the patriarchal mainstream, and consolidating distinct spheres of knowledge and analysis focused on women's social locations.

The late 1980s witnessed the steady entry of writing on women and gender into the stream of work published in the academy and by Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). Dealing especially with labour, health and politics, this work sought to forge new concepts and theoretical scaffolding for exploring and analysing familiar worlds from women's gendered perspectives. A pioneering publication of this time was the magazine, *Speak*, whose title registered its emphasis on inserting marginalised voices into the public domain. South African History Online (2017) describes the publication in the following way:

> Activists and founders of SPEAK magazine, … realized that what women needed in order to demand a change was support from those who were fighting for the same rights around the country. … As women's rights organisations grew, so did the magazine. …When SPEAK's last issue was published in 1994, the magazine had made its way to races and genders around the country.

Apart from *Speak*, before 1994 feminist networking at several universities challenged the patriarchal status quo debates, which conceptualised transformation primarily in racial terms. As teachers and researchers working with African-centred regional networks, such as the Southern African Political and Economic Series (SAPES), as well as at the universities of Cape Town and the Western Cape, we vividly recall processes of fusing networking, teaching, organisational work and research in efforts to develop distinctive feminist and African-centred perspectives on transformation. Such processes involved teaching courses on feminism and gender, introducing topics dealing with gender and women in politics or literature, and including African scholars into our curricula. One of these processes was a winter school run by the Gender Equity Unit (GEU) at the University of the Western Cape in 1992 and 1993. A few years later, the GEU established a Women's and Gender Studies Programme which offered postgraduate courses for Honours and Masters students. Similar courses were offered by the African Gender Institute at the University of Cape Town from the mid-1990s. These were entirely new to university syllabi in South Africa and allowed participants and teachers to define contextually relevant curricula configuring canons of new knowledge in the face of patriarchy and racism. It also entailed linking up with, and forming, alternative spaces and networks for feminists to deepen their situational knowledge and sharpen their critiques of the academic status quo. Standpoint knowledge production was a painstaking but also organic process of combining research with networking, teaching and organisational engagement. The learning processes undertaken in the classroom with others, the collective struggles to articulate what hegemonic knowledge set in place and perpetuated, the battles to forge new ways of knowing, all drove the epistemic project of producing emancipatory knowledge.

As was the case with feminist intellectual activism, Fallists have consistently articulated their embodied experience by fusing learning with the production of knowledge. In particular, the experiences of occupation enabled students to debate ideas, to read and to fuse non-authoritarian teaching and learning with the production of knowledge. Especially at the universities of Cape Town, Rhodes and the Witwatersrand, "occupation" involved students taking over parts of the university spatially in creating domains to debate alternative institutional, pedagogical and curricula arrangements. Students at the University of Johannesburg established formations such as Black Thought, in which they exposed themselves to alternative readings (by Fanon and Biko in particular) which they then also used to debate issues of decolonisation of knowledge on various platforms. In her Ruth First lecture, Leigh-Ann Naidoo, a prominent figure in the Fallist movement, described the tenor and effects of the #RhodesMustFall (RMF)

occupation. Her emphasis on the movement's efforts to conceptualise decolonisation through imagining is worth quoting at length:

> Occupation by *definition creates a new space-time*. The RMF occupation of the UCT management building in March 2015 changed the building from Bremner Administration into Azania House. It *occupied the time and space of university management* that both shut down UCT management's right to continue to oversee the incremental transformation of the university, and *created the conditions for a vibrant intellectual space for imagining what could replace it*. It was during this three-week occupation that RMF students clarified their vision of a future UCT, where *campus was renamed and resignified with other statues, artworks and building names*. … At Wits University, the occupation of Senate House during the October Fees Must Fall shutdown turned it into Solomon Mahlangu House. *Here too mass meetings, small group discussions and strategizing, experimented with the birthing of a different kind of praxis in the university*. … Solomon House became a place in which a different kind of democratic practice started to emerge as the politically aligned student leadership at the forefront of the protests was challenged. (Naidoo 2016; original emphasis)

Memories and understandings of *embodied* experience in the Fallist movement have been central to students' efforts to articulate resistance in psychosocial terms. Of particular importance has been the surfacing of and re-emphasis on the notion of "black pain." In numerous social media posts, public platforms and written statements, the phrase "black pain" powerfully invoked the analysis of psychological oppression as explored by Steve Biko and Frantz Fanon. As radical thinkers with deep interests in reconceptualising black people's health, Biko and Fanon foregrounded the psychic modalities of colonisation. Their insights resonated significantly with Fallist radicals' efforts to articulate embodied knowledge, and in this sense, focus attention on psychological experiences that tend to be buried by activism and knowledge about observable social processes and structures of oppression. Like feminists in the 1990s, Fallists countered the trivialising of the psychic pain inflicted on socially marginalised groups by situating this pain at the very centre of their embodied insight into power and situated knowledge. As early feminist work on women's health revealed, physiological distress and illness among women was usually integrally linked to psychological distress and was seen to be embedded in political oppression.

Fallists, in the repeated evocation of "black pain," made the following epistemological interventions and located their knowledge in distinct forms of oppression: First, they debunked the belief that South African universities are the custodians of normless international "excellence" and universal truths, a belief that has become central to the branding of South African universities during the last decade. Globally, standpoint feminists have exposed myths about universality by revealing the hegemony of privileged groups' situated knowledge, especially evident in the positivism of patriarchal science. Similarly, calls for decoloniality on the basis of experienced "black pain" challenged the idea that dominant knowledge circulating in the South African academy was universal and authoritative. It highlighted that knowledge based on students' racially

and economically marginalised experience was different, side-lined, and in fact, more objective.

Secondly, they questioned the hasty discrediting of black consciousness thought in the South African academy. Neo-Marxist and social constructionist analysis of the "fictiveness" of race continues to enjoy currency in the post-apartheid academy. This view reinforces the claim that race is "merely" discursively constructed and somehow secondary to larger issues explained by class analysis and, more recently, social constructionism. By insisting on stories about the experienced effects of racial supremacy and discourse and by reclaiming theoretical traditions (e.g. Biko 1987; Fanon 1952; 1963; hooks 1981; 1984), Fallists stressed the "reality" of race, and unpacked how powerfully race worked as a subject-constituting language.

Thirdly, conceptualising "black pain" exposed a post-apartheid tradition of affirmative action and transformative politics that in essence shored up white supremacist authority. As young inheritors of "democracy," many of whom are "born frees," Fallists dismissed the rhetoric of "post-apartheid transformation and insisted on more meaningful emancipation through decolonisation. Decolonisation in this context therefore implied the unmasking of, and resistance to, the "racially hierarchised, imperialistic, colonialist, Euro-American centric, Christian-centric, heteronormative, patriarchal violent and modern world order" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, 11, with reference to Grosfoguel) and/ or as articulated by Godsell and Chikane, "the radical transformation of the curriculum and institutional frameworks of the university including the values that distinguish and underpin it" (2016, 59).

Students' articulations of "black pain" included a volume of testimony, open letters, Facebook posts and personal narratives. Many of these concerned speakers or writers, especially those at historically white universities, speaking out about being silenced in class and other institutional sites of knowledge-making (see Langa 2016). Their argument focused not only on the specious truth-claims of others' positioned knowledge, but also on validating their located experiences as the basis for telling alternative truths.

In the same way as feminists developed separatist strategies to ground and develop their situated knowledge, so did the Fallist movement. And as was the case with feminist organising, it was increasingly realised that "standpoint" as the basis for epistemic inquiry can be a slippery foundation. Stoetzler and Yuval Davis' (2002, 319) reflections about which identities matter, as well as when certain axes of oppression have privileged ontological statuses, are especially relevant here. These writers reflect on the difficulty of identifying which subject positions should acquire salience in shaping radical knowledge and consciousness.

South African feminist debates also unravelled the ontological statuses of situated knowledges rooted in different identities. In fact, the first national conference on homogenously defined "Women and Gender in Southern Africa" represented an initial rupture in a "feminist standpoint," with many black women participants challenging the idea of women's homogeneously defined positioned experience. In subsequent forums,

more fractures began to surface, and involved the splintering of black women's situated knowledge with reference to class, political affiliation and sexual orientation.

Similar fractures grew within Fallism. In fact, by 2016, tensions between feminists and masculinist elements in the movement had led to feminist separatism. At Rhodes University as well as the University of the Witwatersrand, Cape Town and the Western Cape, feminist students directly challenged their violent silencing by their erstwhile allies in the movement as well as university management and the state. Overall, knowledge produced by students had to accept that standpoint on the basis of embodied experience yielded the dilemma that no single identity could constitute the basis for consensually defined liberatory knowledge.

INTERSECTIONALITY

"My feminism will be intersectional or it will be bullshit"
Flavia Dzodan (2011)

Implicit in the knowledge, narratives and documented and experienced struggles of the Fallists was the effort to theorise and act in ways that addressed the simultaneous functioning of key axes of oppression. As Gouws explains in a recent essay, "Feminist Intersectionality and the Matrix of Domination in South Africa" (2017), Fallist women students

> articulated their identities as "radical, intersectional African feminists" [and] reintroduced discussions of the … interlocking relations of dominance of multiple social, political, cultural and economic dynamics of power that are determined simultaneously by identity categories of race, gender, class, sexuality, disability and others. (2017, abstract)

On one hand, Gouws provides a useful outline of what intersectionality means and of its centrality to student politics between 2015 and 2016. Simply mapping out the content of intersectionality, however, might fail to explain its connection to the articulation of situated and standpoint knowledges, as well as the complex role of identity politics in South African registers of protest. Both feminism and Fallism took up the challenge that Yuval Davis (2006) poses in asking which identities matter in standpoint. Among feminists, the late 1990s especially saw an explosion of work dealing with how race intersected with gender. The epistemological challenges associated with conceptualising this was central, and it is worth plotting the distinct trajectories of various interventions.

A first intervention involved the separatist emphasis of black feminists and their impatience with being spoken for. In initial efforts to offer alternative knowledge, black feminists invoked the authority of experience—consolidated through separatist networking and knowledge-sharing—to validate their truth claims. The charges of white feminists, that these claims were essentialist and under-theorised, were often driven by their own lack of understanding, fears and anxieties (similarly to the anxieties generated by the student's emphasis on the use of their local languages and knowledge

systems). At the same time, the charge of essentialism (that black women's bodies automatically spoke black women's truths) was valid. Claims to truth, unmediated by subject positioning and discursive processes, do not strengthen epistemology, but can lead to tautological definition along the lines of arguing that "Black feminism is feminism produced by black women. A future liberated world is therefore one envisaged by black women."

Intersectionality, or the interconnectedness of subject positions and power relations of marginalisation, surfaced within feminism from the late 1980s, even though the term "intersectionality" was not used then. Feminists were concerned not only with recognising interlocking or enmeshed power relations, but also with conceptual tools for explaining these, and their relevance in unfolding democratic struggles and efforts to dismantle apartheid capitalism and patriarchy.

Successive articulations of these attempts at theorising, chronicled in the pages of the South African feminist journal *Agenda* from the late 1990s, demonstrate ongoing intellectual efforts to understand the implications of what it means to take into account different axes of oppression. In the work of several black feminists who reflected on essentialising views and mechanical ideas about compound identities (see De la Rey 1997; Gqola 2001; Hendricks and Lewis 1994), there was a growing realisation that recognising and confronting multiple identities influenced epistemology in terms of theoretical, methodological, conceptual and strategic interventions. This work therefore described the way that theorists strategically homed in on particular identities in confronting specific epistemic projects.

In this sense, early feminist explorations of multiple identities have anticipated the struggles of today's feminist student activists as they seek to explore compound forms of struggle. As it has been used in the documents, Facebook posts, slogans and narratives of Fallism, "intersectionality" may have been oversimplified. There is limited attention to the challenging conceptual work that is needed to justify why or how *certain* locations are important in relation to particular political challenges and epistemic interventions. In fact, "intersectionality" has frequently been seen as a kind of panacea of struggle; it is as though by simply stating that struggles are intersectional, commentators were dispensing with the more difficult task of articulating radical goals with reference to particular practices.

Conceptualised in this way, "intersectionality" becomes a tired, routine concept, going the same way as many originally progressive concepts by ossifying social processes that are energetic, mercurial and elusive. This fate is evident in the phrase, "My feminism will be intersectional or it will be bullshit" coined by the American feminist Falvia Dzodan in a blogpost in 2011. This phrase has been taken up in many Fallist posters, open letters and statements. The use of the term, however, is not always accompanied by attention to what intersectionality means, namely, the ontological status of and need to "fix" certain identities in confronting specific struggles or epistemic interventions. Popularised in the metropolis among black and diasporic scholars and

scholar activists based in the global North, the term "intersectionality" has influenced analysis and methodologies for addressing amalgamated subject-positioning, rather than atomised and autonomous identities such as "class" and "gender" (see Grabham et al. 2009; Lewis 2007). But it has rapidly come to be mobilised as a formula, with little attention being paid to whether it constitutes a theoretical lens, a methodological position, or an emancipatory agenda, or to how it works in knowledge-making and organisation.

In the following section, we suggest that possibly the enormous scope for sharing and accessing sound-bytes of information has weakened the epistemic possibilities within Fallist knowledge-making. Instead of labouring over what liberatory knowledge-making means and can do, many Fallists might have unwittingly fallen prey to aspects of an uncritical neoliberal knowledge economy.

NEOLIBERALISM AND EMBODIED POLITICS

In certain critiques of the mainstreaming of feminist theory, writers condemn the "race for theory" (Christian 1988) that leads feminists to reproduce the exclusionary theorising practices of patriarchal and elitist knowledge-making. These critiques raise the extent to which challenging patriarchy involves experimentation with revolutionary forms of expression. Confronting patriarchal knowledge in this holistic way raises similar challenges to contesting neo-liberalism. Both systems entrench and naturalise power relations through ideology, canon-formation, and established scholarly forms and styles.

To a far greater extent than feminist knowledge-making in the 1990s, #FMF knowledge production confronted the revolutionary implications of how to contest power through alternative knowledge production. In a book chapter co-written by Fallist students, the authors write that "the students challenged the manner in which words and symbols become documents of protest, using new media, performances and other artifacts in making meaning of historical events such as the protest" (Godsell et al. 2016, 102). Indeed, Fallists' impatience with the conventions of linearity and authoritarianism have been evident in their preference for non-authoritarian organisations and flattened structures. This principled commitment to democracy directly affected ideas about knowledge production, with many knowledge forms refusing the rigid structures that usually characterise knowledge production within and about education, the academy and higher education institutions.

This is well illustrated in the tabloid newspaper *Publica[c]tion* (2017), a compilation of articles, essays, biographical writings, poetry, cartoons and artwork produced between 2015 and 2016 and launched in August 2017. At the public launch of this publication at Community House in Cape Town, the contributors constantly focused on the need to disentangle multiple layers of power in both the forms, canons and conventions associated with knowledge, book production and book launches.

It is important to reflect on the source of this critique of canons and conventions with reference to Fallists' attentiveness to neoliberal ideology. The national political reverberations within the Fallist movement could be seen in its critical attention to neoliberalism. The emphasis on the exploitative outsourcing of workers and the payment of fees for public education were as central to students' struggles, as was the focus on academic racism and, later, struggles around gender and sexual orientation. Students in the movement highlighted the devastating impact of almost two decades of concerted neoliberal policy-making in the higher education landscape, labour-brokering practices, and the need for social justice. They therefore reinvoked the need for a second democratic revolution, seen to have been obliterated by the post-1994 commitment to capitalist growth. While black feminists in earlier years had invoked "class" in their efforts to explore multiple oppressions, the operation of corporate capitalism and the neo-liberal "transformation" of the universities were not subjected to the focused scrutiny that they were subjected to by Fallists in both their actions and discourse.

Fallist students' attention to neoliberalism was connected to their consciousness of the embodied and visceral effects of contemporary injustices. It is no coincidence that attention to the body, whether in the form of producing and circulated visual texts, or performances involving the body in political activism, or discourses about the body in pain, were central to Fallism. Feminist activism in previous years *did* highlight the gendered body. Research and activism on violence, reproductive justice and the representations of black women's bodies in racist legacies all revealed attention to the socially inscribed body in understandings of power.

Yet this feminist attention to the body was far less insistent and forceful than has been the case with Fallism's preoccupation with embodiment and power. From the outset, the Fallist movement invoked the centrality of the inscribed body in resisting neoliberal and racist hegemony. The infamous act of the student who threw faeces at Rhodes' statue at the University of Cape Town continues to stand out as a form of (un)civil disobedience that refused the conventions of dignified and polite protest. Based on a philosophy of transcending neoliberalism, this bodily act, like many other acts of violence, reflected the anchorage of student militancy in postliberal philosophy and conceptual understandings of what power, governmentality, "colonisation," and, consequently, resistance entailed. This bodily emphasis suggests that the student movement was inspired by an almost visceral effort to be liberated from a Foucauldian understanding of governmentality: a prison of lies, subterfuge and hegemony. The performance genre encouraged the innovative expression and communication of performers and spectators as producers of "knowledge from below." In "Documenting the Revolution," an article co-authored by three student activists, performative acts in Fallism are described in the following way: "Performance was a layered attempt at speaking visually, beyond language" (Godsell et al. 2016, 110).

The intimate connections between physical action and cognition were evident in various acts and ideas about "violence": a central argument within the movement

was that the racial and economic violence perpetrated by the government, university management and corporate capitalism had been normalised, and that their own disruptive acts were necessary cleansing processes in the face of this naturalised violence. At the University of the Western Cape (UWC), where violence perpetrated by outsourced security was unleashed on students in 2015 and 2016, there were especially charged discussions about how violence was naturalised when perpetrated by the status quo. Successive posts in the #FWF (Fees Will Fall) movement at UWC therefore homed in on how the excessive violence of management's response, sanctioned by government and the broader "public," was normalised as the "partial truth" of the status quo.[2]

Music, song, performance and dance have always been central to South African protest, with the toyi-toyi (especially) being a performative act that refuses to subordinate the body's physical energy to more cerebral forms of political agency. But the tendency of the politics of protest in the academy has followed Cartesian dualism. In the student protests, performances and representations of body's physical resources became a form of epistemic rupture: their acts physically challenged the institutional power of universities and the state and the physical boundaries that these institutions set in place.

A heightened awareness of the socially inscribed body—scripted by dominant discourses and used as a weapon of resistance—was implicit at the start of the Fallist movement. With the eruption of feminism in the movement, however, the gendered body was explicitly used as a signifying tool. The explosion of radical women's naked protests in the context of Fallism during 2016 spoke volumes about Fallist women's courage in using the body to speak truth to power. In her comprehensive discussion of the role of naked bodies in protest, Sylvia Tamale (2016) traces the naked protest of the Ugandan academic, Stella Nyanzi, to a tradition of protest by women. She writes:

> The complexities, dilemmas and contradictions that female nakedness throws up have been the subject of scholarly research for years …. . Depending on the context, in the same public space, the same naked body will invoke desire and allure while being "read" with the discourse of shame and humiliation … . Through this ambiguity, the naked protesting body represents what Shirley Ardener refers to as the "condensed symbols of female power."

The public nakedness of the black woman academic or student, ambiguously situated between power and powerlessness, or between the mind and the body, has an especially subversive import. Since she has the power and resources to protest "differently" and *chooses* rather to use her body as a weapon of shock, she commands special attention in domains underpinned by binaries of what is and what is not acceptable gendered and academic behaviour.

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2   Understandings of partial truth have been central to standpoint theorising, much of which insists that seeing from below generates less partial truths because it does not invest in established forms of power.

In extending this reading of the female body in Fallism, Miller draws attention to its role in breaking silences, and in countering legacies of positioning the female body as ugly and mute:

> Politics begins with the scream. The scream is not pretty. The scream tears at the social fabric of society. "Ugly feminists" is about the body of the feminist and the necessary ugliness in the feminist and/or radical act … My personal favourite is the black woman student leader who wears high-fashion suits, has natural hair dyed a blond-orange in a gorgeous fish plait and wears green or blue contact lenses, depending on her mood. (Miller 2016, 272)

Miller's reference to the playfulness of one student leader's self-styling raises another discursive pattern about the use of the body. Critics of pop feminism have persuasively argued that the claiming and celebration of the body directly echoes and endorses neoliberal individualism. The "claiming" of the body as though it were a personal possession, owned in the same way that any other commodity can be seen to be owned and laid claim to under commodity capitalism, is symptomatic of an individualist imagination under neoliberalism.

The naked protests of 2016 also highlighted protestors' engagement with particular transnational legacies. The use of the naked body has in fact featured prominently in popular culture and in forms ranging from music icons' celebrations of their sexuality to the slut marches occurring in various cities mainly in the global North. Although Tamale (2016) traces the history of naked protests by women in the academy to traditions in Africa, she may have neglected the extent to which another tradition has shaped this: a (strongly Americanised) tradition rooted in neoliberal ideas about women taking individual responsibility to act on their "personalised" instincts for freedom. It is noteworthy that Fallism has generally relied considerably on sources of knowledge popularised by digital media, and often emanating from the United States. The memes and slogans that have circulated within the movement speak volumes about the resources available to students and the opportunities for assimilating truncated and decontextualised information, rather than for analysing knowledge in ways that, for example, processes of occupation encouraged.

Hussen (forthcoming) focusing on feminist Fallists' own interpretations of their struggle, stresses their self-conscious affiliation with African traditions of protest, challenging the idea that their strategies have been "influenced by the West." Their outrage reflects many South African (and other third-world) feminists' dismissal of the conservative charge that African feminists "only learn feminism from the West." At the same time, the overwhelming impact of hegemonic Northern and neo-liberal messages in shaping the consciousness of students, young people and, indeed, of many older academics (see, e.g., Lewis 2016) and intellectual activists should not be under-estimated. The eruption of the signifying body into political discourse through the Fallist movement is, at one level, revolutionary and radical. At the same time, it testifies to the extent to which a generation of radical youth is influenced by neoliberal discourse as much as it sees itself resisting it.

CONCLUSION: THE PRESENTS AND FUTURES OF EPISTEMIC RUPTURES

By juxtaposing the contexts, forms and content of knowledge generated by feminist academics and students in the academy at the end of the last millennium with the knowledge produced by student protests in the present, this article has analysed the knowledge-making associated with efforts to resist dominant canons, hegemonic institutional cultures and racist and patriarchal discourses in South African higher education and the broader society in which it is located. It has been shown that racism, patriarchy and the dominant discourses that marginalise certain groups on the basis of their "deviance" or inferiority" have surfaced in university-focused protests and political registers in complex contextually-determined ways. Moreover, identity politics has often been connected to global socioeconomic contexts and politics in ways that significantly shape (and sometimes compromise) these national struggles.

Challenges presented by universities and the broader society have therefore shaped certain forms of action. This action has therefore both driven and been driven by knowledge-making. Activist praxis and radical thought have therefore intersected in organic and linked ways, with knowledge-making being inextricably linked to political protests. By way of concluding this analysis of praxis and knowledge production, it is important to summarise the current status of political action within the Fallist movement with reference to the challenges that faced feminist political interventions in the 1990s.

The triumphs of feminist struggles from the 1980s to the late 1990s included the recognition of intersectionality and transformative shifts in institutions. These led to increasing numbers of women in the academy, especially in leadership positions, the gradual recognition of teaching and research sites on feminism, and the inclusion of feminist work and courses. Such triumphs were gained through the determined efforts of feminist lobbying and struggle. But the triumphs also involved compromises, with gains being determined by a neoliberal environment that compromised the autonomy of feminist critical work and teaching and essentially required feminists to be clones of the European white male professor (Essed 2004).

The lessons learned from affirmative action strategy and cautions against assuming direct connection between the bodies, experiences and consciousness/knowledge of subjects are of direct relevance to strategies within #FMF movement. South African feminists have learned—at considerable cost—that to replace the bodies and knowledge of "men" with those of "women," or to replace the bodies and knowledge of "whiteness" with those of "blackness" is a simplistic understanding of standpoint which often leaves the overarching system intact; feminists have learned that the centre is quite able to absorb the margins in additive exercises that do not fundamentally disturb its hegemony.

Even more pernicious than affirmative action was the appropriation of the discourse and language of feminism in other managerial agendas that ultimately reinforced the status quo. As feminism made headway in the academy, so was its language increasingly

watered down as terms like "gender parity" or "equality"—involving the incorporation of the margin into the centre—came to take the place of demands for radical structural change.

To date, the history of #FMF is very short. But already, university committees are rushing to replace demands for substantive decolonisation with auditing and quick-fix processes. In many cases, these are determined by management, with the onus being placed on progressives (individual staff members or progressive task teams) to "deliver" decolonisation proposals for consideration by councils and management. Departments will now be expected to change their curriculum hurriedly and be audited on what they have done to decolonise. These hasty bureaucratic projects for rushing decolonisation are doomed to fail and to lead to compromises. Such efforts hark back to the compliance-driven processes for gender transformation from the start of the millennium. In the same way that social engineering has worked to erode the critical edge of South African feminist interventions during the 1990s, then, neoliberal engineering will work to weaken the epistemic interventions driven by Fallism. It remains to be seen, however, whether the radical edge among students and academics will retain critical insight into the conditions under which policy and other forms of knowledge are produced and authorised.

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