

The #FeesMustFall movement and student leadership at the University of the Free State (UFS): Reflections from SRC members

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ABSTRACT

The academic year 2015/2016 took the South African government and institutions of higher learning by surprise when students took to the streets to protest for #FeeFree higher education, among many issues. The protests became known as the #FeesMustFall campaign, which engulfed all 26 South African public universities. The Students Representative Council (SRC) at the University of the Free State (UFS) faced a mammoth task of uniting students under the same banner of these protests and campaigns. Some students perceived protests as a hindrance to their academic journey, while others felt that protests were needed. The article examines the inner struggles faced by SRC members during #FeesMustFall at UFS. This article was located within the Interpretivist paradigm, using Critical Reflection Theory (CRT) as a theoretical framework, which assisted in reflecting on past experiences of the seven SRC members. A qualitative research method was used, which permitted the utilisation of newspaper clippings, semi-structured interviews and secondary published data, among others. The data was thematically analysed and assisted the researchers in making informed conclusions. The article concludes that SRC's, when united, can achieve a lot. Additionally, political differences are not a hindrance when participants have a common goal. This article contributes to the growing body of knowledge in reflecting on the perceptions and views of SRC members regarding the #FeesMustFall at UFS.

Keywords: #FeesMustFall, Student Representative Council, Fees, University, Leadership

INTRODUCTION

The #RhodesMustFall (RMF) movement took place on the 9th of March 2015, which was the precursor to #FeesMustFall.¹ The #FeesMustFall Campaign (FMFC) was inspired by the act of Chumani Maxwele, a student from the University of Cape Town (UCT), who defaced the statue of Cecil John

¹ Jonathan D Jansen, "As by Fire: The End of the South African University," 2017.

Rhodes.² Defacing the statue of Rhodes resembled an act against colonialism, imperialism and apartheid oppression in South Africa.³ Social media played an important role during #FMFC, and Maxwele's act was followed by #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall on Twitter, now known as 'X'. Young people, particularly university students, dominated the reality of these campaigns. These universities included, among others, the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), University of Witwatersrand, University of Limpopo (UL), North-West University (NWU), the University of Pretoria (UP), the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT), Durban University of Technology (DUT) and University of the Free State (UFS).⁴ These protests were sparked by the rising costs of university fees, particularly after the announcement by the then Minister of Higher Education, Blade Nzimande, that the fees for the year 2016/2017 would be increased by 10.5 percent. Students from the University of the Witwatersrand began the protests, which spread like wildfire across other institutions, including the UFS.

However, since it was students who started the campaigns, researchers are of the view that student leaders guarded against politicizing of their protests. Although SRC members are politically deployed, the student population that participated in the protests demanded that the protests not be political, as the fee hikes affected everyone. According to Heffernan and Nieftagodien, students had a different approach to transformation than the politically-led transformation. They challenged institutionalised racism, employment demographics, the Eurocentric curricula, patriarchy, homophobia and other forms of oppression.⁵ Furthermore, it helped researchers understand the road that different SRC cohorts traversed to ensure that the 2015/2016 demands became the top of the agenda, meaning the concept of continuity at UFS. It must be noted that the protests did not only focus on fees but also raised several issues, among others, the insourcing of underpaid university workers.⁶ Additionally, protesters at UFS raised an issue of transformation within the institution, particularly the language policy and institutional symbolism. They proposed that the university should end dual (Afrikaans and English) medium of instruction. Rather, English should be the only medium of instruction. University of Pretoria (UP) and Stellenbosch University (SU) followed suit in terms of language policy and transformation.⁷ There is indeed minimal work that has been done to capture and understand how the SRC at UFS dealt with the protests; thus, this article intends to fill in the gap by examining the views of SRC members during the #FMF.

The article focuses on UFS Bloemfontein Campus⁸ because the researchers were interested in capturing how the SRC dealt with the daily struggles of containing the protest and also positioning the university in the national strikes. This is because studies that were conducted have seldom dealt with how the SRC's managed the protests and how they guarded against the capture of the movement by political formations. To achieve the above, the article was formulated using a qualitative approach, which allowed researchers to purposively sample seven (7) former SRC members and interview them as different cohorts between 2015 and 2024. The researchers used open-ended questions, which enabled them to probe interviewees. Furthermore, researchers were guided by the interpretivist paradigm to understand the meanings, views and perspectives of SRC members in relation to #FMF. To make sense of the theme under study, the researchers first engaged with the existing literature to review and also to acknowledge the work that has been done in this field of study. Secondly, researchers utilised Critical

² Rhodes was one of the wealthiest men in South Africa during the 19th century. He was a Prime Minister of Cape Colony and played a big role in establishing the mining industry. His achievements were never found in peace by means of terror and cruelty. See, J. Grobler, "State Formation and Strife" in F. Pretorius, (ed.), *A History of South Africa: From the Distant Past to the Present Day*, pp. 185-187.

³ Nastassja G Wessels, "# FeesMustFall: Discourse Hidden in Plain Sight," 2017; Paul Maluleka and Mohau Soldaat, "Weaving together a tapestry of historical knowledge in the post-apartheid school history curriculum: The case of palesa Berveley Ditsie, *Yesterday and today, special edition November 2025*.

⁴ Jansen, "As by Fire: The End of the South African University," ix.

⁵ Ann Heffernan et al., *Students Must Rise: Youth Struggle in South Africa before and beyond Soweto '76* (NYU Press, 2016).

⁶ Heffernan et al., *Students Must Rise: Youth Struggle in South Africa before and beyond Soweto '76*.

⁷ Jansen, "As by Fire: The End of the South African University," ix.

⁸ UFS has three campuses, namely, South (Vista) Campus, QwaQwa Campus and Bloemfontein Campus. These three campuses coexist with their own autonomous governance structures. Thus, the study will focus on Bloemfontein because, firstly it is the biggest of the three and secondly the protests were multiracial, which was a unique case, as Qwaqwa and South Campus are predominantly dominated by Black students.

Reflection Theory (CRT) as a lens to understand the phenomenon under study. And then analysed the data thematically and concluded by discussing the findings and making recommendations thereof.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reframing the Fallist movement: Continuity or rupture?

The #FMF movement is poised within a longer continuum of student resistance in South Africa through the linkage of anti-apartheid activism and the broader struggles for social justice.⁹ This framing accounts for its historical continuity; however, it analytically curtails the very distinguishable nature of #FMF as a modern, digitally mediated movement.¹⁰ The use of social media platforms allowed rapid mobilisation and reconfigured collective action, reflecting a shift towards networked forms of action.¹¹ The #FMF has also been characterized as “leaderless”; a characterisation that remains highly contested. This is because students argued that there should be no capture by any political formation, but rather, the protests should be student-led. Therefore, the contribution of this article is to understand the role of the SRC at UFS in dispelling or showing whether the #FMF was leaderless or it’s just a myth. Although social media platforms broadened the reach of #FMF, they did not completely eliminate internal leadership hierarchies. Mdepa suggests that informal leadership and influence persisted, which overstated horizontality in current scholarly analyses.¹² This creates a conceptual gap where the literature inadequately interrogates power relations within contemporary student protest movements. Thus, this article seeks to contribute towards the identified missing middle between actors (students) and leaders (SRC) which had to be at the forefront every day of the #FMF period.

Student Representative Councils (SRC) between the agency and structure

According to the Higher Education Act (1997), SRCs are legally and institutionally mandated to represent and ventilate student issues and interests; however, during the #FMF, this perception of this structure quickly became eroded and deemed ineffective by students.¹³ This perception precipitated the formation of student-led movements operating outside the legal jurisdiction, which were perceived to be more responsive to student demands and interests.¹⁴ This analysis of SRCs is one-dimensional as SRCs operate in institutional and legislative frameworks that often curtail their autonomy, especially in times of unrest where universities prioritise stability and control. With the focus on SRC inefficiency, the literature greatly neglects the structural constraints that sought to mould their actions. This precipitates in a limiting binary between resistance and compliance, as opposed to recognising SRCs as actors negotiating competing pressures between the state actors, the students and university management.

The politics of engagement

The #FMF movement is frequently characterized by contestation between key factors such as the state, universities and students. These interactions are shaped by contesting expressions of agency, often resulting in adversary relationships and, in some cases, violence.¹⁵ Literature also highlights the disruptive nature of protests on students, including affective and psychological distress, exposure to violence, as well as academic impediments, especially with vulnerable groups such as female students and first-year students. The securitisation of university campuses and the use of state apparatuses of force escalated tensions, thereby sowing divisions rather than dialogue. In the same period, some analysts argue that the #FMF movement had its internal contradictions, which found expression as political co-option and competing ideological agendas. These contradictions entangle simplistic

⁹ Sandla Nomvete and John Mashayamombe, “South Africa’s Fees Must Fall: The Case Of# UPrising in 2015,” *South African Review of Sociology* 50, no. 3–4 (2019): 75–90.

¹⁰ Anele Arnold. Mdepa, “Social Movement Learning, Student Protest and Higher Education: An Exploration of #FeesMustFall at UWC ” (MA Mini-dissertation, University of the Western Cape, 2020).

¹¹ Mdepa, “Social Movement Learning, Student Protest and Higher Education: An Exploration of #FeesMustFall at UWC .”

¹² Mdepa, “Social Movement Learning, Student Protest and Higher Education: An Exploration of #FeesMustFall at UWC .”

¹³ George Mavunga, “# FeesMustFall Protests in South Africa: A Critical Realist Analysis of Selected Newspaper Articles,” *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa* 7, no. 1 (2019).

¹⁴ Nomvete and Mashayamombe, “South Africa’s Fees Must Fall: The Case Of# UPrising in 2015.”

¹⁵ Mdepa, “Social Movement Learning, Student Protest and Higher Education: An Exploration of #FeesMustFall at UWC”, 45.

portrayals of #FMF as a unified and coherent movement. Thus, this article intends to unbundle, by looking at the role that the SRC at UFS played during the period under study and the post-protest movement in ensuring that the fire does not die down, but that there are continuities thereof.

Transformation or cosmetic disruption?

Literature does not provide clear and agreeable outcomes for the #FMF movement. It does, however, present a dichotomy between the movement's ability to foreground student issues such as access, funding and decolonisation within national discourse, as well as exposing structural inequalities in higher education, thereby interrogating the extent of transformation.¹⁶ Some scholars contend that the #FMF movement revealed systemic failures without pushing for the reconfiguration of the higher education system; some scholars believe that the impact was more cosmetic than transformative. Other scholars have lauded the movement for reshaping political consciousness and reactivating student activism even when material conditions remain largely unchanged. This contestation reflects a broader unresolved debate between reformist and radical interpretations of protest movements like #FMF. The above literature gave researchers in this article an opportunity to engage in the role of the SRC in forging a transformed higher education.

Locating the gap: SRC experiences in the institutional context

Despite the broad scholarship on #FMF as a protest movement, there is a narrow focus on the lived experience of SRC members within specific institutional contexts. Existing literature seldom interrogates how SRCs managed day-to-day dynamics of the protest action spanning weeks and months, mediating tensions with key actors and stakeholders or resisting political co-option. The focus on the UFS Bloemfontein campus seeks to shed light on this gap by foregrounding SRC members' lived experiences in constrained and contested environments. This view will allow for a nuanced comprehension of student leadership during the #Fallist period. The existing literature illustrates that #FMF disrupted traditional, legislated and institutionalised models of student representation while shedding light on the tensions between structure and agency. However, this analysis is uneven since it accounts for broad narratives of activism over institutional specificity. Therefore, a critically integrated and context-specific approach that is centred on SRC experiences becomes necessary to achieve a nuanced understanding of student governance terrain within the #Fallist movement.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework underpinning this article is centred on Critical Reflection Theory (CRT). CRT has been used as a lens to understand a range of outcomes, which, among others, include improved thinking and assessment of self and social systems.¹⁷ Mezirow opined that the significance of CRT lies in making a vivid dichotomy between straightforward reflection and critical reflection.¹⁸ He noted that straightforward reflection is an act of intentional assessment, and critical reflection not only focuses on the examination of cause and effect but also the epistemological and ontological orientation of a context and situation. Additionally, Brookfield alluded to the fact that CRT can be used as an ideology to make people aware of suppressive ideas, policies and practices which seek to marginalise a particular group of people and maintain power relations.¹⁹ Therefore, a significant component is the notion of hegemony, which seeks to ensure that marginalised groups are convinced to embrace ideologies, narratives and claims that are dominant; hence, the article based its arguments on CRT in order to help researchers understand the views and perceptions of former SRC members at UFS. Moreover, Birch

¹⁶ Luvuyo Ntombana, Asemahle Gwala, and Francis Sibanda, "Positioning The# FeesMustFall Movement within the Transformative Agenda: Reflections on Student Protests in South Africa," *Education as Change* 27, no. 1 (2023): 1–18.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Smith, "Teaching Critical Reflection," *Teaching in Higher Education* 16, no. 2 (2011): 211–23.

¹⁸ Jack Mezirow, "Transformative Learning Theory," in *Contemporary Theories of Learning* (Routledge, 2018), 114–28, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315147277-8>.

¹⁹ Stephen Brookfield, "The Concept of Critical Reflection: Promises and Contradictions," *European Journal of Social Work* 12, no. 3 (2009): 293–304.

and Miller indicated that CRT plays a critical role when one studies surface thinking and behaviour and reflects on them with the purpose of understanding influence and effect.²⁰

Additionally, CRT helps to examine subjective thoughts about beliefs and perspectives.²¹ Consequently, this theoretical framework helped researchers to understand the perspectives and insights of the participants about how they reflect on understanding a particular political context.²² At the centre of this article, researchers adopted reflexivity, which is generally used in terms of research processes to pay attention to the interrelationship between self and knowledge creation.²³ The use of CRT through reflexivity was used to question the process of knowledge creation and claims made by those who are regarded as knowledgeable.²⁴ This component helped researchers in this article to understand the phenomenon under study.

It is alluded that CRT, through reflexivity, includes asking questions about ways of thinking that are validated and by whom. Therefore, the theoretical framing enabled researchers to understand the concerns and misconceptions of powerful groups and individuals by exploring different interests, agendas and narratives.²⁵ Brookfield asserts that the fundamental purpose of this theoretical framing is to challenge and uproot hegemonic assumptions and narratives from those who are regarded as knowledgeable or in positions of power.²⁶ This theory assisted researchers in understanding the rationale behind decisions that were made by the SRC leadership at UFS and the progress that has been made through evaluating every historical epoch that the SRCs will embark on. This theoretical framework consists of four domains, viz. (1) personal thoughts and actions, (2) interpersonal interactions with others, (3) contextual concepts, theory and methods, as well as (4) critical political, ethical and social context. The following Figure 1 shows various domains of critical reflection:

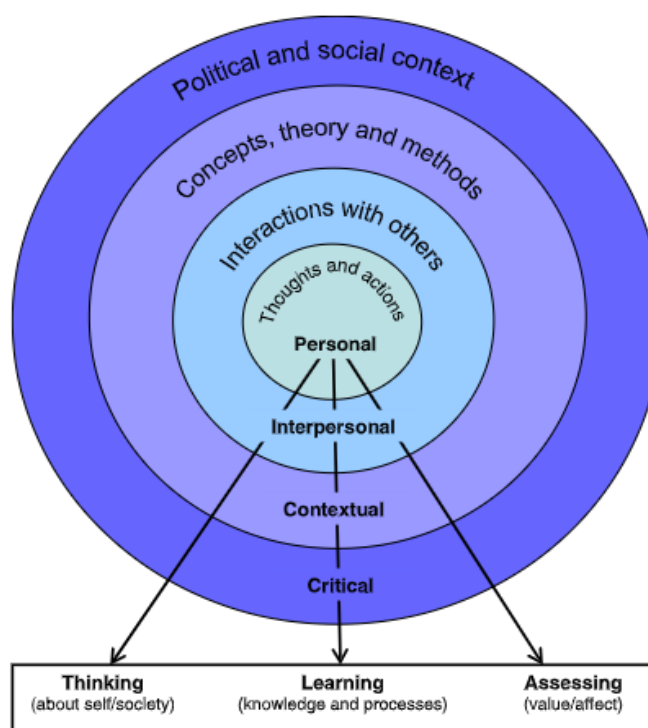


Figure 1. Domains of critical reflection.²⁷

²⁰ Maxine Birch and Tina Miller, "Inviting Intimacy: The Interview as Therapeutic Opportunity," *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 3, no. 3 (2000): 189–202.

²¹ Timothy D. Wilson, *Strangers to Ourselves: Discovering the Adaptive Unconscious* (Harvard University Press, 2004).

²² Maura Dowling, "Approaches to Reflexivity in Qualitative Research," *Nurse Researcher* 13, no. 3 (2006).

²³ Smith, "Teaching Critical Reflection, 217."

²⁴ Michael Burawoy, "Critical Sociology: A Dialogue between Two Sciences," *Contemporary Sociology* 27, no. 1 (1998): 12–20.

²⁵ Smith, "Teaching Critical Reflection, 207."

²⁶ Brookfield, "The Concept of Critical Reflection: Promises and Contradictions, 301."

²⁷ Brookfield, "The Concept of Critical Reflection: Promises and Contradictions."

Personal: Thought and actions

Firstly, personal reflections include one's perceptions, reactions, judgements and behaviour relating to a particular situation or political context. This critical reflection domain is self-inspection, self-awareness and personal reflexivity.²⁸ In this context, researchers utilised semi-structured interviews in order to gauge the viewpoints and perspectives of SRC leaders about the events and views on what was happening during the 'fallist' movement and the progress made thus far. Through oral interviews, the researchers understood the views of the SRC during 2015/2016 and the 10 years after the 'fallist' movement.

Interpersonal: Interactions with others

Secondly, Hardy *et al.* noted that interpersonal reflection means focusing on relations that have a particular history and have been undertaken in a particular activity. This domain of critical reflection also pays attention to group reflections and dynamics that influence decisions in a particular political context.²⁹ To understand the phenomenon, the reflection of various SRC cohorts gave varied perspectives to the researchers.

Contextual: concepts, theory and methods

Thirdly, CRT includes the examination of concepts, theories and methods that are used to make claims and determinations. It further questions the structures of knowledge and narratives that are used and accepted as valid knowledge and explores alternative knowledge structures and narratives.³⁰ This domain became valuable by helping researchers to understand how the SRCs understood student protests and giving a voice to the perceptions of those students.

Critical: Political, ethical and social contexts

Fourthly, CRT brings issues of power and ideological contestation into focus; it involves the ethical, political and social issues faced by a particular community and their impact.³¹ In this context, the focus area was the SRC leadership, with more emphasis on the 2015/2016 events as well as gauging the progress made since the commencement of the protests. Furthermore, this domain assists in challenging the grand narrative of what is regarded as a normal state of power and explores narratives that are marginalised and suppressed.

Therefore, CRT was relevant to this article as it seeks to consider the voices, narratives and claims of those who are marginalised *versus* those who were and/or are in positions of power. It also adds value to the decolonial conversations by tracing histories from the marginalised and the phenomenon of the periphery. Moreover, this theoretical framework was helpful in this article as it attempts to utilise epistemological and ontological views of the participants who were part of the political context to debunk the misconceptions that hegemonic and dominant groups/individuals make.

METHODOLOGY

Research paradigm

This study is located within the interpretivist paradigm, which is concerned with a critical understanding of the meaning that people ascribe to their worldviews.³² This paradigm enabled the researchers to understand the lived experiences and reflections of SRC members in relation to the #FMF movement. Furthermore, this paradigm allowed the researchers to have a deeper understanding of SRC members' subjective views within their ontological context. Mustofa alludes to the interpretivist paradigm is inherently meaning-laden and context-dependent; in other words, it assists the researchers

²⁸ Barry E Wolfe, "Knowing the Self: Building a Bridge from Basic Research to Clinical Practice," *Journal of Psychotherapy Integration* 13, no. 1 (2003): 83-95.

²⁹ Smith, "Teaching Critical Reflection, 217."

³⁰ Smith, "Teaching Critical Reflection, 217."

³¹ N.S. Mauthner and A. Doucet, "Reflexive Accounts and Accounts of Reflexivity in Qualitative Data Analysis," *Journal for Sociology* 37, no. 3 (2003): 413-31.

³² Husam Helmi Alharahsheh and Abraham Pius, "A Review of Key Paradigms: Positivism VS Interpretivism," *Global Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, no. 3 (2020): 39-43.

to critically understand the epistemological aspects embedded in the meanings and the ontological aspects that are embedded in the context of the UFS SRC members.³³ Therefore, the interpretive paradigm emphasizes research within the qualitative approach as it displays social realities both in meaning and context.³⁴ The paradigm aligns well with the lens utilised in this article, as it seeks to understand the social phenomenon from those who have knowledge about the events.

Research design

A qualitative approach is selected in this article as it explores the textual meanings in the lived experiences and reflections of SRC members. Qualitative research explores deeper insights into real-world problems; it does not seek to collect or understand numerical data but rather collects and understands data from experiences, perceptions and behaviours of relevant participants to the study.³⁵ This aligns with the theory adopted for this article, as researchers intended to understand the world of #FMF through the knowledge of SRC members. A qualitative approach can equally be used at a descriptive level, where meaning is not only gathered through experiences, behaviours and perceptions but also can be gathered from policy documents, academic literature, and transcriptions.³⁶ Therefore, a qualitative approach is suitable for this article as it explores lived experience and reflection from the SRC members.

Sampling

Sampling is a process of selecting a subset of participants and elements that are named samples from a broader population for the study and attempting to conclude about the larger population.³⁷ This article employed a purposive sampling technique, which is a non-probability sampling technique where researchers selected the sample by using their purpose and judgement to determine relevant participants and elements that are of relevance to their study. Therefore, the relevant participants were seven former SRC members of the term (2015/2016) and the subsequent SRC presidents. The sampling was sufficient because, in total, participants were supposed to be 10, but researchers were able to get data from seven participants who were willing to participate in the study and enabled data saturation. These participants were relevant because they carry the lived experiences of the #FMF protests and the continuity of #FMF outcomes post 2015/2016. These participants were active and had a role to play; thus, their reflections became important because they have first-hand experience of the #FMF at UFS.

Data Collection

Researchers used semi-structured interviews when collecting data. Oral testimony was used as a tool to collect the data, providing a more realistic and fair construction of the past. It changes the narrative from the top-down model to the bottom-up approach, which gives the marginalised an opportunity to raise their views. This gave researchers an opportunity to critically capture the reflections of former SRC members at UFS during and after the #FMF. The downside of oral evidence is that it is based on memory, which fades over time. In addition, corroborating and triangulating sources assisted researchers in making informed conclusions about the article. Thus, to supplement the memory of those who were at the forefront of the #FMF campaigns, the researchers used secondary material, viz., peer-reviewed articles, books, book chapters and dissertations, which also complemented the nature of this study.

³³ Mustofa Mustofa, "Epistemological Paradigms in Positivism, Interpretivism, and Action Research in Educational Research: A Literature Review," *Journal of Office Administration: Education and Practice* 3, no. 3 (2023): 214–24.

³⁴ Mustofa, "Epistemological Paradigms in Positivism, Interpretivism, and Action Research in Educational Research: A Literature Review."

³⁵ S. Tenny, J. B. Brannan and G.D. Brannan, "Qualitative Study," in *StatPearls* (State Pearls Publishing, in Treasure Island (FL), 2025).

³⁶ Hani Morgan, "Conducting a Qualitative Document Analysis," *The Qualitative Report* 27, no. 1 (2022): 64–77; Mohau Soldaat and Fezeka Gxwayibeni, "Exploring the Potential of Oral History Project (OHP) in Enhancing Meta-Cognitive Abilities in a History Classroom," 2025.

³⁷ Paula Lagares Barreiro and Justo Puerto Albandoz, "Population and Sample. Sampling Techniques," *Management Mathematics for European Schools* 1, no. 1 (2001): 1–18.

Researchers used pseudonyms to quote the views and perceptions of these SRC members. Thus, to reference different participants, the researchers used the interview sequence to help identify and protect the names of the interviewees. Furthermore, the first person to be interviewed is 'Participant 1', for reference purposes. In addition, these interviews were held through various online platforms, viz. Microsoft Teams and Google Meet. The interviews lasted approximately one hour and were recorded with the permission of the participants. The recordings were transcribed for text purposes and easy access.

Data Analysis

The researchers worked with meanings that emerged from the data analysed, not numbers; the meanings that emerged from the data were interconnected with the phenomenon explored through descriptions and classifications. This study used thematic analysis to understand the meaning of the lived experience of participants.

Ethical Considerations

This study was guided by moral principles designed to protect participants' autonomy and well-being and to ensure that it upholds scientific integrity. Formal approval was obtained from the University of Limpopo Research Ethics Committee with Ethics No. TREC/1605/2024: IR

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

At the UFS, mass protesting was a foreign concept because of the liberal SRC that existed on campus before 2015. Participant 4 made this assertion: "You remember when we came in, there was a problem of student apathy, and the student apathy in the UFS was as a result of suppression, starting in 2008 when they banned the entire SRC. If you look at it from after 2008, after Moses Masita, since then no one wanted to speak out about the views of the university. So there was suppression of student apathy, but students were suppressed. They didn't feel like they had a voice, but there was also fear that you might then be expelled; there was also a history of victimisation."

Jansen purported that the fee protests in Historically Black Universities (HBUs) took place against unaffordable university fees. Still, their tears were ignored until the protest started at white universities.³⁸ In the same vein, Luescher, Webbstock and Bhengu stated that in the past 25 years, after democracy in South Africa, student protests have been there, among many pertinent issues, including financial exclusions, student funding, accommodation, institutional transformation, institutional culture and also governance issues.³⁹ The emergency of 2015/2016 was a culmination of many underlying events wherein students took to the streets and demonstrated that they had had enough. The government and the universities missed the opportunity to overhaul the exclusive system and create an inclusive system. Luckily, the SRC members at the university seemed to understand the plight of many poor students in the university because one participant raised the issue:

*"This thing of fees because you have someone paying for you, so you have a sense of privilege, but for us, I'm well, you know, at a level of consciousness there was always that thing to say that this is a generational mission, although you might not be personally affected right now, but the system is rigged, and the system is against predominantly people that look like me."*⁴⁰

Undoubtedly, the realities of expensive higher education existed among students, and they understood them. To further understand this, even students understood that there were problems with food security in students' residences and outside campus parameters. Students knew that they had one mission when they entered university:

³⁸ Jansen, "As by Fire: The End of the South African University, x."

³⁹ Thierry M Luescher, Denyse Webbstock, and Ntokozo Bhengu, "Has Co-Operative Governance Failed Students? A Perspective Based on Students' Experiences," *STudeNT GoverNANce ANd ENgAgemeNT for AcAdemIc SucceSS*, 2020.

⁴⁰ Personal Collection, Interview between Soldaat, Noosi and Leqoalane with Participant 3.

*"I think it was one understanding that this is a generational mission, and we've always known where we come from. We are always told that education is the key to success. Education is the key to success, but now education in itself is its own commodity. It's inaccessible, particularly to people who look like me, so being someone who comes from a white school and an Afrikaans school in particular, you get the taste of how racism is and how institutionalised it can be from a very young age where even before you even become a teenager you get, you get it gets ingrained in, but they learnt that there emerge numerous challenges on their quest to achieve their goals."*⁴¹

Additionally,

*"I come from a poverty-stricken background. So surviving in an institution of higher learning required that one should be able to stand for themselves, outside of the financial ability required, to stay afloat in university."*⁴²

Students could not pay for university fees. In the midst of this, the SRC had to develop different strategies to ensure that at least a certain quota of students was not dropped. This came in handy as one of the participants alluded that they went all out to do fundraising, and the generated proceeds were contributed to the campaigns.⁴³ The CRT domain of personal (thoughts and action) tapped into the views of the students by activating a sense of self-awareness and personal reflexivity in their educational and political contexts. The student leaders understood that regardless of whether they are sorted financially or not, the struggle for fees and institutional transformation cannot be individualised, there should be selflessness in ensuring that the voices of students are heard. In summary, this shows that student leaders were aware of the situation and needed to act to ensure that universities are inclusive rather than exclusive. Lepere and Radebe emphasise this point by indicating that self-awareness and understanding of human everyday life, which includes knowledge and relatability, indicates *Ubuntu* as a philosophical perspective.⁴⁴ Thus, the sense of self-awareness and *Ubuntu* assisted SRC members to further reflect on their state of being and how they can further advance their advocacy for students.

They needed to tap into their repository of *Ubuntu*. On the contrary, Participant 7 asked an appropriate question:

*"But is anyone really hearing us? Is anyone really understanding what we're fighting for?"*⁴⁵

While student leadership was grappling with these questions, the university mobilised its security personnel, and students could not fathom why their pleas were not heard. Therefore, from time to time, SRC leaders had to provide leadership and persuade the university management to listen to their plight. To avoid being swallowed by management, Participant 6 alluded that management wanted to micromanage them, but their consciousness could not allow it:

"You would recall the initial reaction of the university management was to try and persuade the SRC away from the protests. It was a way to try to isolate certain students as instigators of the protests. There were a number of attempts to have meetings with the SRC on campus. You would recall this, and the SRC always refused to leave students and go meet with the university management. If I recall correctly, and once again, it's ten years ago, so some of the things might not follow the natural order as things happened. Some of it blurs out in the mind because it was just so long ago, but you would recall that we used that protest to raise many other issues that we're facing on campus, including issues of transformation, and we had some memorandums then that we drafted to university management. We refused to meet with them independently

⁴¹ Personal Collection, Interview between Soldaat, Noosi and Leqoalane with Participant 3.

⁴² Personal Collection, Interview between Soldaat, Noosi and Leqoalane with Participant 1.

⁴³ Personal Collection, Interview between Soldaat, Noosi and Leqoalane with Participant 7.

⁴⁴ R. Lepere, and T Radebe. "Ubuntu as a Dramaturgical Tool for Building Community in Protests," in *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 15(5), (2024, pp. 108 – 122.

⁴⁵ Personal Collection, Interview between Soldaat, Noosi and Leqoalane with Participant 7.

and externally, without students being aware and rather had them come to us and address us on the points that we had initially demanded...But they ultimately cooperated because they would come to our mass meeting and address us in the letter of demands that we would send to them, and I think they ultimately agreed.”⁴⁶

The university used tactics such as the above to micromanage student leaders. However, student leaders were ahead in influencing that meetings should not be held in private rooms but rather in the open, where all students could listen and hear for themselves. In so doing, student leaders also accounted for their constituencies by allowing them to see for themselves the type of people they dealt with. The domain of (Critical) CRT emphasizes the need and significance of awareness and reflexivity in understanding power and ideological contestations in a political context. The actions of the SRC challenged the university's status quo, which seeks to maintain and exercise power and marginalize students' views. This domain shows the power and ideological contestations between the university management and the SRC and how the student leaders advanced the narratives of the marginalized students at UFS. Sinwell emphasises this by indicating that the institutions are capable of exerting force and domination over students in order to control social relations within campuses to promote their own interests over students' interests.⁴⁷ Thus, the 2015/2016 protests tested student leadership, in which SRC members had to be firm and show their capabilities. One notable strong element was that many of them in the SRC composition were members of various political formations. Therefore, they were more aware of developments on campus.

Adapt or perish: Tests of leadership and cohesion.

On the other hand, #FeesMustFall campaigns were significant in the history of South African universities and exposed injustices in the higher education sector.⁴⁸ One significant aspect of #FMF was the student leadership, which coordinated the protests and became the mouthpiece of the student populace. Therefore, the SRC had to act by raising money and rejecting the proposed increase while the SRC was still deliberating on what should be done. The FMF was gaining momentum, and the UFS students were becoming impatient with their newly elected leadership, as they did not act “on time”. The SRC was uncertain about joining the FMF protest because of its inexperience, thus:

“I think most of us at the time were inexperienced, and we had never participated in a national cause. I think across the country, there's never been one single protest as far as I could recall at the time that you could participate in.”⁴⁹

SRC members acknowledged that there were novices in student politics. This can be seen as a strength and weakness; the strength is knowing that you are new, you will always be eager to learn and face challenges optimistically. On the other hand, being new would mean that students will be led into campaigns by people who were unsure as well about how to react or act during the protests. From the point of view of the CRT's personal reflection domain, this acknowledgement illustrates the critical self-awareness among SRC members about their leadership capacities.⁵⁰ Despite their inexperience creating uncertainty, it also provided significant learning and growth as they traversed a movement aimed at challenging inequalities within higher education.

Secondly, due to different political orientations in the SRC, differences emerged regarding participation in the protests. One interviewee observed that:

⁴⁶ Personal Collection, Interview between Soldaat, Noosi and Leqoalane with Participant 6.

⁴⁷ Luke Sinwell, “The# Fees Must Fall Movement: ‘Disruptive Power’ and the Politics of Student-Worker Alliances at the University of the Free State (2015–2016),” *South African Review of Sociology* 50, no. 3–4 (2019): 42–56.

⁴⁸ A. Saidi, “Enhancing Academic Success through the Involvement of Students in Quality Assurance and Promotion in Higher Education: A Synopsis,” *South African Journal of Higher Education* 34, no. 5 (2020): 1–19.

⁴⁹ Personal Collection, Interview between Soldaat, Noosi and Leqoalane with Participant 4.

⁵⁰ Wolfe, “Knowing the Self: Building a Bridge from Basic Research to Clinical Practice.”

“We were of different ideological dispositions, so at times, we will not see things the same way.”⁵¹

This finding highlights the interpersonal reflection domain of CRT, which places significance on relationships and group dynamics. Despite ideological differences, SRC members continued to interact with each other constructively while seeking common ground, demonstrating how collective action can emerge from diverse political perspectives. Despite the inexperience and ideological differences, the SRC joined the FMF protest and demanded a 0% fee increment, ultimately #freefeehighereducation and other issues such as institutional symbolism, representation and inclusivity. During the protest, the SRC ensured that it rallied all students and student organisations under one common agenda: a 0% fee increment that later escalated to issues of inclusion. Participant 6 stated:

“Due to different ideological orientations among students from different political formations, the SRC ensured tolerance and unity among students towards a common goal. To maintain tolerance and unity amongst students, the SRC argued on two fronts: 1. to wear SRC regalia in all the protests, which would serve as a symbol of unity among the students and 2. to avoid political hijacking of the protests and ensure that all students rally behind the SRC regardless of political affiliation.”⁵²

The reflection above shows that leadership by the SRC intended to promote tolerance amongst students who come from different backgrounds and unite them under one common goal. Through the contextual reflection domain, the SRC's endeavour to advance unity showcases an awareness of the greater social and institutional challenges confronting students. The prioritisation of a commonly shared student identity by the SRC fostered a collective resistance to exclusionary structures within higher education.

Additionally, Legodi indicated that during #FMF, students were mobilised and galvanised regardless of race, gender, class, religion or political affiliation with student-centred issues.⁵³ This shows how unity was forged among students at UFS. However, there were attempts by student political formations and their mother bodies to hijack the protest to score political points. The SRC showed resilience and took a position to ensure that they (the SRC) would lead the protest and continue to unify the student populace. In the same vein, Participant seven echoed that:

“We were very clear that this is not a political drive where we drive a specific agenda with a specific political party, but a drive where we are fighting for the students as a whole.”⁵⁴

This view is congruent with CRT's contextual reflection domain, which emphasises the significance of understanding social realities beyond factional interests. The SRC's emphasis on student-centred activism reflects an attempt to challenge inequalities affecting the broader student community rather than advancing party-political agendas. On the other hand, Langa noted that one of the negative aspects of the #FMF was the party-political power dynamics, in which political formations were more influential during the protests.⁵⁵ This negative aspect of the #FMF protest was not evident at UFS, and the SRC displayed leadership which sought to depoliticise the #FMF protests. It should be noted that the UFS-SRC also faced challenges during the #FMF protest, which were internal conflicts within the SRC regarding the directions that the SRC had to take and the power dynamics within the SRC. These ideological variations posed challenges to the SRC when making decisions. Participant 5 stated:

⁵¹ Personal Collection, Interview between Soldaat, Noosi and Leqoalane with Participant 4.

⁵² Personal Collection, Interview between Soldaat, Noosi and Leqoalane with Participant 6.

⁵³ Legodi, L., *Towards Understanding #FeesMustFall as a Leaderless Student Movement in South Africa*, vol. 1 (Kagisano: Council for Higher Education, 2020).

⁵⁴ Personal Collection, Interview between Soldaat, Noosi and Leqoalane with Participant 7.

⁵⁵ Malose Langa et al., “# Hashtag: An Analysis of The# FeesMustFall Movement at South African Universities,” 2017.

*"In my view, I know one member resigned, and I remember that one member also talked a big game at [sic] the point, and there was a disagreement between him and the president then asked the President, and it was like it almost seemed to me like a one-man show at one point, the President had his ideas of what he was doing, and we would say one thing, and then one thing would come out, and then we would send him as our representative to go say something, and then something else comes out."*⁵⁶

In congruence with Participant 5, Participant 7 added that:

*"I think at that point, we experience this leadership crisis, a crisis where leaders have opposing views, and the question is how do we move forward from those opposing views to a point where things almost got a little bit personal, a little bit emotional, and I think when one is using too much of the emotions, it is very difficult to provide sound leadership."*⁵⁷

From the interpersonal reflection domain, these tensions highlight the complexities of leadership within #FMF. Although disagreements precipitated challenges, they also encouraged dialogue and critical engagement among SRC members with respect to the direction of the struggle. A member who resigned from the SRC due to political or ideological differences surfaced as a glimpse of a leadership crisis. Furthermore, the power dynamics in the SRC posed a challenge to the SRC, as some of the members felt that the President decided outside of the collective. These challenges caused cracks in the unity of the SRC, where some members disagreed on principles and direction. However, even when there were cracks within the SRC, most of the SRC members saw a need to put their differences aside and focus on serving the best interests of the students. Additionally, Participant 7 alluded to the following:

*"I think in everything that you do, it's important to start with why, and the stance from an SRC perspective is to remain true to the course. There were many opposing views. There were many opposing or different opinions as to how things should be done, but the main thing was for us to stay true to the course and to stay true to why we are doing what we are doing."*⁵⁸

This view indicates how the SRC remained true to the course regardless of their differences, an indication of resilience, selflessness and leadership shown by the SRC to ensure that they continue to advocate for students' interests. According to Xaba, the students showed resilience during FMF because they understood the magnitude of the course in which they were involved.⁵⁹ Participant 7 noted that one of the student leaders requested that they burn something, and that they should agitate the management so that they can respond to their needs swiftly. The participant concluded that they (as SRC) could not agree to that, arguing that they should not destroy but foster engagement with management, which was not coming forth in some instances. This finding highlights both the personal and interpersonal reflection domains of the theoretical framework used. SRC members were able to self-reflect and demonstrate collective responsibility by prioritising the interests of students above personal or ideological perspectives, thereby intensifying the movement's cohesion.

This resilience was vivid when the management of the university responded to the FMF protests by suppressing the protests by arresting and victimising students and student leaders who were participating in the protest. The university management focused on maintaining the status quo and was unwilling to listen to the demands of the students. Participant 6 stated that during FMF protests, the university management was highly unresponsive to the demands of the students. They would rather interdict protests, call the police and private security to ban protests, create uncertainty and instil fear

⁵⁶ Personal Collection, Interview between Soldaat, Noosi and Leqoalane with Participant 5.

⁵⁷ Personal Collection, Interview between Soldaat, Noosi and Leqoalane with Participant 7.

⁵⁸ Personal Collection, Interview between Soldaat, Noosi and Leqoalane with Participant 7.

⁵⁹ Wanelisa Xaba, "Challenging Fanon: A Black Radical Feminist Perspective on Violence and the Fees Must Fall Movement," *Agenda* 31, no. 3-4 (2017): 96-104.

through securitisation and militarisation of campuses, as alluded to above. Participant 6 made the following expression:

*"The issue of the victimisation of students, I remember the students were being expelled for taking part in certain protests."*⁶⁰

This finding can be best understood through the critical reflection domain of CRT, which explores issues of power and domination. The victimisation and exclusion of protesting students can be ascribed to mechanisms used to preserve institutional authority and suppress challenges to the status quo. Participant 7 further stated that:

"We were not fond of management's reaction. I think from a management perspective, what happened is that they were very defensive to the point where the police were called on-site. I remember people getting arrested. I remember people getting injured with rubber bullets and so on. Tear gas or pepper spray. So, from a management perspective, they were extremely defensive. It was almost like students were being treated like criminals for fighting just for a basic right such as education."

The management's reaction demonstrates how institutional power may be wielded to control dissent rather than engage with demands for social justice. The participants perceived securitisation and policing as barriers to meaningful dialogue and transformation. The university management's response to the FMF protest did not assist the students. One SRC member was astonished and asked:

*"But is anyone really hearing us? Is anyone really understanding what we're fighting for?"*⁶¹

However, the students did not barge but showed resilience by ensuring that students who were expelled were brought back to campus. The SRC played a role in ensuring that it provided inclusive and free leadership from political party influence. At the centre of its leadership was a student-centred approach that dictated that the SRC receive a mandate from students and consult student formations so that it carries a mandate from its constituency. Participants 6 and 7 confirmed:

*"We engaged students in almost all the protests that happened. We sorted the mandate and the engagement and the input of student formations from different leaders of student formations, and at the same time, we were not wishy-washy to the university management on issues."*⁶²

This finding is in alignment with the critical and contextual reflection tenets of CRT. The SRC sought mandates from students and consultations with diverse formations; the SRC encouraged an open, participatory leadership and would ensure that student perspectives remained at the centre of their decision-making. Therefore, these reflections of former SRC members suggest that although the SRC faced challenges, they managed to navigate the testing times as they finished their term of office. These cracks and differences did not pose a crisis to the SRC, but motivated the SRC to remain resolute in the course by promoting tolerance and unity amongst students and advancing the best interests of students. Lastly, one emerging challenge was to hand over and at least ensure that the problems raised in 2015/2016 were at the top of the agenda for the next SRC because each SRC served for one term (one year); thus, handing over was a bit challenging.

Does it end with them? Or does the journey continue?

In history, each generation has its own mission, and every leadership epoch has its own defining moments. Every SRC term has its own challenges. Other participants stated,

"You would submit an issue, like the issue of the shuttle system, or free internet... and then they will say, 'you have to submit it to Council, and Council will present it to the

⁶⁰ Personal Collection, Interview between Soldaat, Noosi and Leqoalane with Participant 6.

⁶¹ Personal Collection, Interview between Soldaat, Noosi and Leqoalane with Participant 6&7.

⁶² Personal Collection, Interview between Soldaat, Noosi and Leqoalane with Participant 6&7.

*University Senate.' But these bodies do not sit every day. Now, it's the beginning of your term, and Council will sit in March. And the Central SRC will sit in March... and then they will say, 'Okay, we acknowledge these issues, we will submit them to the Senate in June.' By the time you get a response in June, your term is nearing its end.'*⁶³

The university management has been good at using game-time tactics. One critical question that many scholars of contemporary histories have been grappling with is to what extent did struggle continuities happen post-2015/2016 protest to avoid losing focus? Did the ensuing leadership after 2016 continue with the cries that were made in 2015/2016? As such, this section of the study seeks to add to the growing literature about the legacy of FMF protests as informed by the views of former SRC presidents and members of the University of the Free State. The #FMF protest at the UFS highlighted a key issue of concern as far as change and continuity are to be considered in the leadership space. To date, some of these issues have not been attended to; therefore, the big question is, "Where is the movement when the issue that gave rise to it is still prevalent?" While the question leaves much to be desired, there seems to be a lack of continuity and succession planning by SRCs at the University of the Free State, resulting in the succeeding SRCs' inability to carry out the goals and objectives of the pioneers of #FMF. Participant 3 claimed that:

*"Continuity is something that we have failed to ensure happens. I think, if I'm not mistaken, it's still going on even now, where a group comes in; they just come in with their own new ideas. They want to implement those things instead of [sic], you know, having a proper handover with those that came before them."*⁶⁴

The abovementioned suggests that the goals and objectives of the #FMF protest may not entirely be met today due to the disconnectedness of incoming and outgoing groups and their outlook on their SRC terms. Congruently, other student leaders felt that if they had to provide wisdom or guidance to those in office, it would be like "they are leading from the grave." The domain of personal (thought and personal) becomes visible here as student leaders reflect on why there are challenges in maintaining continuities within different SRC cohorts. The theory continues to help draw from the experiences of the SRC members at UFS during the #FMF. One notable issue here is that space has not been created where there is collegiality between different SRCs to hold onto unfinished business from the previous SRC to the current. Also, the terms of office and candidature should be revised to ensure that momentum and results emerge from different SRCs. However, it must be noted that the FMF movement did not fall into the trap of horizontalism, wherein the movement would be hijacked by those not legislated to represent the interests of students by the Higher Education Act. It must be clear that "horizontalism", adopted by social movements, does not necessarily carry negative nuances. However, due to attempts by some groups at the UFS to steer the FMF away from being led by SRCs, 2015/2016 had to garner student unity, centralising the leadership and coordination of the movement in its own ranks, albeit with differing views in the SRC itself. To ensure unity was achieved, Participant 1 alluded to the following.

*"The approach was that with every institutional decision I would make and every institutional meeting I would have with the university, I would first consult with all political heads from all political organisations. So, when I brought feedback, all of them knew that their inputs were represented in terms of fighting for student battles, which is concerned."*⁶⁵

⁶³ Personal Collection, Interview between Soldaat, Noosi and Leqoalane with Participant 2&3.

⁶⁴ Personal Collection, Interview between Soldaat, Noosi and Leqoalane with Participant 3.

⁶⁵ Personal Collection, Interview between Soldaat, Noosi and Leqoalane with Participant 1.

Additionally, the participant asserted that:

*"There was consensus in the first meeting when we met with political organisations. We met with all political organisations in drafting the memorandum and ... call for mobilisation of students."*⁶⁶

This approach proved to be a key ingredient in keeping the #FMF movement from crumbling in the face of possible alterations in conditions. The achievement of student unity led to a stronger and more empowered atmosphere for student activism at the UFS. Theoretically, the idea of interpersonal interactions with others showed its strength when leaders decided that, to resolve issues, they needed to find each other and ensure that they worked together. Again, CRT helped researchers to locate the daily experience and how the SRC navigated the politics of the university from all angles. This was also noted at the University of Pretoria (UP), where the leadership of "UPrising" worked creatively to bring solutions to challenges and maintain unity within the movement.⁶⁷ This approach was foregrounded in strategic planning and non-violent protests if the goals and objectives of #FMF were to be achieved. Participant 6 added that non-violence ensured that UFS suffered the fewest casualties in terms of student arrests, injuries and deaths; thus, *"all our protests have been violence-free."* The legacy of #FMF at UFS was rooted in the various robust dialogues for transformation that were held during and after the protests. There were contestations around decolonisation of the curriculum, gender and sexuality and the institutional culture. Participant 6 contended:

*"At the height of FEESMUSTFALL, the language policy resurfaced in such a prominent way on campus that the university council had no other alternative but to address it head-on."*⁶⁸

This resulted in the university council of the UFS adopting and officialising English as a medium of teaching and learning across the faculties, thus promoting inclusivity and addressing historical inequalities prevalent at the university. Though other critics say English is a foreign language and that this perpetuates colonisation, some argue that it is one step towards the right direction. This shows that the legacy of 2015/2016 did not die completely, but some continuities are visible. Hence, Participant 1 alluded to this:

*"Protesting for a policy position that spoke to, you know, decolonisation and removing of some of the statues there and at the UFS, there was always a movement that would come in and want to push a right perspective, a right-wing perspective in terms of, you know, sustaining the status quo, trying in the name of preserving heritage."*⁶⁹

This dialogue and resultant protest culminated in the removal of the statue of the 6th State President of the Orange Free State, whose tenure was at the height of apartheid, from the front of the main building of the university. This shows the level of conscientisation and maturity of thought prevalent in the student populace as a direct effect of the #FMF unearthing and encouraging difficult conversations, which, within the prism of CRT, falls under the critical domain. Participant 5 underscored that the change in the names of colonial or apartheid buildings post-2015/2016 was an element of continuity. Additionally, renaming the SRC building as the Steve Biko Building was also an element of continuity in the gains of the fallist movement. In addition, renaming the Ampie Theatre to Student Lekgotla was another gain on the Bloemfontein campus. Thus, there were some gains, but institutions of higher learning should rework the composition of SRCs in a way that ensures there are visible continuities. Therefore, grounding this study on CRT was helpful as researchers were able to understand the views and perceptions of those who participated in the leadership at the height of the protests.

⁶⁶ Personal Collection, Interview between Soldaat, Noosi and Leqoalane with Participant 1.

⁶⁷ Nomvete and Mashayamombe, "South Africa's Fees Must Fall: The Case Of# UPrising in 2015."

⁶⁸ Personal Collection, Interview between Soldaat, Noosi and Leqoalane with Participant 6.

⁶⁹ Personal Collection, Interview between Soldaat, Noosi and Leqoalane with Participant 1.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The article maps that political ideologies do not justify differences but rather where people find their commonalities, they can mobilise through that and forge forward towards the same goal. Thus, universities in their current form recognise student political formations; at UFS, independent candidates were allowed to run for elections. Institutions of higher learning should look into how continuities can be sustained, without forgoing the idea of new SRC's pushing their own ideas during their term of office. Indeed, it is not yet *Uhuru* in terms of fees and higher education, but rather, the #FMM laid a foundation for better higher education, wherein writing, inclusivity, insourcing, and all the demands of #FMM are visible, though there is still a long way to go. Further research can be done to enhance such articles, i.e. how students in Historically Black Universities (HBUs) perceive #FMM. Such research will assist in unearthing how unity can be achieved, and political differences can be averted. On top of that, general students' perceptions can be researched, which this article did not cater for; thus, this will grow the scope of understanding the plight of students in a broader spectrum of things.

CONCLUSION

This article addresses the experiences of the SRC at UFS Bloemfontein campus. In their reflection, the SRC leaders show that indeed there was leadership, though cracks existed. One notable element is that though the 2015/2016 generation faced numerous challenges, they laid a solid foundation for transforming the university. The article intended to map the continuities in the struggle for equal education in South Africa by understanding the role of the SRC at UFS. The Fallist movement sped up the process to ensure that academic inclusion and institutional symbolism were reflected. In a nutshell, the SRC at UFS played a critical role in steering the protests and avoiding violence by all means necessary; hence, the SRC at UFS could not agree with one of the student leaders who asked for something to be burned on campus. Using CRT was critical in assisting researchers to tap into the memory of those who led the 2015/2016 protest and the subsequent leaders, as it allowed them to express themselves, and researchers learned that there were differences in the SRC, but despite those differences, they managed to rise above water and lead students throughout. SRC's, when united, can achieve a lot. Political differences are not a hindrance when participants have a common goal. This article contributes to the growing body of knowledge in reflecting on the perceptions and views of SRC members about #FeesMustFall at UFS.

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