

Johannes Glückler · Heinz-Dieter Meyer  
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*Editors*

*Klaus Tschira Symposia*

Knowledge and Space 17

# Knowledge and Civil Society

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# **Knowledge and Space**

Volume 17

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## **Knowledge and Space**

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Laura Suarsana  
Editors

# Knowledge and Civil Society



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# Chapter 13

## Seeding a New World: Lessons from the FeesMustFall Movement for the Advancement of Social Justice



Adam Habib

The “#RhodesMustFall” and “#FeesMustFall” protests of 2015 and 2016 became the largest student social movement since the dawn of South Africa’s democracy in 1994. The protests emanated from two major challenges facing higher education: alienation and access. The #RhodesMustFall movement, in which students at the University of Cape Town (UCT) demanded the removal of a statue of Cecil John Rhodes, captured the alienation of the largely black student population at UCT and reflected valid concerns about institutional racism and/or the slow pace of transformation at all of the country’s universities. The #FeesMustFall movement, whose principle concern was access for poor, black students to affordable, quality education, began at the University of the Witwatersrand and spread across the country, culminating in a march on the Union Buildings where former President Jacob Zuma conceded to a 0% fee increase for 2016. However, what began as a social justice movement with widespread support from across society soon turned into violent protests that undermined the university as a safe and free space for ideas. The students lost support and the university activated security protocols, which ultimately led to demobilisation of the movement. The question to be asked then is what lessons can be learnt from the strategies and tactics of social movements such as #FeesMustFall.

In this article, I address this question as part of the broader thematic investigation into knowledge and civil society. Extrapolating lessons from the empirical experience of #FeesMustFall—which I have extensively detailed in the book *Rebels & Rage*, from which this article flows—builds the global knowledge base on social movements, which can in turn enhance the effectiveness of social justice struggles in the future if activists sufficiently internalize them. I discuss the value of social mobilization in effecting change, but demonstrate that this is only sustainable if the protest is structured within certain strategic and ethical parameters. I then proceed

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to interrogate the issues of violence, the framing of the struggle and outcomes, the decision-making processes associated with the protest, and the importance of ethical conduct by leaders and activists. I conclude by underscoring the legitimacy of the social justice struggles, but insist that these must be more effectively conducted if they are to culminate in the establishment of a more humane social order.

I am of course not an impartial observer or assessor of this movement and its challenges and successes. Instead, as vice-chancellor of the University of Witwatersrand and the chairperson of University South Africa during the crucial years of 2015 and 2016, I was a central actor in the struggle of #FeesMustFall. This positionality must be understood for both its strengths and weaknesses. I observed the struggle and the conduct of its leaders and activists from the vantage point of the university's executive, which skews my interpretation and analysis in significant ways. Yet this same vantage point allows for a unique insight into how institutional and system decision-makers operate, the influences on their internal deliberations on when to permit and how to contain social struggles, and how to effectively use them for the reform of the system itself.

#RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall were, as I suggested earlier, the largest student social struggles in South Africa's democratic era. Its causal pathways lie very much in the policy choices and behavior of the post-apartheid government in the massification of higher education and the resultant decline in per-capita subsidy to universities; in university executives' lack of responsiveness to students' acclimatization to their environment; and frankly in the political opportunism of post-apartheid political elites who spoke with forked tongues, articulating social justice concerns on party platforms while simultaneously promulgating conservative policy prescriptions in government. Their focus on enabling access for poor and middle-class students, and addressing these students' alienation from the universities' institutional cultures and architectures generated enormous sympathy across society and throughout the world. The social struggles as such shook the very foundations of the political and postsecondary education system, and led to significant reforms in the financing of higher education. They also have prompted significant reflections on the movement, its legitimacy, and strategy and tactics from a variety of political perspectives and actors, including among others university executives, student leaders, academics, and journalists (Booyesen, 2016; Chantiluke, Kwoba, & Nkopo, 2018; Chikane, 2018; Habib, 2019; Heffernan & Nieftagodien, 2016; Jansen, 2017).

Social justice has to be advanced in the world that exists, not the one activists wish existed. This obvious statement is perhaps the single most important lesson that advocates of social justice need not only to realize, but also internalize. Radical activists of a variety of ideological persuasions, including of the Marxist traditions—Lenin, Trotsky, Luxembourg, and Gramsci—devoted more than a century of study to strategies and tactics for challenging the political and economic order and advancing social justice. Many in the social justice community, including theorists, now recognize that the overthrow and/or transcendence of the political and socioeconomic order will not be a single event, but a drawn-out process of advances and retreats. Thus, for social activists who are committed to change, strategies and tactics are paramount. They should develop strategies and tactics not from what they

think is fair in an abstract worldview, but rather from what will work in the realities of the current context. This does not mean forgetting their ultimate goal, but rather understanding the possibilities of achieving their goals not from a rule book or formula from a time that is past, but from the contextual realities of the present. Too often, too many demand reforms that are compatible with an alternative social order, rather than those that are viable in the present, and yet push the boundaries of what is acceptable to enable a political dynamic of continuous social change—what Hardt and Negri (2017) describe as a strategy of antagonistic reformism.

Perhaps this has to do with the fact that most activists are often so emotionally invested in their cause that they cannot imagine that there are others who are not the enemy, but may not share the same strategies, or even passion, for the social justice issue at hand. It is often said that anger and rage are essential in mobilizing against injustice, but what is often forgotten is that it also blunts actors' ability to dissect the forces arraigned against them critically and determine how to neutralize or demobilize these to register social gains. All of this was evident in the #FeesMustFall movement. It may be valuable to extricate the movement's lessons, not only for the advancement of the struggle for free education, but also for those associated with other social justice causes.

## **Social Mobilization**

Perhaps it is best to begin this reflection with a recognition that mass action and social mobilisation is an essential component of the strategic arsenal required for changing the world. This is the most obvious lesson to emerge from the #FeesMustFall movement. As I have explicitly and publicly stated on a number of occasions, the students achieved in ten days what vice-chancellors had been debating for ten years. The difference between these two interventions was that the students' engagement took the form of social mobilization. In the process, they redefined the systemic parameters of what was possible and opened up policy options and financial concessions that had not been seriously considered in normal daily engagements. Some of these outcomes exceeded those expected by the student leadership themselves. For example, the Wits Student Representative Council (SRC) president's original proposal to the University Council was not for no fee increase, but rather for a more measured one in the region of 9%. When the protests kicked off, this demand shifted to no increase; when this was achieved, it shifted again to free university education. This was not the first time that these demands had been made. Indeed, they had been made regularly across the country for some time, but government and, more particularly, Treasury and the Presidency had not been responsive to them. But when the 2015 protests erupted and took on the scale that they did, generating widespread support from stakeholder groups across society, not only was a significant financial concession made, but a policy process was also initiated to change the financing of universities fundamentally.

Similarly, the insourcing of vulnerable workers was never on the agenda until the 2015 protests fundamentally changed the environment. The Wits executive had recognized for years that outsourcing practices were exploitative and incompatible with the institution's human rights obligations. Addressing outsourcing would require trade-offs that internal stakeholders were not collectively willing to agree to at that stage. The student protests changed this, again by opening up the systemic parameters and allowing options to emerge that had not previously been considered. The collective willingness to incur these costs was not always present; it only emerged in the wake of the #FeesMustFall protests.

In both these cases, then, social mobilization was essential for putting policy and financial options that had not previously been available on the systemic agenda. But its value cannot be unqualified. Social mobilization is incredibly important for opening up systemic parameters, but some forms of mobilization can also undermine the possibility of social justice being realized. This was evident in the #FeesMustFall movement. As social mobilization became more violent and increasingly started to violate the rights of the institutional community, it also became more factionalized and lost the broader support of the public. As importantly, it forced authorities, both institutional executives and national government, to begin to activate security protocols in an effort to protect universities and the broader public. The net effect was that, in a number of institutions—including Wits—stringent security measures contained the violent social mobilization. This created huge controversy, not only between institutional executives and student protesters, but also within the broader progressive community itself.

Social mobilization on its own does not translate into progressive social outcomes. For such outcomes to be realized, social mobilization needs to be institutionalized through processes of deliberation and policy formulation. It also requires the presence of intra-institutional actors who are willing to use the opportunities that it enables to craft new social policy. Again, this was evident in the #FeesMustFall movement. The fact that it occurred within a democratic society, and in a context where the governing party was deeply polarized, ensured responsiveness from some institutional actors. South African society's democratic character and the civil society's vibrancy meant that options such as all-out repression were not on the agenda, as would be the case in more repressive societies. It is also worth bearing in mind that the student protests emerged soon after the Marikana massacre, where police killed 34 workers in a mining labor dispute. This event traumatised South Africans, deeply delegitimized the police and parts of the government, and paralyzed the police in their management of the student protests. South African society's democratic character, the divisions within the governing party, the widespread support of the social movement, and the paralysis of policing in the aftermath of the Marikana massacre all created a resonance for the demands of #FeesMustFall within the institutional apparatus of the state itself.

None of what I am suggesting here would be unfamiliar to those well versed in the literature on social movements. Scholars writing in the traditions of political process theory and political opportunity structure, such as Charles Tilly (1978, 2003), Doug McAdam (1983), Sidney Tarrow (1994), and Donatella della Porta

(1995, 2013, della Porta & Diani, 2006), have for some time explored the dynamics of how political systems and institutional actors significantly influence, and are in turn conditioned by, the evolution of social movements and their outcomes. But social movement actors and their leaders have never understood this sufficiently well. Even their academic supporters, some of whom are familiar with the literature on social movements, have neither sufficiently internalized this nor allowed it to inform their practice. This is urgently required if movements are to become more effective in achieving social justice outcomes.

## Violence as Strategy

Effective social struggle depends on more than a simple reflection of the dynamics of the struggle and the complex interplay between social and institutional actors. It also requires deep consideration of the strategies deployed by social movements themselves. Perhaps the most important of these for consideration is the use of violence to achieve desired outcomes. It must be said that, at least at the rhetorical level, most of the leaders of #FeesMustFall professed a commitment to peaceful action. Peaceful mobilization also seemed to be the substantive intent of the vast majority of its supporters. But it is also indisputable that the movement, or at least elements of it, became substantively violent in the course of the struggle itself.

Activists and even their supporters have suggested that this violence was inspired by the actions of the police and security. Although the behavior and actions of police and security personnel may well have caused individual incidents, the general picture is one of police and security being deployed only when some protesters had begun to perpetrate violence and/or when the widespread abuse of rights was becoming evident. In 2015, for instance, police were only deployed on campus when the bookshop and a vehicle were burnt on the evening of October 27th. In January 2016, private security was only brought in when protesters repeatedly refused to allow registration and continued to assert that if there was “no free education, there shall be no education at all.” Similarly, the university only embarked on a comprehensive security response in October 2016 after the failure of repeated attempts to negotiate with the protesters, through the mediation of previous leaders of the SRC and the Black Students Society.

Some academics, particularly within the university, were highly critical of the security response but were unable to provide coherent or unified responses as to what the university should have done instead. Jane Duncan, for example, argued that instead of calling private security, we should have used “the least restrictive means [which] would be to prevent the perpetrators from registering, punish them through the disciplinary process and lay charges against those guilty of criminal conduct, to dissuade others from following suit” (Duncan, 2016). But herein lies the problem with her suggestion. The essential issue with what she recommends is that, when Wits acted along these lines, this same collective of academic supporters accused the university of authoritarian behaviour and violating the right to protest

action. Indeed, when student activists became violent in August 2015 and the management suspended them, this same group of academics essentially criticised the response as too heavy handed. Others, when asked what they would have recommended as an alternative to deploying private security, answered not for the suspension and rigorous deployment of disciplinary processes against perpetrators, but the closure of the campus and the suspension of activities—in effect, capitulation to the protesters’ demands, even if the vast majority of the community was against this and it impacted negatively on the poor.

It should be noted that at no time in January 2016 or even later in the year were protests or meetings not allowed at Wits, as was the case at some other universities. Indeed, Wits continued to allow for protest and its coverage by journalists; during the events of January 2016, private security was simply mandated to secure the two buildings where registration occurred and to regulate access to them. Private security was deployed, and not police, not only because the latter could not commit for a long period of time, but also because, in the case of private security, the Wits management could specify that no serious weapons would be carried. Was this, then, not acting in the least restrictive of ways as required by the Constitution? Yet this same collective group of anarchist-oriented scholars opposed our measures and tried to disrupt them.

But the problem is not simply one of coming to terms with the need for security in selected circumstances. It is also some leaders’ actual advocacy of violence. There is no doubt that resorting to violence was, in part, facilitated by strands of the movement that deliberately adopted it as a strategy. In fact, violence and arson were particularly romanticized by some of the movement’s activists and leaders. This was cogently and evocatively expressed by student leaders at a Ruth First lecture at Wits University in August 2016. Unsurprisingly, the speakers’ central message was that black people are confronted with structural violence daily, as they have to experience the consequences of inequality, poverty, and corruption. In their view, it is therefore legitimate to respond with black violence to protest this structural violence. In one of the student leader’s evocative words, violence is the “aesthetics of rage” (Fikeni, 2016). Although his original reference was throwing feces at the Rhodes statue at UCT and the “fuck white people” graffiti at Wits, in the course of the engagement he spoke approvingly of the burning of university infrastructure, seeing all of these acts as “a common aesthetics” to the movement, “an insistence on moving beyond the boundaries of ‘civil’ discourse towards attacking the symbols of white supremacy through disruptive acts of rage” (Fikeni, 2016).

In discussing rage and violence, another student leader highlighted “a generational fault line” (Naidoo, 2016), in which she held that:

the spectre of revolution, of radical change, is in young peoples’ minds and politics, and it is almost nowhere in the politics of the anti-apartheid generation . . . Many in the anti-apartheid generation have become anesthetized to the possibility of another kind of society, another kind of future . . . And they can no longer be trusted with the responsibility of the future. When they dismiss the student movement’s claim on the future, its experiment with time, when they belittle it, shoot it down, well, then pain becomes anger, anger becomes rage, even fire. (Naidoo, 2016)



Ignoring the fact that the claim of revolutionary consciousness being present among young people and absent among the anti-apartheid generation has no empirical basis, what is notable in this student leader's argument is her highlighting of the generational challenge. There is indeed a restlessness among young people across the world—in the Americas, Asia, Europe and Africa—that is reflected in contradictory phenomena like #BlackLivesMatter, the Bernie Sanders movement, the rise of the far right, and the migration crisis in the Mediterranean. Some of this restlessness does have structural dimensions, in particular the rise of insecurity among young people as a result of the technological shifts of the global economy and the unemployment it portends for those with no or limited skills. A generational conflict that has not been seen in fifty years is, indeed, possible—and may even be necessary. But it does not have to be violent, and yet this is exactly where some want it to go. Student leaders are fond of quoting Frantz Fanon's celebrated remarks that "each generation must out of relative obscurity discover its mission" (Fanon, 2007, p. 145). However, as Mangcu (2017) reminds us, Fanon follows this statement with another:

We must rid ourselves of the habit, now that we are in the thick of the fight, of minimizing the action of our fathers or of feigning incomprehension when considering their silence and passivity . . . if the echoes of their struggle have not resounded in the international arena, we must realize that the reason for this silence lies less in their lack of heroism than in the fundamentally different international situation of our time. (Fanon, 2004, pp. 145–146)

A humbler and more measured response may be required if student leaders want to honor Fanon's words.

It needs to be noted that the rationality of these arguments for violence breaks down when it is subjected to even a little scrutiny. First, Fanon (2004) and Biko (2002) wrote about revolutionary violence in the crucible of the colonial struggle. Is it legitimate to transpose these ideas onto a democratic era which, however flawed, provides the space not only for protest, but also the right to vote out the political elite? And even if one did believe in the legitimacy of violence given Fanon's criticisms of the compromising and profiteering character of the newly emergent nationalist elite, what of Arendt's (1969) searing critique of both Fanon and Sartre's views on violence when she suggested that violence inevitably contaminates and destroys the end for which it was originally deployed? Essentially, comparing democratic South Africa to colonial societies is not only intellectually unsustainable, but also suggests that student leaders are incapable of distinguishing between different types of political systems and the forms of protest that can be legitimately deployed against them.

Second, how is the struggle against structural violence advanced by attacking other students and destroying university property that is intended for housing and teaching the students themselves? If anything, such actions are likely to consolidate the very effects of the structural violence against the poor and marginalized. Indeed, if the presence of structural violence can legitimate individual acts of violence in a democratic society, the consequences are too horrendous to contemplate: It could justify not only violent attacks on any public authority or their representatives, but

also rape and murder against any individual simply on the basis that a perpetrator belongs to a community that is historically disadvantaged, and the act is committed against someone who belongs, by accident of birth, to a community that is historically advantaged. It would, in essence, violate the very social pact on which democratic society derives its philosophical legitimacy. Finally, as a result of this very social pact on which democratic society is founded, violent actions compel the state to respond with force to protect public property and the rights of other citizens, thereby creating a securitized atmosphere that works against the immediate interests of the protesters and the legitimacy of the protests themselves.

Part of the problem with much of the writings and reflections used to advocate for or condone violence is that their authors confuse violence with rage. It is important to distinguish between the two. Feelings of rage can be important and useful if they inspire collective action against injustice and drive progressive social change. Canham (2017) argued in an essay in the *Du Bois Review*: “Black rage [can be] . . . seen as an expression of black self-love in that it is the ultimate cry for freedom” (p. 442). Yet he also cautions against romanticizing black rage because it has the potential to harm the poor and vulnerable, and not only the system. As importantly, one must never confuse explaining and understanding black rage with condoning it, especially when it works against the agenda of freedom. My own view is that black rage need not be violent in our present circumstances to achieve positive outcomes, as the national student protest in 2015 demonstrated. Moreover, rage must not cause leaders to act emotionally and impulsively. It must not blunt them from critically assessing the forces arraigned against the social justice cause, and determining how to overcome these without compromising the end goal itself. Rage is necessary, violence is not; when the two get confused, the cause of social justice itself maybe delegitimized or defeated.

The same can be said of contentious politics and social struggles. Activists and radical scholars often refer to the importance of disruption in enabling change. This is entirely valid. Yet, as Martin Luther King Jr.’s ideas and practices reflect, social activism must impose systemic costs to create the political will among decision-makers to enable social change. But he also states that this must not be violent, for it then becomes immoral and self-defeating (Luther King Jr., 1968/2010). This understanding poses an important question for the leaders and supporters of #FeesMustFall. Would resorting to a permanent shutdown of the university not have entailed a cost that exceeds what is socially acceptable, given the fact that its immediate victims were the poorest among the student community and it did not automatically create the impetus for change among the institutional decision-makers? Moreover, was resorting to violence not unacceptable in these circumstances? Did violence as a strategy not become self-defeating?

It is worth noting that the issue of violence is not only about social movements’ deploying it strategically, but also about how the social justice community approaches policing in a democracy. During the protests, Mbembe (2016) questioned whether all security arrangements are inimical to freedom. The automatic opposition to policing by so many in the social justice community suggests that too many would respond affirmatively to this question. But as Mbembe (2016)

suggests, this is untenable—freedom does not automatically lead to security, so there is a need for decision-makers to act pragmatically, to contextually analyze each moment and incident. A *de facto*, automatic response is neither legitimate nor appropriate for a democracy, for it would violate the very essence of the social pact on which a democratic society itself is founded.

Perhaps the dilemma and how it was addressed can be better understood through a reflection of the scholarly work of della Porta and Diani (2006), who suggest that social movements become violent under two conditions: when police are deployed and engage in a repressive response, and when movements are factionalized and compete with each other to claim victories. Scholars used their work and its conclusions to suggest that police should not have been deployed at the universities, even if violence was being committed. But again, this conclusion was flawed; it was morally problematic and did not logically flow from a nuanced understanding of the empirical facts. As indicated earlier, the violence at Wits preceded the deployment of police, largely as a result of the second factor that della Porta and Diani identify. But their first causal factor was also evident, because the violence did indeed escalate immediately after the police deployment and subsided only a few days later, after those who had committed it had been arrested and restrictive security protocols had been activated, at least temporarily, to stabilize the situation.

The question that emerges is this: What is the responsibility of institutional and societal decision-makers in a context where protests turn violent as a result of the second factor, the factionalizing of the movement? Can responsible leadership refuse to deploy the police because of the fear of the first causal factor, the escalation of the violence as a result of the deployment? Our answer as institutional executives at Wits to this question was not to concede to the framing of this debate. To refuse to deploy police would have enabled the violation of the rights of the vast majority within the university, and would have made public institutions and society vulnerable to any group that was willing to commit violence to realize its ends, an untenable situation in a democratic society. Even in the context of a lack of adequate police training, the answer was not to deny their legitimacy to manage security challenges. Rather, the appropriate strategic response in the medium term is to urge their training and organization so that they can fulfil their constitutional responsibility in a democratic society. In the interim, the mitigation measure was to urge them to act with restraint through an engagement with police leadership and the political authorities to whom they reported. The mitigation was also in the recognition, publicly expressed in my review of the 2016 protests (Habib, 2016), that a security solution was not sustainable in the long term, which influenced our interventions to find a political solution through both institutional initiatives negotiated with the SRC and student leaders, and systemic ones such as the National Education Crisis Forum (NECF) and the Heher Commission.

Finally, it is worth noting that the broader progressive community has never developed a coherent approach to the matter of security in a democracy. But this agnosticism is no longer tenable, especially given the violent character of South African society and the rising populist threats to it. Bringing violence under control in this society, which is essential for the sustainability and vibrancy of democracy,

will require concerted action on the part of both social movements and societal stakeholders, and the police themselves. All stakeholders need to become the collective agents of the future they desire and claim to want to build.

## **Framing Social Justice Outcomes**

The struggle for social justice must contain within itself the imagery of the outcome it desires. This means that it should be framed in a language, and its activities should be organized in a way, that is compatible with the intended social justice outcome. This strategic principle has a particular resonance for #FeesMustFall: It is here where the movement floundered, which influenced its trajectory dramatically towards factionalism and violence. In 2015, the movement was largely framed and organised in antiracist and nonracial terms. The protests' goal was lowering the cost of higher education, thereby enabling the poor and the middle classes to access universities more easily. Its marches comprised students from across class and racial lines, and drew support from stakeholders across the political spectrum. As political parties tried to intervene to gain control of the movement, it became more factionalized and racialized. Some students started to wear t-shirts bearing racialised statements, whereas others began to frame the movement in explicitly racial terms. As this happened, and other parts of the movement refused to condemn and marginalize these elements, broader groups of students withdrew. The net effect was that the 2016 protests had neither the nonracial flavor nor the broad support that the movement had experienced a year earlier.

This is why it is so important for those interested in social justice to frame their movement in explicit antiracial or nonracial terms. There are two reasons for this. The first is an instrumentalist rationale. If a social movement is to be successful, it must draw on the support of the vast majority of society. In the language of the UDF of the 1980s, one needs to maximize support for the movement and minimize that for the advocates of the status quo. Framing the movement in more racial terms with explicit racist and/or prejudicial statements and activities weakens support for the movement and allows adversaries to caricature it as an agent of division and hatred.

The second rationale is perhaps even more fundamental, for it speaks to the desired social justice outcome. A central political tension that confronts all oppressed communities in their struggle is whether the movement should be framed as a retreat into nativism, where the previously oppressed become the master, or as progress towards the construction of a nonracial, cosmopolitan society in which all have a future. This political divide was perhaps most dramatically evident in the struggle for the allegiance of the African-American community by Martin Luther King Jr.'s Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Stokely Carmichael's (Kwame Ture's) Black Power movement. Too often, however, the divide is caricatured as one between mainstream integration and co-option on one side and radical exclusionary politics on the other. Yet, as he demonstrates in his "Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?", Luther King Jr.'s (1968/2010) ideas were much more

complex and defied this simple caricature. In this book, Luther King Jr. criticises the segregationist and militaristic impulses of the Black Power movement and advances a vision of radical change that is more cosmopolitan and inclusionary. Yet the radicalism of his ideas speaks not only to racial integration, but also to socioeconomic inclusion, calling for a guaranteed income for all citizens in an effort to banish poverty in the United States. Moreover, as indicated earlier, Luther King Jr.'s mobilizational and organizational strategy was not one of appeasement, as is often suggested. Indeed, with his brand of contentious politics he recognized the importance of disorder and disruption for there to be systemic social costs to create the impetus for change. But he also drew an explicit boundary at violence, which the Black Power movement too often ignored. This book, Luther King Jr.'s last, is worth going back to in these fractured times, when social inclusion and fundamental change are back on the global agenda.

Scholars in other settings have also reflected on this central political tension in the struggles of oppressed communities. In "When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda," Mamdani (2001) tries to develop an understanding of the Rwandan genocide by exploring how colonial authorities manipulated tribal divisions in Rwandan society, framing the Hutus as subjects and the Tutsis as citizens. The Tutsis were thus constructed as settlers by colonial authorities and by the Hutu administration in the postcolonial era. Once this defining and labeling happened, the genocide was a logical consequence. It was, Mamdani maintains, not an ethnic but a racial cleansing in which newly established citizens were ridding themselves of the settler presence. This work is a timely warning of the long-term societal consequences that can emerge from present-day political choices and behavior.

These cases essentially underscore the fact that the path a society takes—towards nativism or towards a nonracial common humanity—is not crafted at the point of victory when one ascends to political power. Rather, it originates from the character of the movement that led to that point, and the strategies and tactics its members employed. Hardt and Negri (2017) remind us about the following:

Rather than asking only how to take power, we must also ask what kind of owner we want and, perhaps more important, who we want to become . . . We must train our eyes to recognise how the movements have the potential to redefine fundamental social relations so that they strive not to take power as it is but to take power differently, to achieve a fundamentally new democratic society and, crucially, to produce new subjectivities. (pp. xiii–xiv)

Essentially, the new society's imagination is seeded in the struggle itself. Acts of racial prejudice, or silence in the face thereof, are not simple theatrics of social struggle—they are the building blocks of consciousness that will ultimately define the very character of the society that is to be born. Ultimately, the trajectory of the #FeesMustFall movement reveals that antiracist framing and organization is essential if social justice struggles are to contain within them the nonracial, inclusive community that social justice activists desire.

## Mass Organization and Structural Considerations

The final strategic consideration that the trajectory of the #FeesMustFall movement warrants is the argument of some in its leadership that representative institutions and vertically organized structures of leadership are no longer compatible with social justice struggles and outcomes. This was reflected in the demands of some elements of the #FeesMustFall movement to locate decision making solely in the mass meeting and disband or reform all governance structures, including the Council, Senate, and SRC. Part of the motivation for this lay in some of the activists' deep fear that individual leaders are too easily co-opted by business, government, and institutional elites. But the insistence on making decisions in mass meetings was also driven by a political logic in which small, fringe political groups could easily dominate proceedings through a "politics of spectacle"—one that silenced ordinary, pragmatic voices. Lacking political acumen and experience, the leadership of other student groups were incapable of challenging these voices and repeatedly found themselves on a strategic path more compatible with the agenda of competitor political parties. And so, whether by design or default, an anarchist tradition of decision making, captured in the language of participatory governance, took root in the #FeesMustFall movement.

This tradition is not as democratic as it professes to be. Many students who supported the #FeesMustFall campaign but wanted to return to class were harangued and intimidated in mass meetings by a group of self-appointed political commissars. Individuals who proposed measured and pragmatic solutions were labeled as sellouts, betrayers of a generational cause. Extreme choices were deemed as radical and were enabled in the meetings through demagogic speeches and rhetorical fervour, where sloganeering dominated and complex issues were trivialized. Essentially, the mass meeting was as much a mechanism of silencing ordinary, pragmatic voices as it was of mobilizing others.

The lesson to be learnt for the social justice community is that greater thought needs to be given to how to structure decision making so that it can be more socially accountable. Hardt and Negri (2017) use their concept of "assembly" to make a number of proposals in this regard. Although I am sceptical of their recommendation to locate strategic decision making in the multitude and confine leadership to tactical considerations, they do nevertheless enable thoughtful deliberation about the matter. We need further considered engagement along these lines, especially between multiple stakeholders, so that the reform of governance structures within the university does, ultimately, manage the tensions between different forms of decision making and organization. Only then will we be able to develop universities and public institutions that are socially accountable, yet progressively pragmatic and practical, focused on being responsive to both the short-term needs of different internal constituencies and the long-term institutional mandates defined by the broader society.

## Maintaining the Ethics of the Movement

A final set of deliberations that the evolution of #FeesMustFall poses for the advancement of social justice is whether there should be an ethics in the conduct of social justice struggles. Perhaps the most important ethical value to underscore is the importance of movement leaders being consistent in their public and private engagements. Far too many of the leaders of the movement acted duplicitously. Many claimed publicly that executive management was not willing to meet them when they had personally met me and other executives, and pleaded with us not to reveal these engagements. Many who interacted with me on a face-to-face basis were utterly charming and respectful, but their personas seemed to change fundamentally on Twitter. There, they engaged in the most virulent, extreme manner, which was frankly reminiscent of far right behavior. One student leader repeatedly made the most scurrilous remarks about me and my family, but then sent me an SMS to say that he respected me and that his actions were not personal. In interactions outside the university, other student leaders also suggested that their actions were not personal, apologized for any discomfort that they may have created, and then promptly behaved even more obnoxiously in the months that followed. Some repeatedly criticized the presence of private security and police, but then indicated in personal discussions that they understood why we needed it and felt safer as a result. A few who had called for a boycott of lectures and examinations privately approached individual executive managers and asked whether they could write their examinations in secret, so that other students would not see them. This kind of behavior was not exclusive to Wits University. Vice-chancellors and executives across the system had similar experiences and interactions with student leaders of all political persuasions.

The problem with much of this behavior is not simply the individual duplicities, but that it seems to emanate from a belief that astute politics involves saying one thing in public and doing another in private. Student leaders across the spectrum seem to have become captured by a politics of spectacle, believing that they are obliged to be extreme, rude, and obnoxious in public, and pragmatic and polite in their engagements outside the public eye. There is also the belief that the overriding goal is to win through any means. This kind of duplicity should be of particular concern to all of us. It suggests that, despite their criticisms of the existing political elite, some of the prominent leaders among this new generation of activists are displaying behavioral traits that are typical of the most venal of South Africa's current politicians.

The leaders and activists of the #FeesMustFall movement have also displayed an astonishing level of intolerance. On many occasions, student leaders have tried to implicate one another and get the university to invoke its disciplinary processes against others in an effort to rid themselves of potential political and electoral rivals. Students outside the movement were treated with far more disdain, and those who dared to organize formally outside the #FeesMustFall fold were harassed, threatened, and often pilloried as stooges of white interests or executive management.



This intolerance was also reflected in the disruption of meetings—numerous university executives' meetings were disrupted across the system, as were national meetings convened by government and even the NECF. Essentially, some #FeesMustFall leaders and activists shared a widespread belief that anyone who did not fully share their views was a legitimate target for silencing.

These incidents were not exclusive to Wits University. Academic, professional, and administrative staff, students, and executives across the system have increasingly reported similar intolerance. But the challenge also extends to external stakeholders. Some academics outside South Africa undertook lazy solidarity action in which they pronounced on a course of action by the university, at the prompting of an academic colleague, without any independent investigation of the issues on the ground. When confronted, very few even bothered to engage further. Similarly, progressive public lawyers refused to think through the political implications of their legal representation, pleading that their profession required a political agnosticism of them. Finally, civil society activists, even notable ones who had demonstrated incredible bravery in the struggle against apartheid, remained silent in the face of student leaders' intolerance, while at the same time privately communicating with me about how unacceptable their behavior was. Most of this was inspired by a mistaken belief that they could earn student leaders' trust and then slowly encourage them to behave in more acceptable and principled ways. These activists had forgotten that, if left unchecked, these behavioral patterns could generalise themselves across society, consolidate a new generation of venal politicians and, in the process, compromise the very social justice outcome that the protest desired.

The challenge of these ethical violations among leaders, activists, and supporters of #FeesMustFall is not only that they delegitimize the social movement, but also that they consolidate a cynical view of politics within broader society. People come to see all politics, politicians, and political activists as duplicitous and unprincipled, saying one thing and doing another. As I suggested earlier, a movement seeds an imagining of the alternative society that it envisions. This requires not only that its strategies are compatible with the outcome, but also that its participants practise a politics that is distinctive, and more ethical than that which prevails in the current political system—one that can incubate an alternative behavior that is compatible with the social outcome that the movement desires.

## **Lessons for Advancing Social Justice**

If there is one lesson that the trajectory of #FeesMustFall can impart, it is that the dynamics, strategies and practise of politics in a social justice movement must be very different from what the political system normally practises. This is a lesson not only for South African social movements, but also for social struggles across the globe. It is worth noting that, in many ways, South Africa is two worlds in one: an advanced, competitive, and successful world, surrounded by another that reflects underdevelopment's most tragic features. Its contradictions, then, are as global as



they are local. It is fair to say, perhaps, that social struggles are more accentuated in South Africa and that, as a result, political fault lines are more dramatically exposed. This makes South Africa a centre of political protest, but also an incredible social laboratory from which to investigate global challenges and potential solutions.

The struggles of #FeesMustFall—the high costs of education, minimum wages and inhumane working conditions for vulnerable workers, and socially inclusive communities—are not unique to South Africa. Indeed, they are the global struggles of this era. As a result, movements similar to #FeesMustFall have emerged across the world, including in North America and Western Europe. The social struggles that these movements organize, and their success, are essential to heal our world, address its inequalities and political polarization, and build more inclusive cosmopolitan communities and societies. To do this, there is a need to learn from past struggles in both the local and global setting. If reflections on #FeesMustFall can help at least a little in this regard, then the protests, and the difficulties that accompanied them, would have been worth it—for South Africa and the rest of the world.

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