CRITICAL TRANSFORMATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: ETHICAL REFLECTIONS ON #MUSTFALL MOVEMENTS AND CONCOMITANT GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

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ABSTRACT

Protest movements such as the #MustFall currently dominate the South African higher education landscape. This article focuses on such protest movements, paying particular attention to protests against gender-based violations at some universities, commonly referred to as #RapeMustFall, as an exemplar of the gender injustices and inequities that persist. We argue that debates and policies about gender-based violations at universities cannot and should not be overshadowed by deficient grand narratives informed by patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism. To frame this argument, we critically review the current status quo from a gender mainstreaming policy-making perspective. We then argue the merits of an ethical perspective to transformation in higher education. Critical transformation in higher education requires not only epistemological change and access, but should be a fundamentally ethical pursuit.

Keywords: higher education, #MustFall protests, gender mainstreaming, gender-based violence, critical transformation, ethics

INTRODUCING AND CONTEXTUALISING THE SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

In the past two decades, at least three main politically infused discourses with structural, ideological and transformative dimensions have dominated the South African higher education

landscape (Du Preez, Simmonds and Verhoef 2016). Transformation has received considerable attention especially as a result of the South African Education White Paper 3 (DoE 1997) and the work of the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education (DoE 2008). These included pivotal policy-driven initiatives that were geared towards addressing challenges of inequality, poverty and economic growth in and through higher education. Despite these initiatives, the higher education landscape continues to be marred by controversy and to be immersed in social movements, because it is often perceived as '... a barometer of societal content or discontent, as academics and students are perhaps the freest agents in democratic societies to think, reflect and act' (CHE 2016). It is therefore not surprising that students and academics would at times use their agency to express their content and/or discontent about structural issues and initiate transformation from the bottom up.

The recent 'Fallism' movements and protests reflect the way students and academics use their agency to think, reflect and act on societal matters that concern all citizens. To perform one's agency is important, not only to cultivate a healthy democratic environment where citizens can articulate their free will, but also to challenge hegemonic structures that limit the agency of people. One common way in which the protesters have challenged the structure of higher education during the various 'Fallism' movements is by asserting that 'nothing in higher education has changed after Apartheid'. This claim is neither completely true nor altogether false. Although the demographic profile of students has changed dramatically since 1994, the demographic profile of academic staff has altered to a much lesser extent (CHE 2016; Le Grange 2016; Soudien 2010). Narratives – such as patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism – continue to dominate the structure of higher education. It is these narratives that are being challenged during the protests when the naturalisation of male dominance is challenged, when the Eurocentric nature of the curriculum is questioned, and when demands are made for free higher education. Despite interventions made to change the demographic profile of academic staff (CHE 2016, 283); to decolonialise curricula and thus provide greater epistemological access (CHE 2016, 15); and to respond to the demands for free education by announcing no fee increases for the 2016 academic year (Butler-Adam 2015, 1); it seems that there is a revolutionary regrouping in preparation for more sustained disruption by protesters (Seale 2016, 9).

The issues raised by the protesters require attention to the discursive environment in which these complex events have unfolded as well as to the economic, political, psycho-social, historical intersections that have primarily influenced them. This is a formidable undertaking,

which may explain why scholars tend to focus on only one dimension or intersection at a time, or why they take particular philosophical or theoretical stances to formulate their arguments. In the education realm, for example, arguments about providing epistemological access (Morrow 2007) through decentring dominant Eurocentric knowledge systems and introducing Africanisation, decolonisation, indigenisation and/or endogenisation[1] into the curriculum is a route most often chosen (Le Grange 2016, 9; Letsekha 2013, 9). There are at least three possible reasons for this: first, curricula are vehicles that bring policy imperatives, such as policy about transformation of higher education, to life (Jansen 2001); second, the curriculum can facilitate epistemological access to academic ways of knowing that sustain the strategic imperatives of universities (Morrow 2007); and third, the curriculum draws on material and symbolic resources that cunningly preserve deficient dominant narratives (Rao and Kelleher 2005). The danger is that focusing only on one intersection or dimension can result in reductionist or superficial treatment of complex social issues that are divorced from the dynamics that perpetuate them (Du Preez and Simmonds 2014, 11).

Although we endorse many of the epistemological and curricular approaches that have been adopted, we argue for an alternative approach in this article. This approach is partly inspired by Odora-Hoppers (2005) who avers that transformation becomes possible only once people are in a position to alter the moral basis of their practice. We are convinced that while epistemological change and access are essential for critical transformation of higher education, transformation should be fundamentally ethical in nature. In our view, current higher education scholarship on critical transformation takes too little account of this.

We commence with a general description of the performativity of the 'Fallism' movements and then give close attention to the #RapeMustFall campaign. These movements arose not only in response to ongoing dehumanising practices at some universities in South Africa (Griffin-EL 2015), but also to the slow progress of social transformation, an increasing decline in government funding and the perpetuation of inequality (Bozzoli 2015; Munusamy 2015). It is thus ironic that the #RapeMustFall campaign has received little attention in comparison to the other 'Fallism' movements. Moreover the #RapeMustFall campaign, which focuses on gender-based violence[2] in universities, has predominantly focussed on the (non)existence of policies and their tendency to engage with gender-based violence in a 'by the way' fashion as opposed to addressing it as a problem in its own right. Debates and policies on gender-based violations are side-lined by attention to other deficient grand narratives. To frame this argument, we criticise the current status quo from a gender mainstreaming policy-making perspective. We use this criticism to inform our argument for critical transformation in higher education based on an ethical approach.

#MUSTFALL PROTEST MOVEMENTS

The cataclysmic #RhodesMustFall (#RMF) movement in March 2015 heralded the way for the ensuing social movements. The #RMF movement was a collective mobilisation involving students, staff and workers at the University of Cape Town (UCT) against institutional racism practised at the institution (Chaudhuri 2016). The statue of Cecil John Rhodes, a colonialist and white supremacist, generated controversy in the higher education transformation debate. Its central position in an academic space was seen as a provocative symbol of colonial oppression (Qwabe 2015). The ideological struggle to have the effigy removed elicited a global transformation debate not only at institutions of higher education but also in broader society,[3] reflecting that education and social issues are closely intertwined (Msila 2016). As police brutality at the campus ensued (Furlong 2016) UCT obtained a court interdict against activists. Masixole Mlandu, a suspended student who contravened this interdict, passionately proclaimed 'it cannot be that after 40 years since the Soweto Uprising, we are still dealing with the same mechanism that seeks to silence black people from speaking the truth' (Malgas 2016).

The #RMF movement undoubtedly shook the academic landscape, which seemed to rest comfortably in its Eurocentric epistemological convictions, colonial history and initiated important debates. Questions included: In democratic, academic spaces, should pre-eminence be given to such entities that reflect colonialist history and are central to the country's imperialism and the marginality of its people? Whilst it is crucial to remain conscious of the country's history, should the purposes of academic spaces not be to build an ameliorating and just society, foster social upliftment, inform new ways of thinking and empower the next generation by delivering legitimately qualified students to society? Related to these questions are calls for curriculum policies to shift from their current archaic Eurocentricity and attune to reflect Africanisation, decolonisation, indigenisation and/or endogenisation of knowledge which would promote inclusivity (Le Grange 2016, 9; Letsekha 2013, 9). While activists viewed the eventual removal of the statue as a victory, it was far from the end of their struggle.

The #FeesMustFall (#FMF) movement initiated in October 2015 further placed the sphere of higher education, and its purposes, at the forefront of both national and international discourse. The announcement by most universities of tuition fee increases for 2016 triggered a wave of student-led activism amongst the country's universities (Tandwa 2015). Violence and brutality surrounded these movements as students were attacked with stun grenades and tear gas during the uprisings (Christian 2015). The protests resulted in a no fee increase for the 2016 academic year. Whilst the moratorium on fee increases signalled a short term victory for the

protesters, it failed to address the deeply rooted structural and systematic problems of higher education and its current financial makeup (Kalla 2015, 22). This decision had immense implications for universities who were already confronted with a decline in government subsidies, increases in the cost of infrastructure and utilities, and the depreciation of the South African currency.

What social media platforms have referred to as #RapeCultureMustFall and #RapeMustFall also emerged to engage with the culture of gender-based violence at universities and the responses to it. Matebeni (2015) contends that 'rape, as culture, is made so palatable that it is even stripped of its gruesome harm and violence'. Violated and wounded women constantly look over their shoulders, and have to attend class alongside their male perpetrators (ibid.). Gender inequalities and the associated gender-based violence that both women and men endure result from the multiple layers of oppression that plague the sphere of academe.

Gender-based violence extends far beyond the act of rape itself in that it is shaped and enabled by the long historical injustice of patriarchy (Le Roux 2016). At this juncture, we briefly reflect on the relevance of #RMF and #FMF movements to this assertion. During the 'Fallism' movements, students (of diverse socio-economic backgrounds, ethnicities, genders and so on) were amongst the key role players in participating in, conceptualising and executing these movements (Martin 2015). However, patriarchal attitudes marred these movements. An exemplar of this was when Nompendulo Mkhatshwa, SRC president at WITS at that time, issued instructions during these protests, her male counterparts retorted, 'We won't be told by a woman!' and 'feminism must voetsek' (Pilane 2015). Female student activists further revealed that they were subjected to misogyny and sexual assault by male activists during the #FMF movement (Seale 2016, 9). This highlights the urgent need for university campuses to interrogate gender-based violence and act against it.

Rochelle Jacobs, a student at Stellenbosch University (SU) co-founded the 'Unashamed' movement in 2014 to engage actively with the prevalence of rape and gender-based violence on the campus. As rape attacks intensified at UCT, a mass meeting was held with representatives from the SRC, 'Patriarchy Must Fall', 'UCT Survivors', the 'Gender and Sex Project', 'Safety and Violence Initiative', 'HIV/AIDS Inclusivity and Change Unit' and 'Disrupting Whiteness'. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss safety on the campus, issues related to sexual violence and the failure of the institutions to create a system to protect students and survivors of rape (Ausmeier and Venter 2016). Students at Rhodes University (RU) were also exposed to a dramatic increase in rape attacks. The SRC revealed that 21 students had been raped or sexually assaulted at the campus in 2016 alone (Sesant 2016). Subsequently, the

#CHAPTER212 movement, which forms part of the larger 'Unashamed' movement and is named after Chapter 2.12 (Bill of Rights) in the South African Constitution (South Africa 1996) affirming the human rights, freedom and security of students, was launched at RU in April 2016 (Wazar 2016a). This movement served as an awareness campaign pertaining to rape culture and the gross shortcomings of current institutional policies related to gender-based violence. Activists used posters (which were subsequently removed by the Campus Protection Unit), demanding changes to the policies which they claimed to be discriminatory (Wazar 2016b). They cited the management's insensitive manner in dealing with survivors of rape, including rhetoric such as 'Are you sure you want to go through with this? You'll ruin his reputation' and 'Focus on your exams rather. We're not going to prosecute' to demonstrate the hegemonic power of the institutional structures to silence (Parker 2016, 4). The publication of the #RUReferencelist (Johnston 2016) a week later was a catalyst for further action at the campus. One of these was the protest by partially nude female students, a poignant statement against rape culture and gender-based violence in general (Charter 2016).

RU, UCT, WITS and the University of the Western Cape (UWC) all have policies to deal with sexual offences, harassment or assault. However, student activists argued that these policies are a sham, they further argued that the policies were based on a 'rigged legal system' and needed to be reviewed as they contain very narrow definitions of rape and marginalise survivors whilst creating a safe haven for perpetrators (Corke 2016). According to UCT's sexual offences policy, rape is defined as 'an unlawful and intentional act of sexual penetration with another person without that person's consent' (University of Cape Town 2008, 3). Such narrow definitions and imprecisions are lacunae in the policies. The responsibility of proving that the perpetrator intended to rape or violate the individual rests on the victims: a mockery of justice and that violates their human dignity and freedom. The institutional policies also seem to have been enforced within a regulatory system rather than a constitutive one. One example of this could be the use of an institutional behavioural manual in which various types of misconduct such as intoxication, dishonesty and harassment (amongst other) are addressed (North-West University 2013). We find this problematic as gender-based violence is merely viewed as an aspect of misconduct rather than an important aspect in its own right.

It seems that following these 'Fallism' movements, policies to protect people against gender-based violence are being reviewed at various higher educational institutions. This invites the observation that institutions are doing so only because of the current turbulence. This article highlights the fact that the policies have no chance of succeeding unless those who review the policies have a deep understanding of the plights and complexities of all members

of the student body. It also explores policy-making itself as a symbolic marker of change. We refer to the Women Empowerment and Gender Equality (WEGE) Bill (South Africa 2014) as well as the Department of Women 2015-2020 Strategic Plan (South Africa 2015) as examples of national initiatives that can be regarded as advocating for gender justice. Gender mainstreaming underpins these policies. We use this exploration to criticise the status quo.

MAINSTREAMING GENDER THROUGH POLICY-MAKING

Socialist feminists hold the view that a strong correlation between the state and male dominance persists in society. Odora-Hoppers (2005, 57) argues that 'women's subjugation is a product of both the logic of capitalism and patriarchal ideology'. She explains that women are often expected to mediate between the calls made on them by state services/corporate enterprise and domestic responsibilities. In effect, the sexual division of labour falls prey to capitalist ideals such as the economic orthodoxy feeding competitive markets and free trade (Rao and Kelleher 2005). This complex interplay is clearly visible in the manner in which the #MustFall movements have unfolded in South Africa.

Regardless of what or who resides at the centre or the periphery, policy-making remains a site of tension and conflict because of its tendency to exclude certain voices when they construct a generic vision for an often heterogeneous population. The WEGE Bill serves as one such example in South Africa. In her term as Minister of the Department of Women, Children and People with Disabilities, Lulama Xingwana argued the importance of the WEGE Bill:

> It will help us in our quest to continue to influence policy positions and government programmes to reflect the imperatives of gender equality and women empowerment. Furthermore, the Bill will assist to accelerate the mainstreaming of gender in policies and programmes across the public and private sector. (South Africa 2014)

The NGO, Sonke Gender Justice, were amongst those to highlight their concerns about the possible gaps in the Bill (Sonke Gender Justice 2014). First, rural women along with other groups of marginalised women in South African society are disadvantaged by their lack of education and employment opportunities, poverty and disabilities were not adequately consulted during the process of drafting the Bill. Second, although they sound commendable, the declarations lack substance. The Bill fails to address clearly how and when these frameworks and plans are to be implemented and by whom. Third, the Bill has lofty aims, such as ensuring 50 per cent representation of women in all decision-making assemblies in both government and private entities. However, while these further the interests of women in

political parties or those who occupy senior management positions, they do little to cater for the needs of marginalised women. Fourth, the Bill merely duplicates the functions and provisions of existing legislation like the Employment Equity Act (55 of 1998) and the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (4 of 2000).

In July 2016, we engaged in email correspondence with the Director-General of the Department of Women. In response to our enquiries on the current state of the Bill, we were informed that:

> ... as with all legislation that has not been finalised in Parliament by the end of an Administration, it lapses. The Minister has determined that it should not be reintroduced in this Parliament as we are of the view that there is adequate equality legislation and policy in place across government and no new legislation would be required. (22 July 2016)

The 'lapsing' of the WEGE Bill led us to speculate why something that was deemed so important was not pursued. Or alternatively, why it was placed under a larger corpus of existing legislation when the view was expressed, 'there is adequate equality legislation'. It seems that business continues as usual under the leadership of Ms Susan Shabangu, the current Minister for the Department of Women, who claims that this Department strives to: 'Accelerate socio-economic transformation and implementation for women's empowerment and participation through oversight, monitoring, evaluation and influencing policy' (Department of Women). It could certainly be argued that many of the ideals advocated by the WEGE Bill are included in the Department of Women 2015–2020 Strategic Plan (South Africa 2015). This strategic plan, developed by the management of the Department of Women, has three strategic objectives: administration, social transformation and economic empowerment as well as policy, stakeholder coordination and knowledge management (South Africa 2015, 5). Gender mainstreaming is a core feature of the strategic objective 'social transformation and economic empowerment'.

Gender mainstreaming can be perceived as redressing patriarchy and promoting gender equality in part. Mainstreaming gender in policy-making gained prominence as a result of social concerns such as poverty reduction and improved awareness of gender-related violence. Although an established body of research exists, 'policy and programmes continue to show very limited and compartmentalised concerns with gender equity' (Kabeer 2003, 225). The Gender Management System (GMS) was one of the key initiates and provided a driving force to address policy and programme shortfalls. As part of the 1995 *Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development*, commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs mandated the Secretariat to develop the concept and methodology of the GMS to facilitate all aspects of

gender mainstreaming (Commonwealth Secretariat 1999, 10). This involves a 'comprehensive network of structures, mechanisms and processes for bringing a gender perspective to bear on all government policies, plans, programmes and projects' (Commonwealth Secretariat 1999, 6). However, key to the success of the GMS is its partnerships in society between government, civil society and the private sector. For Kabeer (2003, 229) 'it is the pressure from civil society in democratic societies that gives legitimacy to gender equity goals within government as well as the political clout needed to follow them through'.

To determine the effectiveness of GMS initiatives for promoting and achieving gender mainstreaming, indices such as the Gender Development Index (GDI) and the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) can be used to measure gender (in)equality at national levels (Kabeer 2003, 85). GDI 'endorses the view that a precondition for the empowerment of women in any context is closing gender disparities in returns to labour efforts, in levels of education attained and in life expectancy' (ibid.). For GEM 'women's and men's percentage share of parliamentary seats, positions as legislators, senior officials and managers, and estimated earned income is calculated' (Unterhalter 2005, 86). Odora-Hoppers (2005, 67) warns that although all the disparities can be overcome, mainstreaming must not be equated with equal representation of women and men. What is needed is 'changing policies and institutions so that they actively promote gender equality' (ibid.). Although commonly regarded as a 'specialized tool of the policy world', gender mainstreaming could be conceptualised as a practice and as a theory (Walby 2005, 338). As a practice, gender equality is promoted through improved 'effectivity of mainline policies by making visible the gendered nature of assumptions, processes, and outcomes' (Walby 2005, 321). As a form of theory, the 'revision of key concepts to grasp more adequately a world that is gendered' is privileged (ibid.). However, gender mainstreaming remains a contested concept because of its deep-rooted connections with feminist, political and social theories and the associated processes that could constitute various routes towards its goal (Daly 2005; Lombardo 2005; Perrons 2005; Squires 2005; Verloo 2005). For Walby (2005, 322) this contention is underpinned by 'gender equality' and 'mainstream' as dual agendas, while at the same time acknowledging the multiple theories informing each concept.

It can therefore be argued that gender mainstreaming is not static but rather constantly being 'constructed, articulated, and transformed through discourse that is clustered within frames that are extended and linked through struggle and argumentation' (Walby 2005, 338). There are two main perspectives of gender mainstreaming: 'agenda setting' and 'integrationist'. Agenda setting prizes 'transformation and reorientation of existing policy paradigms, changing

decision-making processes, prioritising gender equality objectives and rethinking policy ends' (Walby 2005, 323). This perspective is often favoured by feminists who strive for radical transformation. Ferree (2004) and Verloo (2005) use frame theory to refer to this approach as 'frame extension'. It too emphasises a change of the mainstream through modifications and extensions of theory and practice. An integrationist approach is more assimilationist in nature. It seeks to 'introduce a gender perspective without challenging the existing policy paradigm' to 'more effectively achieve existing policy goals' (Walby 2005, 323). From a frame theory perspective, the concept 'frame bridging' is used to infer that links or bridges can be drawn to the existing dominant frame (Ferree 2004; Verloo 2005). At present it seems that many institutional policies on gender-based violence are assimilationist because they simply integrate clauses referring to gender-based violence in existing policy paradigms that tone down the brutality of these offences.

Perhaps partly to support an 'agenda setting' approach to gender mainstreaming, Rao and Kelleher (2005, 62) prefer to speak of institutional transformation rather than gender mainstreaming. This notion, they advocate, promotes 'ideas like empowerment, citizenship and rights with new eyes and a more overtly political analysis'. They hold the view that transformation is a political and personal process that 'requires access to, and control over, material and symbolic resources. It also requires changes in deep-seated values and relationships that are held in place by power and privilege' (ibid.). This is only possible when women's empowerment and gender equality are on the agenda supported by 'skilled, politically influential advocates' whose goal is to create enabling environments as well as to mobilise women in rights and access to power and resources (Rao and Kelleher 2005, 68). One might argue that change in deep-seated values and relationships that are readily naturalised and taken at face value need to be driven by powerful ethical arguments.

Gender mainstreaming, although appealing in its intention, has also aroused institutional politics. We have drawn three possible implications of such politics: the yardstick stigma; compromised personal and professional identities; and refraining from the conversation. In terms of an infatuation with ratios, targets and statistical representation, Gouws (2010, 17) warns that gender mainstreaming has resorted to 'tool kits and checklists to make sure that gender is taken into consideration inside institutions'. As a result, women are included because institutions and organisations have to meet certain criteria. In such instances of affirmative action, candidates (often women and individuals of colour) are victims labelled or categorised 'as proof of benevolence, or as a demonstration of congenital incapacity' (Odora-Hoppers 2005, 65). As part of the system, these individuals are often marginalised or expected to assimilate

into a system where they 'compete with those in power according to paradigms that are acceptable to and formulated by the latter' (ibid.). So it is that 'the terms of [their] participation' prove more problematic than 'the fact of their participation' (Odora-Hoppers 2005, 66). Although the demographic profile of academic staff has changed dramatically as a result of affirmative action initiatives, the majority of academics in South Africa are white (53%) or male (55%) (CHE 2016, 283). In the light of the fact that women and individuals of colour remain in the minority, the chances of their being assimilated in mainstream narratives that are essentially patriarchal, colonialist and capitalist are reduced. Such minority groups could effectively be marginalised or even silenced.

Because the majority of academics in South Africa are white or male, the chances are good that women feel compelled to compromise their personal and professional identities. This is often the case when 'organizations are staffed with many self-interested individuals who align their interests with that of the ruling party in order not to lose their positions, leading to chronic dysfunctionality' (Gouws 2010, 17). For Bhana and Mthethwa-Sommers (2010, 3) this implies that individual women are 'menstreamed' to explicitly adopt roles unlike their own for reasons such as acceptance or respect. Gouws (2010, 15) argues that women 'express internalized male norms of competition and hierarchical thinking through which they may exclude or even psychologically damage other[s]'. In turn, because of the image of the privileged male, some individuals aspire to be like men in order to achieve certain goals, prove a particular point, be acknowledged, and be respected. Bhana and Mthethwa-Sommers (2010, 3) caution that the danger of menstreaming is that it could lead to 'counter-feminist thinking' which in turn influences the psychology and identity of any person.

Lastly, the effect of gender mainstreaming on some individuals has resulted in their removing themselves from the particular context or not participating. Research done by the organisation Gender at Work has found that some South African's experience 'fundamental difficulty in shifting the paradigm of patriarchy within which they operate, and the resultant high fall-out and burn-out' (Rao and Kelleher 2005, 58). This could be due to the deep-seated patriarchal imperialism in South Africa's history that still thrives in society.

As a result, when one interprets the 'Fallism' movements in terms of policy-making from a gender mainstreaming perspective, it becomes evident that policies might provide better governance, but they do not always provide an avenue for societal change. This becomes a real danger when governance overemphasises measuring who participate rather than what their participation entails (Walby 2005). To transform institutional culture requires using a new lens to interrogate the implications of political participation through reflecting on power, ethics,

citizenry, governance, democracy, human rights, policy and politics itself (Odora-Hoppers 2005, 63). For Odora-Hoppers (ibid.) change requires 'altering the moral basis for practice'. In agreement with this statement, we next argue the merits of an ethical approach at a time when critical transformation of higher education is urgently needed.

ETHICAL REFLECTIONS ON CRITICAL TRANSFORMATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

If transformation can only happen when we alter 'the moral basis for practice' (Odora-Hoppers, ibid.), we need to reflect critically on the ethical basis of our institutional practices. Ethics, understood as 'the search for a good "way of being"' (Badiou 2002, 1), ought to receive more emphasis in the South African higher education context. This, we argue, opens a pathway for profound transformation that is not steered by superficial policies that downplay severe societal inequalities and injustices. Alain Badiou's philosophy, which is critical of hegemonic political agendas and offers an ethical perspective to challenge such agendas, provides a useful lens to conceptualise alternative ways of initiating critical transformation in higher education.[4] We use his meta-theory of ethical revolution to discursively endorse our main arguments rather than to descriptively engage with the spaces and places where transformation in higher education could transpire.

In his book, *Ethics: An essay on the understanding of evil*, Badiou (2002, 40) argues that there is no ethics in general. Ethics for him emanates from an ethic of a truth which arise when a subject, through fidelity, bears the trajectory of an event, from which truth emerges that pierces the boundaries of a situation. In making sense of this, it is important to understand what Badiou means when he uses the concepts situation, event, subject and truth. In order to illustrate these, we will apply Badiou's ethic of truths to the #RapeMustFall movements and policies about gender-based violations in universities that are overshadowed by deficient grand narratives. In doing so, we aspire to shed light on the potential ethical contribution that the #RapeMustFall movement could make to accelerate critical transformation in higher education.

The state of the 'situation' is explained in the sections dealing with the 'Fallism' movements (that included the #RapeMustFall movements) and the context of higher education that consistently fails to mainstream gender in policy-making. It seems that this reflects the normalisation of gender-based violence because of absolute, totalitarian grand narratives, such as patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism. For Badiou (2002, ix), '[i]n the ordinary situation, the domination of its state is effectively absolute ... It is precisely this indetermination that ensures conformity or obedience from the ... members of the situation'. This explains why

minority groups, women in particular, are often forcibly assimilated into systems created by those who hold the absolute power, why these groups often feel compelled to compromise their personal and professional identities by internalising absolutist norms, and why some fall silent and withdraw from the situation.

The process of entering the realm of truth or the exceptional requires singular innovations in order to evade domination: this signifies the 'event' (Badiou 2002, viii–ix). The current #RapeMustFall movements challenge absolute, totalitarian grand narratives. In such an event, a new truth could come into being, if the subjects maintain 'a resilient fidelity to the consequences of an event that took place in a situation but was not of it' (Badiou 2002, x). These subjects refer to the #RapeMustFall protesters who initiated and steered the campaign against gender-based violence. The fidelity marks the process of realising the ideals of the event (Badiou 2002, 67). The event, which is the beginning of ethics, is situated because it is linked to a situation (patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism), as well as supplementary because it is detached from the rules of the situation (Badiou 2002, 68). Noys (2003, 126) summarises this well: 'The ethical then is the "ethic of a truth", not something general but something that maintains fidelity to the truth emerging from a particular event'. Under the imperative to 'keep going!' – the continuation of fidelity to the event and the truth embedded in it – ethics unite resources of discernment, courage and moderation (Badiou 2002, 91). Discernment serves to remind a subject not to succumb to delusions concerning the event; courage teaches the subject not to give up; and moderation warns the subject not to get carried away in totalitarian extremes (ibid.).

Thus this ethical approach provides us with three resources, i.e. discernment, courage and moderation, to be used to work towards critical transformation in higher education and attain the ideals of an equal, just society. Secondly, this approach teaches us the directives of a good way of life that stems organically from the ethic of truths. Thirdly, it reminds us, the subjects who bear the trajectory of the event have to 'keep going!'. Thus, to counter gender-based violations and attain critical transformation in higher education, we should refrain from falling prey to delusions, from giving up, and from getting carried away in extremist arguments and actions.

In sum, we consider the current 'Fallism' movements important because of their potential to accelerate critical transformation in higher education. However, following Badiou (2002), we urge protesters to avoid the three evils that could undermine the potential transformative nature of an ethic of truths that could stem from such an event. Firstly, protesters should never become terrorising followers of false events (simulacrum); secondly, they should refrain from acting to satisfy their own interests or hidden agendas (betrayal); and thirdly, protesters should

never be so arrogant as to force the power of a truth and by so doing impose an absolute, totalising truth on others (the unnameable, or disaster). Žižek (2012, 1) reminds us to never be propelled by obscure destructive dreams, but to thrive on emancipatory dreams. The latter do not simply imply that we respect others during and through our protests and campaigns, but that we 'offer them a common struggle, since our most pressing problems today are problems we have in common' (Žižek 2012, 46). Without a shared struggle, we occupy a 'worldless space' in which 'meaningless violence is the only form a protest can take' (Žižek 2012, 54). In the context of this article, an example of a common struggle is the urge to transform higher education in South Africa. To prevent that our struggle occupies a 'worldless space', we have argued that our shared struggle should emanate from 'the search for a good "way of being"' (Badiou 2002, 1). This might open a pathway for profound transformation in higher education.

CONCLUSION

We acknowledge the value of protests as a means of initiating and driving change agendas in higher education. However, for this to be successful, movements have to be wary of counterproductive practices such as simulacrumism, betrayal and indoctrination. Avoiding these requires thinking anew about what critical transformation entails within the higher education landscape. Although critical transformation includes policy reform, epistemological change and access as well as other forms of socio-political redress, we argue that these need to be conceptualised and underpinned through a critical reflection on the ethical basis of our institutional practices.

NOTES

1. We acknowledge that these concepts are highly rhetorical and have different meanings attached to them that should be questioned and engaged with. However, for the purposes of this article, they are noted as one of the background issues that steer the #MUSTFALL movements.

2. We are aware that gender-based violations include many forms of violence, but for the purpose of this article we understand it as any form of gender discrimination and/or systemic oppression, as well as rape and sexual assault.

3. Although many of the arguments and examples that we use emanate from the local context, we are aware that it is not devoid of global discourses and tensions.

4. Our reference to Badiou and Žižek is solely driven by the fact that these philosophers engage with meta-theories of revolutions that sheds light on the current status quo in the country.

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