



**UNIVERSITY of the  
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**Mini – Thesis Report**

**Title of Research: Social Movement Learning, Student Protest and Higher Education:  
An Exploration of #FeesMustFall at UWC**

**Masters in Education (Adult Learning and Global Change)**

**Supervisor: Dr Natheem Hendricks**

**Date: 13 November 2020**

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this mini thesis has been written in fulfilment of the Masters in Education Degree, Adult Learning and Global Change, at the University of the Western Cape. I would also like to declare that through the supervision of Dr Natheem Hendricks, I worked and developed this mini thesis independently in accordance to the rules and requirements for postgraduate studies at the University of the Western Cape. It has not been altered by anyone except myself, and it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. The work presented is entirely my own except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgement.

Location: University of the Western Cape, South Africa

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines student activism and student protests that occurred at South African higher education institutions (HEIs) during the academic years 2015 and 2016. These protests were inspired by multiple grievances experienced by students at HEIs, which included protesting against the maintenance and celebration of imperial symbols at universities as well as the unaffordability of academic and residence fees. These protests were different to previous student protests in that student discontentment and protests were popularised and advocated through social media under Twitter hashtags such as #RhodesMustFall (RMF) and #FeesMustFall (FMF).

This explorative study uses the University of the Western Cape as a site to explore what and how student activism has contributed to learning within the #UWCFMF student protest movement. Theorists that have worked on the evolving nature of social movement learning have theorised learning as cognitive.

The investigation uses a qualitative research methodology to solicit lived experiences from the students who were at UWC during the #UWCFMF student protests in 2015 and 2016.



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## KEY WORDS

FEES MUST FALL

RHODES MUST FALL

UWC FEES MUST FALL

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STUDENT ACTIVISM

FREE EDUCATION

SOCIAL MOVEMENT LEARNING

HIGHER EDUCATION

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

ADULT LEARNING



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## ACRONYMS

ALP	Advanced Leaders Programme
ANC	African National Congress
CPUT	Cape Peninsula University of Technology
ELP	Emerging Leaders Programme
CSSS	Centre for Student Support Services
DASO	Democratic Alliance Student Organisation
EFF	Economic Freedom Fighters Student Command
EMS	Economic Management Sciences
FMF	Fees Must Fall
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GEAR	Growth Employment and Redistribution
HBI	Historically Black Institution
HBU	Historically Black University
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Act of 1997
HEDT	Higher Education and Training
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HWI	Historically White Institution
IASAS	International Association of Student Affairs
ICT	Information Communication Technology
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
LGBTIQI+	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer Intersexual
LPP	Legitimate Peripheral Participation
LSR	Leadership and Social Responsibility
NDR	National Democratic Revolution
NP	National Party
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
PASMA	Pan Africanist Student Movement Association
PwC	Pricewater Coopers

RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
RU	Rhodes University
RMF	Rhodes Must Fall
SA	Student Affairs
SAA	South African Airways
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SADC	Southern African Development Countries
SASCO	South African Student Congress
SMs	Social Movements
SRC	Student Representative Council
SOEs	State Owned Enterprises
SU	Stellenbosch University
TAC	Treatment Action Campaign
UCT	University of Cape Town
UCKAR	University Currently Known as Rhodes
UDF	United Democratic Movement
UFS	University of Free State
UJ	University of Johannesburg
UKZN	University of KwaZulu Natal
UP	University of Pretoria
UPM	Unemployed People's Movement
UWC	University of the Western Cape
Uwc	University of the working class
VAT	Value Added Tax
WWW	World Wide Web
WITS	Witwatersrand University
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development



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## SECTION ONE

### 1.1 Background

This study examines student activism and student protests that occurred at South African higher education institutions (HEIs) during the academic years 2015 and 2016. These protests were inspired by multiple grievances experienced by students at HEIs and included protesting against the maintenance and celebration of imperial symbols at universities as well as the unaffordability of academic and residence fees. These protests were different to previous student protests in that the student protests were popularised and advocated through social media under Twitter hashtags such as #RhodesMustFall (RMF) and #FeesMustFall (FMF). Twitter, a short messaging service (sms) based social networking site, was launched in 2006 and according to Caroline Forsey (2019), this media platform is used daily by over 100 million people.

Increasingly, from about the time of the #Arab Spring, the use of Twitter became an integral part of student protests or demonstrations globally, and #FMF followed the trend nationally. This perspective is confirmed by Manuel Castells in the statement that “demonstrators used the hashtag #sidibouid on Twitter to debate and communicate, thus indexing the Tunisian revolution” (Castells, 2015, p. 28). To understand how these tweets work, Benjamin Gleason (2013) wrote that:

tweets contain multiple links utilising a number of platforms: a photo-sharing site with user-generated images that display opposition to the movement; video-sharing websites with videos that protest, explain video, or critique; a Google map that demonstrates the location of protests across the United States. (p. 3).

Similarly, local South African student protestors made use of hashtags to share their actions and views during #FMF campaign.

The #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall, among others - nascent social formations collectively became known as the ‘fallists’ movements - became characterised by the hashtag #...MustFall. As a researcher I am interested in gaining a deeper understanding of the events associated with the #FeesMustFall movement which also became known as #UWCFMF or more popularly as UWC Fees Will Fall (#UWCFWF) at the University of the Western Cape

(UWC) during 2015 and 2016. Specifically, this exploratory study aims to investigate what, how and why activists, within UWC #FeesMustFall movement, have learnt due to their activism.

## 1.2 Locating Local Fees Protests

Student protests at South African institutions of higher learning during 2015 and 2016 were not isolated from student protests that had transpired earlier internationally. In the mid-2000s, students from a developed economy, such as Germany, and developing African countries such as Kenya and Mozambique demanded free higher education (Langa et al., 2016). These protests followed the 2011 United Kingdom public demonstrations against the exorbitant fees universities started to charge for tuition (Teicher, 2011). Supporting the perspective that the local university student protests, which called for free higher education, was influenced by similar international demands, Fatima Moosa (2016) from the *Daily Vox* identified a number of countries globally that experienced protests with similar demands.

The availability of mobile phones and free Wi-Fi internet access to registered students at South African universities afforded students with the capacity to instantly learn about, and follow, global developments. According to a staff writer at *Mybroadband* online news, all South African universities were connected to the Tertiary Education and Research Network of South Africa's (TENET) fibre backbone (South African University Internet Speed, 2015). This meant that South African universities experience excellent internet speeds on campuses (South African University Internet Speed, 2015). The availability of free high-speed Wi-Fi at South African universities, and the distribution of information from the internet via smartphones meant that UWC students were not isolated from national and international student voices that demanded free higher education. In addition to receiving messages using the latest telecommunication technologies, which included smartphones, computers and laptops to access Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter, local student activists also used these technologies and applications to communicate and spread their own messages, publicise their demands, grievances and protest activities. The role of the social media platforms was huge during #FMF, and as such, Mthokozisi Emmanuel Ntuli and Damtew Teferra (2017) emphasised the use of “digital technologies in enhancing political participation, civic engagement and governance processes in the twenty-first century ... to boost citizen involvement in democratic processes” (p. 66).



### 1.3 Historical Roots of the Fallist Movements

South African higher education institutions, including UWC, were relatively stable, immediately after the advent of democracy in 1994. This relative calm across the higher education landscape was shaken, almost simultaneously, during the 2015 and 2016 academic years due to student protests at all 23 universities in the country. In his contextualisation of the #FeesMustFall protests, David Smith (2015) from *The Guardian*, locates the immediate roots of these protests within the University of Cape Town (UCT) student activists' demand for the removal of the statue of British colonialist and arch imperialist Cecil John Rhodes (1853-1902) and other symbols of colonialism at UCT. This demand initiated a social movement which the UCT students named the #RhodesMustFall (RMF) movement. Having its roots at UCT, the RMF movement was not limited to this institution, instead the "Rhodes Must Fall campaign also had resonance with students" (O'Halloran, 2016, p. 188) at Rhodes University (RU) in the Eastern Cape Province.

While RMF was essentially a protest movement, its activities were not limited to protests. On the contrary, RMF activities and activism included students and staff initiating dialogues about free higher education, decolonisation of the academic curriculum, and increasing the proportion of black academics on campus (Andrews, 2017). These dialogues are important to note as the genesis of the RMF student protests in 2015 culminated in the formation of the #FMF call.

UCT students and staff did not universally accept the demand for the removal of colonial symbols at institutions of higher learning advocated by the RMF movement. Some regarded Cecil Rhodes as "one of Cape Town's grandest 'sons': mining magnate, former prime minister of the Cape Colony, and conqueror of the colonial 'hinterland'" (Luescher, 2016, p. 22). Others perceived him as being celebrated as the perpetuation of the colonial and racist legacy of South Africa (Badat, 2016). Badat (2016) reasoned that the black student community at UCT, under the banner of RMF, utilised the personality of Cecil Rhodes as a symbol to coerce the institutional authority to accelerate the transformational project, which included "decolonization of the university" and "transformation" at UCT and constructing an institutional culture that does not alienate black students and staff (Badat, 2016, p. 12; see also Habib, 2016, p. 1).

The moral message carried by RMF could not be faulted. Local parliamentarians and other social commentators publicly expressed their support for the goals of RMF (Maringira & Gukurume, 2016). Thus, early in April 2015, the UCT Council voted to remove the Rhodes

Statue and management stated that the “ ‘Rhodes Must Fall’ campaign has been a ‘wake-up call, not only for tertiary institutions, but the entire country as transformation issues needed to be addressed a long time ago” (Essop, 2015, para. 1).

Was this outcome a victory for student activism? Did this outcome inspire similar initiatives at other higher education institutions? It surely confirmed that the UCT student grievances and demands were legitimate and necessary. More importantly though, the RMF activism became an example and model for the student protests that were about to follow.

This model of student protest initially spread to the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg following an announcement by the university’s management that the tuition fees for the 2016 academic year would increase by 10% (Badat, 2016). This protest against the fee increases became the turning point for higher education and student activism in South Africa in the post-apartheid period.

Building on the success of the RMF movement, the embryonic student protests against increasing tuition fees at universities organised themselves under the hashtag banner of #FeesMustFall (FMF). FMF activists sparked solidarity action at most South African universities. The FMF movement gained momentum quickly and escalated to other universities across the country. *News24 Online* reported that Rhodes University (RU) students initiated their FMF protest on 19 October 2015, which resulted in the institution being shut down (Herman, 2015). UCT students joined the FMF protest on 26 October 2015 (Herman, 2015; Quintal, 2015). The University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (UKZN) joined the movement in late October 2015 (Langa, 2016); the University of the Western Cape (UWC) on 21 October 2015 (Qukula, 2015); and the University of Johannesburg (UJ) initiated their support action on 22 October 2015 (Lenyaro, 2015).

#### **1.4 #Fees Must Fall Movement at UWC**

The call for a #Nationalshutdown of higher learning institutions in South Africa led to UWC students joining the national FMF protests on 21 October 2015 (Pretorius, 2015). This eventually precipitated in the formation of the so-called UWC FMF initiative. Unlike FMF at the University of the Witwatersrand where South African Student Congress’ (SASCO) politically aligned SRC led the movement, student activists associated with the Pan Africanist Student Movement Association (PASMA), the Economic Freedom Fighters Student Command

(EFFSC), and the Democratic Alliance Student Organisation (DASO), and non-partisan feminist groups led FMF at UWC (Maringira & Gukurume, 2016).

The UWC Student Representative Council (SRC) distanced themselves from the FMF movement and called on students to return to campus and commence with the academic programme. Professor Pretorius, the Rector of the University, confirms that UWC FMF activities diverged from that advocated by the UWC SRC leadership:

Unfortunately, there were groups, who in defiance of the SRC's call, remained on campus and went on the rampage, damaged property and looted shops. [...] As Executive Management we are in full agreement with the SRC that vandalism, looting, damaging and the destruction of property are criminal offences and have no place on our campus and in society. (Pretorius, 2015).

Due to the incumbent UWC SRC's invisibility during the student protests, a cohort of PASMA student leaders replaced them in a scheduled SRC election. Thus, in October 2015, following the announcement by the Minister of Higher Education and Training that the 2016 university fees increment should not exceed 6%, UWC students joined their mainly black counterparts from Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), UCT, and Stellenbosch University (SU) "in a march to Parliament in Cape Town to demand that the Minister declare a 0% fee increase for the 2016" (Ndelu, 2015, p. 15) academic year.

In viewing the relationship between the #UWCFMF and the SRC at that period, it is evident that UWC students did not work in solidarity to achieve the national student demand for a 0% fee increase. The FMF student activists did not adhere to the SRC's call against violence and vandalism on campus and the UWC SRC released a statement on the UWC communication platform to affirm their governance position:

As provided for and mandated by the Higher Education Act of 1997, the SRC is the only structure, which is recognized as the vanguard and representative of the interests of students. This provision bestows legitimacy on the SRC as the only voice of students on any institution of higher learning. (SRC UWC, 2015).

The aforementioned statement from the executive and the SRC showed the extent of the complexity that existed in the student body calling for no fee increases at UWC. In its assessment of the situation at UWC, *MyBroadband* reported on 28 October 2016 that the situation on campus was volatile and it led to the destruction of university property such as the

Residential Services building. It further reported that while the damage caused by FMF movement at South African universities was estimated to be in the region of R800-million in 2015, damage to UWC property was calculated to be approximately R46 million (#FeesMustFall Protestors' Rampage, 2016).

Due to the protest action at UWC, classes and academic activities were suspended, and the university introduced private security personnel to protect personnel, students, and property. In addition to these measures, the South African Police Services (SAPS) took up a permanent presence on campus.

As FMF activists continued with their actions and protests, despite the official closure of the institution, clashes between the activists and the private security personnel and police became violent which resulted in ten UWC FMF activists being arrested on 11 November 2015 (Lenyaro, 2015; Herman, 2015; Quintal, 2015).

It seemed, similar to other universities, that the FMF activism caught the UWC management off guard. Despite the negotiations that took place between the FMF activists and the university management, an alternative plan to respond to the violent tactics used by some student activists was not produced. They relied on the private security companies and the police to calm the situation on campus.

The police and private security personnel created a capricious and tense environment to which the FMF activists responded with more violent protests. Siyabonga Kalipa (2015) wrote in *IOL News* that:

when the Public Order Policing Unit arrived, a tense stand-off ensued before they traded volleys of rocks, stones, stun grenades, teargas canisters and rubber bullets. ... The day's chaos was sparked by an e-mail allegedly sent by the chairman of the university council, Mthunzi Mdwaba, stating that an interdict should be sought to stop the disruptions. (para. 9 & 10).

It is important to note that the perception of governance and leadership frustrations at UWC during the FMF affair was not unique to the institution. Badat (2016) disclosed that, similar to the UWC SRC's stance, FMF activists at other HE institutions also questioned the role of elected SRCs. #FMF activists accused these SRCs of failing to represent the interests of students. O'Halloran (2016) recalled a parallel situation at Rhodes University where "students also questioned the role and legitimacy of the SRC as representatives of the student body" (p.

192) as the SRC was considered “to be part of the institutional structure and culture and not a real or potential driver of change” (p. 192). Ntuli and Teferra (2017) put this into perspective by suggesting that the “internet-age social movements” like #FMF “are horizontal, broad-based and leaderless, negotiations between the DHET and SRCs were ineffective as the movements did not recognise formal leadership as their representatives” (p. 74). This could be the nature of how social movements operate. During the FMF student protests, the student movement leadership was fluid and leaderless, operating outside institutional structures and in fact challenging such formal structures. It was therefore logical for student activists to question the legitimacy of formal student structures like the SRC as responses from university management to students normally took longer than anticipated.

This historic narrative is provided not to express an opinion on the legitimacy of the #UWCFMF protests nor to comment on the university management’s responses to these protests. Instead, the narrative is included to provide a background that locates a study that is interested in understanding learning and learning processes in social movements and learning from social movements. Accordingly, the research question that guides this study is: *How and what has the university community learned from the student action and protests during #FeesMustFall activism and protests at UWC during 2015 and 2016 academic years?*

I now turn to historical student activism at UWC as further background to this research.

### **1.5 UWC Student Activism: From Anti-Apartheid Activism to #FeesMust Fall**

Student activism at UWC has a long history that can be traced back to the 1960s (Franklin, 2003). This activism was not necessarily focussed exclusively on issues affecting students directly. Instead, their activism, during the 1960s and 1970s, was intertwined with the South African liberation struggles (Franklin, 2003). As early as the 1960s, UWC students demanded the Africanisation of the university (Franklin, 2003). Salim Badat (2016) confirms this in *Black Student Politics Higher Education and Apartheid from SASO to SANCO, 1968 -1990*, and documents how UWC-based activists linked university grievances with struggles against the apartheid system. Premesh Lalu and Noelene Murray in their book, *Becoming UWC: Reflections, Pathways and Unmaking Apartheid’s Legacy*, also recollect the role of the SRC, the events that troubled UWC management in the 1970s, and the right that students had claimed to affiliate to emerging national student political movements such as the Black Consciousness (BC) which inspired the South African Student Association (Lalu & Murray, 2012, p. 46). In retrospect, the student protests in 1976 cannot go unmentioned in connecting the history of



student actions and student activism in South Africa. Through protests and mass demonstrations, students defied the apartheid regime's dictation of a black child's future by vehemently refusing to be taught in Afrikaans as a medium of academic instruction. The call by the apartheid government to impose Afrikaans on students as a learning medium could be described as the highlight and turning point in South African education and political history.

The resistance displayed by the youth against the Afrikaans language should also not be taken out of context. The defiance against the apartheid government emanated from the introduction of an inferior education system that was meant for black people through the promulgation of the Bantu Education system into law in the 1950s as Nelson Mandela reminisced in his biography *Long Walk to Freedom* (1994). The call for "Africanisation" in the 1960s (Franklin, 2003) of universities elevated the voice of the so-called historically black institutions (HBI) and put pressure on the apartheid regime as well. This was followed by a combination of events which challenged institutional laws in the 1970s as these intensified and somehow contributed to protests against the "Bantu Education of 1976" according to the book, *Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness* (Pityana et al., 1991, p. 75). Evidently, the protests and mass demonstrations in some black areas in South Africa acted as a sign of defiance against the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction at schools which the apartheid government could not ignore. Politically, BC can be attributed to some degree as an instrumental ideological influence on some of the outcomes that acted as the resistance against the apartheid system.

In *Unfinished Business: South Africa, Apartheid and Truth*, Terry Bell maintains that the philosophy of BC is an inclusive concept as not only is this concept limited to the "black nations" as defined by apartheid, but it also includes those people classified by the system as "coloured" or "Asian". In essence, this was a national movement that was the start of the changes of the future South African education system. Bell (2001) emphasises that Steve Bantu Biko, the founder of Black Consciousness movement in South Africa, promoted a notion of a non-racial, unitary South Africa (p. 77).

Fundamentally, the patterns of historical student activism in South Africa provides a rich political heritage and insight into student engagement culture. Moreover, student protests during the apartheid period, at historically black universities (HBU) was often a way for students to vent their frustration against the state and institutions of higher learning (Cele & Koen, 2003). This study assumes that the 2015-2016 student cohorts at UWC had inherited

such activism and engagement. Keeping this heritage in mind, it was thus not surprising that the UWC students became actively involved in the FMF student protests.

At this point, it is necessary to gain an insight into the profile of UWC students.

### **1.6 UWC Student Profile Post 1994**

During the 1980s, UWC became a respected higher education institution attracting progressive anti-apartheid academics to its staff which resulted in it becoming known as the “intellectual home of the left” (Bozalek, 2004, p. 2). This ensured that UWC was able to initiate a deliberate affirmative action admissions policy, which has encouraged students from the “‘disadvantaged majority’ to study at the institution” (Bozalek, 2004, p. 2).

In 2015, UWC had a population of 20 269 students that studied in its seven faculties (Arts, Community Health Sciences, Dentistry, Economic and Management Sciences, Education, Law and Natural Sciences) (UWC, 2017). Using the apartheid classification categories, students identified as “Coloured, constituted the majority at 46.1% of the student population; African students who constituted 42.6% of the student population followed; Asian and White students were a minority at 4.7 % and 5.5 % respectively; and Other at 1%” (UWC, 2017).

In terms of gender distribution, female students comprised the majority at 59% while the male population stood at 40% and 1% was classified as ‘other’ (UWC, 2017). The 2015 student cohort came from South Africa’s nine provinces, and some were citizens of other Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries, which include Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Mauritius, and Swaziland (UWC, 2017).

The majority of UWC students can be classified as coming from poor communities according to the 2013 Report of the Ministerial Committee for the Review of the Funding of Universities, which was chaired by Cyril Ramaphosa (Department of Higher Education & Training [DHET], 2013). This report further confirmed that many students who enrol at these universities come from poor-quality schooling backgrounds and require extra support to succeed in their studies.

As the majority of UWC students are poor, can it be argued that affordability of tuition was a significant concern they shared in the 1970s which continued to the 2000s? This perspective is supported by the South African public intellectual, Jonathan Jansen (2003) in his argument that as “students at HBUs were uniformly poor, they did struggle to pay their tuition and accommodation fees” (p. 4). The historic legacy of poor HBU students unable to settle their

fees had not changed by 2015. This might explain why the goals of the FMF protests resonated with the concerns of such students.

Was the government aware of the concerns experienced by poor university students? Indeed, legislation that speaks to access and success was promulgated by parliament. Badat (2008) quotes the *Higher Education Act 101 of 1997* to call for “appropriate measures for the redress of past inequalities” (p. 14) to specifically cater for poor students. The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) was specifically introduced to address student funding (Parliamentary Monitoring Group [PMG], 2014). However, Paul Mashatile, the chairperson of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Appropriations, acknowledged that funds managed by NSFAS were inadequate to cover all financially needy and academically successful students at universities (PMG, 2014). His committee hence recommended full state subsidisation of poor students and those from working class backgrounds to be realised progressively (PMG, 2014).

### **1.7 Organisation of this Research Report**

The structure of this mini thesis report consists of five sections. Section 1 looks at the background of the study. This is followed by additional four sections. The four sections comprise of a literature review, the research paradigm and design, findings and analysis of the findings, and conclusion and lessons learned. The literature review section provides an outline of selected literature dealing with social movement learning and provides the theoretical framework to analyse social movement learning. For this reason, it examines social movements within the adult education landscape as well as learning theories associated with social constructivism. The research and design section justifies the research methodology that has been chosen for this study. It explains why this study uses qualitative tools as the most appropriate research inquiry instrument to investigate student activists’ activities during the UWCFMF student protests in 2015 and 2016. The findings and analysis section analyses the collected data. Finally, the last section looks at the lessons learned from this exploratory study. The study is underpinned by the systematic approach and strategy chosen to formulate a balanced and cogent argument. Simultaneously, it uses scholarly tools associated with research inquiry of this nature to analyse data collected from participants of the study.

I now turn my attention to the literature review which guides this study in probing the #UWCFMF social movement.



## SECTION TWO

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### 2.1 Introduction

This section reviews the literature associated with different conceptions of social movement learning which I identified as relevant. Specifically, it examines the notions of social constructivism (Stetsenko & Arievidt, 1997); the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1986); cognitive praxis (Eyeman & Jamison, 1991); and communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger 1998) in order to construct an analytical framework for the analysis of social movement learning.

Before commencing with this task, I will review different definitions of social movements.

#### 2.2 Conceptions of a Social Movement

While there are numerous definitions of what constitute social movements, Aldon Morris and Cedric Herring (1984) acknowledge that “social movement” (p. 2) is a contested concept because each definition reflects the theoretical assumption of the specific theorist.

The literature though suggests that social conflict and collective activism are two characteristics of any social movement. This is reflected in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*'s definition of a social movement as a collective that is “loosely organized but [maintains a] sustained campaign in support of a social goal, typically either the implementation or the prevention of a change in society's structure or values” (Killian et al., 2019, para. 1).

This conception is consistent with Mario Diani's (1992) review of multiple analytical definitions of social movements which led him to conclude that social movements are networks of “informal interactions between a plurality of individuals and/or organisations” which through collective activities develop shared “beliefs and solidarity” and engage in “collective action on conflictual issues” (p. 9). Shirley Walters (2005) concurs that social movements have a “collective identity”; “they exist in an antagonistic relation to an opposed group or interest”, and “they embody a mobilising ethic, moral code or set of beliefs that reflect shared values and purposes” (p. 3).

I now review the relationship between social movement activism and learning. The aforementioned definitions and characteristics associated with social movement are reflected in the #UWCFMF social movement and they provide a better understanding of how social movements identify themselves.

In the South African context, Gibson (2006), provides examples from the TAC to the Anti-Eviction Campaign during the late 1990s marked the emergence of new social movements (p.15). He states that “Black Conscious Movement (BCM) in the 1970s and the United Democratic Front (UDF) in the 1980s were regarded as social movements” (p.18). Robins (2008) also recognises the “TAC” as a social movement that played an important role post-apartheid (p. 101). Rule (2011) distinguishes that “the old social movements refer to those that enraged in the anti-apartheid struggle, whereas the new social movement have emerged post – apartheid era...”(p.217). it is therefore possible to assume that #UWCFMF is a new social movement.

### **2.3 Social Movement Learning**

Numerous scholars have examined social movements (SM) as sites of learning (Eyerman & Jamison, 1991; Finger, 1989; Kilgore, 1999; Spencer, 1995; Walters, 2005). The scholarly literature generally discusses learning as a product of individual engagements with learning tasks (Billett, 2001). However, learning and knowledge construction within social movements are generally understood as the outcome of shared activities, collaboration, and cooperation among movement activists. It is for this reason that the literature theorises social movement learning as a product of collective endeavours (Eyerman & Jamison, 1991; Choudry & Kapoor, 2010; Hall, 2005).

“Social movements are exceedingly rich learning environments” (Walters, 2005, p. 55) and sources of new knowledge (Eyerman & Jamison, 1991). Eyerman and Jamison conclude that “social movements are the social action from where new knowledge [...] originates” (p. 14). Supporting such a perspective, Jenifer Sandlin and Carol Walther (2009), in their analysis of learning within the Simplicity Movement, found that social movement (SM) activists “engage in a continuous, lifelong process” (p. 311) of change. So, social movements “do their utmost to communicate how they interpret a social, political or economic change” (van Stekelenburg et al., 2009, p. 817).

However, movement activists are not the sole beneficiaries of SM learning. Instead, SM learning occurs in two ways: a) learning by activists who are members of the social movement; and b) persons outside of the movement learn from the actions taken by the social movement “or simply by the existence of such a movement” (Hall, 2005, p. 3). The literature confirms that social movement activists generally learn incidentally or in informal contexts and the learning results from their social activism or participation in movement activities (Hall, 2005). For this to happen, active participation or observation by bystanders is essential in the learning process. Fundamentally, it is through participation in movement activities that activists learn specific skills and knowledge that introduce them to ways of thinking analytically and/or strategically (Choudry & Kapoor, 2010). Not only do activists learn from each other, they also co-construct knowledge in the processes of forming coalitions with other movements (Choudry & Kapoor, 2010). Evidently, learning as a group is paramount in this process to achieve the vision of the movement or “shared values and purposes” as purported by Walters (2005, p. 2).

To deepen the understanding of this type of learning, Kilgore (1999) refers to this as collective learning theory. She explains that collective learning is a “process that occurs among two or more diverse people in which taken-as-shared meanings (including a vision of social justice) are constructed and acted upon by the group” (Kilgore, 1999, p. 191). Ostensibly, the #UWCFMF social movement was orchestrated by a collective group of students who represented the interests of the general populace of the student community registered at the institution. As a result, it is safe to assume that collectively through student actions during the student protests some sort of collective learning did take place through “formal” and “informal” (Hall, 2005, p. 3 ) or accidental means.

I now turn to an examination of the learning theories relevant to social movement learning.

#### **2.4 Theorising Social Movement Learning**

I am cognisant that a plethora of identical theories associated with social movements exist and over many years different theories have been developed to study social movement learning. Nonetheless, this section reviews selected learning theories that justify and/or explain how learning is possible within social movements.

### **2.4.1 Social constructivism**

Alanazi (2016) references the work of (Dewey, 1916; Piaget, 1972; Vygotsky, 1972) that central to learning theories associated with constructivism is the notion that new knowledge is actively constructed from prior knowledge and experiences instead of it being transferred from the knower to a passive receiver. Constructivists explain that learners “actively construct their own knowledge” (Woolfolk, 1993, p. 485). Woolfolk (1993) clarifies further and states that learning implies “active mental work” instead of it being the “passive reception of teaching” (p. 485) input. The Swiss psychologist, Jean Piaget (1896-1980), theorised cognitive constructivism as a mental model of development. In this model, the learner constructs ideas individually “through a personal process” (Powell & Kalina, 2009, p. 241). In contrast to theorising knowledge as the outcome of individuals constructing knowledge, social constructivists - such as the Russian psychologist, Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) - theorised knowledge as socially constructed. This means, as stated earlier, knowledge is conceived as a product of collective action.

As social movements operate primarily as groups or collectives, this study prioritises social learning theories such as social constructivism. Social learning is the foundation of social constructivism and therefore, through collective interaction and participation movement, activists become active meaning makers (Powell & Kalina, 2009).

Social constructivism is underpinned by three assumptions. These are:

1. individuals actively participate with others in conceiving and shaping their collective knowledge;
2. knowledge results from ‘shared activities’ and ‘co-operation between the individual and other people’; and
3. language, as a container of the ‘accumulated knowledge of prior generations’ can be used by individuals as a mediating tool to regulate behaviour (Stetsenko & Arievitch 1997, p. 160-161).

### **2.4.2 Zone of Proximal Development**

Renowned scholar, Lev Vygotsky’s (1986) work on the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) acknowledges an individual’s “ability to from independent to assisted problem solving is the best indicator of his dynamic development”. Peter Doolittle (1995) explains the important work

of Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) who introduced the theory of the ZPD which theorises learning as a mediated process. He defines the ZPD as the distance between the actual development as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Gauvain & Cole, 1997; Palincsar, 1998). In providing an insight into the ZPD, Hedegaard (2009) explains that a person can, intellectually, be extended with the help of more competent peers or teachers than he or she could not do alone. Supporting this explanation, Irina Verenikina (2003) adds that “the term proximal (nearby) indicates that the assistance provided goes just slightly beyond the learner’s current competence complementing and building on their existing abilities” (p. 5). The notion of the ZPD suggests that the more capable peer/s in a group assists those in need of further development.

It is for this reason that Kilgore (1999) views the ZPD as a helpful construct upon which to build and theorise an understanding of the internal workings of collective learning. Drawing on Vygotsky’s social constructivism, Verenikina (2003) states that the most important part of an individual’s “psychological development is acquisition of the culture” (p. 6) to which the individual belongs. Culture, in this instance, is understood as the intellectual and physical products of human labour. This means that all artefacts a social group manufactures and/or creates, including language, physical and theoretical structures, and systems become part of the culture of the group. It is by drawing on and using such artefacts that the culture of a collective influences development.

In essence, the theory of social constructivism supports and recognises that people do learn from each other using appropriate social and cultural symbols with others in their environment. (Doolittle, 1997).

This study explores how cultural artefacts were used in the #UWCFMF student movement for the activists’ learning.

### **2.4.3 Communities of Practice**

Locating themselves within the social constructivist learning paradigm, Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) introduced the notion of “communities of practices” to signal that members of a group that share a common interest do create knowledge collaboratively. These scholars used

the idea of communities of practices, initially, to describe the participation and practices of occupational apprentices and theorised that by sharing information and experiences, group members learn from each other. Using the notion “Legitimate Peripheral Participation” (LPP) as a heuristic device, Lave and Wenger (Fuller et al., 2005, p. 51) theorised learning within the community of practice. Conceiving learning as a contextual social phenomenon, LPP describes the cyclical process of newcomers becoming experienced members within a community who on their part become old-timers for all newcomers. This theorisation mirrors Vygotsky’s (1978) Zone of Proximal Development.

Theorising learning using a community of practice as a lens to explain social movement learning is appropriate as a community of practice can be conceived as “an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavour. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations - in short practices emerge in the course of this mutual endeavour” (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992, p. 464). This perspective is supported by Fuller et al. (2005) drawing on Lave and Wenger (1991) who maintained that “a community of practice is a set of relations among persons, activity and world, over time and in relation to other tangential and overlapping communities of practice” (p. 52).

Universally, social movement can be regarded as the epitome of communities that are able to evolve into learning sites, where knowledge is created by members of the movement working together to attain a goal for a common good that is meaningful. Wenger (1997) concurs that:

communities of practice are the prime context in which we can work out common sense through mutual agreement. Therefore, the concept of practice highlights the social and negotiated character of both the explicit and the tacit use of our lives. (p. 47).

Furthermore, Wenger’s (1997) theory of communities of practice supports the social construction of knowledge theorising that learning occurs through the relations of mutual engagement by which people can do whatever they do within a community of practice (p. 73). In fact, Wenger (2000) emphasises that communities of practice are necessary as learning is an interplay between social competence and personal experience as well as a two-way relationship between people and the social learning systems in which people participate.



Concurring with the insight offered by Wenger (2000), Fuller et al. (2005) stress that learner identity is rooted in the context in which the individual is co-participating. These theories highlight learning as an integral dimension of social practice; they maintain that “participation in social practice will inevitably involve learning” (Fuller et al., 2005, p. 51). Thus, “the action of participating in social practice can be read as a way of belonging to a community” (Fuller et al., 2005, p. 5).

This study comments on the #UWCFMF movement and it being a community of practice. It can be debated that a modern university should not solely be looked at as the knowledge production community of academic endeavours. Instead, it should also be viewed as a multifaceted microcosm of society where a learning community surfaces where learning takes place in various forms outside the formal learning spaces. For instance, a university is also a place where informal learning flourishes. The #UWCFMF characteristics portrayed itself as not being a community of practice, but it can be purported as having displayed traits of being a learning community for student activists and followers of the movement.

Bielaczyc, and Collins (1999) introduced community learning theory, and used it as a lens within HEI, as a learning community, which advances individual and collective knowledge. The theory is based on the premise that an institution promotes a culture of learning.

This study draws on assumptions from the learning theory discussed to discern whether the #UWCFMF community of practice formed a learning community during the student protests in 2015 and 2016.

This brings the study to how learning takes place within a social movement.

#### **2.4.4 Praxis of social movements**

Pedagogically, learning is a fluid and dynamic science which is highly contested. Consequently, social movements are learning communities in their own right. When learning takes place it informs the perspectives, actions, and identities of those actively involved in carrying out the vision of the movement. It is fundamental to reiterate that learning might take place through formal or informal ways, as suggested above. Eyerman and Jamison (1991) as well as Hall and Clover (2005) explain this point by illustrating that the cognitive praxis of

social movements is not just social drama, instead it is the social action from where new knowledge originates. This is emphasised in Jamison's (2006) elucidation that cognitive praxis "characterizes the knowledge-making activity that takes place in social movements" (p. 47). Thus, to realise this, one can assume that social movements contribute to the formation of science and ideology – as well as everyday knowledge – to develop new perspectives (Eyerman & Jamison, 1991).

The process of forming a social movement is a process of establishing an identity for the movement which in and of itself is a cognitive one (Holford, 1991). Theoretically, to ascertain an identity of a social movement like the #UWCFMF social movement is not an easy task.

#### **2.4.5 Collective learning**

As we have already mentioned, Deborah Kilgore (1999) is a proponent of collective learning. Justifying her theory of collective learning, Kilgore (1999) highlights some limitations of "individualized learning theories" (p. 191). Firstly, she argues that such theories are inadequate in their capacity to explain group learning. Instead, these individualised learning theories fail to theorise a social movement or group as a learning entity that constructs knowledge. Furthermore, these theories fail to explain "the centrality of the group's vision of social justice that drive it to act ... in the larger social, economic and political field of meaning making" (Kilgore, 1999, p. 191).

To theorise collective learning, it is imperative to conceive the "group itself as a learner" (Kilgore 1999, p. 196). Drawing on sociocultural learning theory and social movement theory Kilgore (Kilgore, 1999) proposes that collective learning "involves both individual and group components" (p. 196) where individual development is concerned with the development of individual identity and agency which is partially determined by collective action and consciousness. Collective learning, on its part, is primarily about the "construction of collective identity", which is a process of developing collective understanding, which provides the group with a sense of "continuity and permanence" (Kilgore, 1999, p. 198). Kilgore (1999) continues and introduces the notion of a "collective ZPD" that should be viewed as an expanded ZPD. She explains that:

An expanded ZPD applies to any situation which individuals are engaged together in learning a new concept or practice. ZPD is an attribute of interaction among participants



jointly engaged in learning activity. ... Each participant has different socioculturally developed understandings to contribute to the collective learning process. Thus, the potential for collective development is only limited when the diversity of individuals and interaction with other groups is limited'. (Kilgore, 1999, p. 198).

Consistent with the notion of collective learning, Alberto Melucci (1980) refers to social movements as a “collective behaviour” (p. 200) which he interprets as a unified type of behaviour, such as “changes in fashion, from crowd behaviour to revolutions” (p. 200). As a justification for individuals participating in social movements, Holford (1995) drawing on collective behaviour theory, maintains that social movement activism allows individuals to express their grievances and values by them responding to the strain caused by rapid change.

The #UWCFMF student protests presented numerous learning opportunities for student activists, as individuals and as a collective and created a platform for knowledge to be created in the midst of turbulent times during the 2015 and 2016 student protests.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

This section problematised the notion social movement learning by reviewing different theories associated with group and collective learning.

In the following section, I explain and discuss the methodology utilised in this investigation.

## SECTION THREE

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

#### 3.1 Research Methodology and Design

Thomas (2010) confirms that all research is grounded in some “philosophical assumption about what constitutes ‘valid’ research and which method(s) is/are appropriate for the development of knowledge in a given study” (p. 292).

This is a qualitative investigation. Qualitative research assumes that people are the locus of knowledge construction. It not only “seeks to elicit what is important to individuals” and how they interpret the “environment in which they work” (Bryman, 2012, p. 12), but it also enables the researcher to develop a “deep understanding of how people perceive their social realities and in consequence, how they act within the social world” (Bryman, 2012, p. 41).

Adopting a qualitative approach to this study is appropriate as the inquiry aims to investigate student activism in “their natural settings” and aims to “make sense of” or “interpret phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3).

Indeed, this investigation seeks to understand, from the perspective of student activists and followers in the #UWCFMF movement, how and what has been learned in the movement by activists and by the university community as a result of student activism during the 2015-16 #UWCFeesMustFall protest.

Ontologically, this study is located within the constructivist research paradigm. Constructivism is a theory of knowledge that maintains that “knowledge” is socially constructed instead of it being discovered (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 197). Consequently, Denzin and Lincoln emphasise that human beings “invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience and [they] continually test and modify these constructions in the light of new experience” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 197). Bryman (2012) concurs that constructivism’s ontological position stresses that “social actors are continually accomplishing social phenomena and their meanings” (p. 33).

The same can be said about the #UWCFMF social movement that student activists constructed their own knowledge by actively participating in the student protests, to “[accomplish] social phenomena and their meanings” (Bryman, 2012, p. 33). This perspective is contrary to the

positivist research paradigm that perceives knowledge as independent of human interpretation, but rather “highly determined by their situation so that there is little effect of human agency and little free choice” (Donaldson, 1997, p. 77).

The constructivist paradigm is appropriate, in this instance, as student activists conceptualised the #UWCFMF movement within the context of UWC, according to sense-making of their constructed world. Ideologically, the #FMF protests had symbolic, political, and ideological meanings for the student activists at UWC and members of the society that supported them.

### **3.2 Methods of Collecting Data**

This study used semi-structured interviews to gather data for this investigation. Seven (7) student activists were interviewed in this inquiry. These interviewees were identified by purposive sampling. This technique allows a researcher to rely on his/her judgment to select members of a population to participate in a study. The purposive sampling method is appropriate to this inquiry as I am familiar with those who participated in the Emerging Leaders Programme (ELP) and Advanced Leaders Programme (ALP) programmes offered at UWC as I was a facilitator in the programmes mentioned. From this vantage point, I was familiar with students from these cohorts who participated as activists in the #UWCFMF movement as participation in this movement was a criterion to be interviewed.

As indicated earlier, the interviews were semi-structured. The interviews were guided by the themes:

1. *The role FMF student activists played during student protests in 2015 and 2016.*
2. *The learnings student activists gained during FMF student protests.*
3. *The manner in which the UWC management addressed the FMF student protests in 2015 and 2016.*
4. *The government’s role during FMF student protests in 2015 and 2016.*

#### **3.2.1 Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews allow participants to “tell their own story, as they see it, feel it, and experience it” (Corbin & Morse, 2003, p. 339). This method is “flexible in process, allow[s] interviewees’ own perspectives to be explored and [is] used to keep more an open mind about

the contours of what the interviewer needs to know' (Bryman, 2012, p. 12). This is particularly important for this study to understand the lived experiences of the students during #UWCFMF student protests.

As part of the research methodology that has been chosen for this study, the qualitative research methodology was most suitable to conduct informal interviews with the participants that were at UWC during #FMF student protests in 2015 and 2016. In total the seven participants that were interviewed for this study were at some point of their studies based at UWC and were part of the selected students who participated in the student leadership development co-curriculum programme at LSR. The intention was to interview 10 students who would be contacted through their UWC email accounts. However, I could only interview seven students who were willing to participate in this study.

Some of the limitations that were encountered during the interview sessions were: 3 participants who originally agreed to participate in the study were unable to commit to do the interviews as originally planned. The reasons for this were that one prospective participant was no longer at UWC and was working in Durban; the second prospective participant was unable to participate in an interview due to his busy schedule; and the final prospective interviewee was travelling regularly between Cape Town and Johannesburg and could not make time for the interview.

Even though I planned to interview five randomly selected students who were merely observers and not associated with LSR, I was unable to locate such individuals due to the delay in this study. By the time ethical clearance was given most LSR students who were at UWC during the 2015/2016 period had left the university. The purpose of these interviews was to elicit their perspectives on what they had learned from the #UWCFMF protests at UWC.

After consultation with the participants, I agreed on an interview schedule which accommodated the participants' availability. Please see the written schedule labelled as Appendix 2. The questions prepared for the participants were premised on suggested themes that participants could answer, and I could seek clarity for deeper understanding.

### 3.2.2 Data analysis

According to Robert Bogdan and Steven J. Taylor (1975), data analysis is a process that entails an effort to formally identify themes and to construct hypotheses as they are proposed by data and an attempt to demonstrate support for those themes and hypotheses. I processed and transcribed the data collected from a recording device and written notes. Thereafter, I used predetermined themes and themes identified within the scholarly literature to act as a framework to gain an understanding of the data. In addition, the data itself suggested some more themes.

#### Profile of the participants of the study

Participants of this study were purposively selected from the Leadership and Social Responsibility (LSR) Office and the participants voluntarily agreed to participate in this research study. The participants were former Emerging Leaders Programme (ELP) and Advanced Leaders Programme (ALP) students. At the time the interviews were conducted Participant 1 was a final year Advanced Diploma in Public Administration student from the Economic Sciences Management (EMS) Faculty. Participant 2 was a 3rd year Computer Science student and Participant 3 was a PhD candidate within the Science Faculty. Participant 4 was an LLB final year candidate in the Law Faculty. Participant 5 was an MPhil candidate in the Law Faculty and Participant 6 completed her Masters in the Arts Faculty. Participant 7 was a master's candidate within the EMS Faculty and was working at SU Tygerberg Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences (FMHS).

#### Research question

The research question that guides this study is: *How and what has the university community learned from the student action and protests during #FeesMustFall activism and protests at UWC during 2015 and 2016 academic years?*

#### Suggested themes:

1. *The role FMF student activists played during student protests in 2015 and 2016.*
2. *The learnings student activists gained during FMF student protests.*

3. *The manner in which the UWC management addressed the FMF student protests in 2015 and 2016.*

4. *The government's role during FMF student protests in 2015 and 2016.*

The data I analysed for this study were collected from the participants who volunteered to participate in the interviews of this study. The lived experiences and stories of the participants during the FMF movement were vital for analysis in this study.

### **Questions**

1. During the #FeesMustFall protests, what were your learning highlights as a student at UWC?
2. What were the challenges confronted by students during #FeesMustFall protests in 2015 and 2016?
3. What is your perspective on how the university should have responded to #FeesMustFall student protests in 2015 and 2016?
4. How would you describe the role the government played during the #FeesMustFall protests in 2015 and 2016?

The following themes were identified from collected data:

1. Learning through activism
2. Militarisation of the campus
3. Communication and consultation
4. The use of technology during the #UWCFMF student protests
5. The use of artefacts: songs, graffiti, and the construction of the movement's culture
6. Disruption of the academic programme
7. Sexual harassment, rape accusations, and mental health issues
8. The call against the outsourcing of the workers at UWC
9. Role of the government

### 3.2.3 Ethical considerations

I followed the University of the Western Cape's Policy on Research Ethics that promotes the adherence of the Code of Conduct of Research at UWC (UWC Policy on Research Ethics, n.d., p. 10). An ethics clearance certificate was provided by the Ethics Committee which granted me the right to proceed with collecting data from participants from UWC. The participation in this study was voluntary and by consent. The consent letter was read to the participant to give his/her informed consent, and the purpose of the research was explained to him/her. It was explained that he/she could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences and that I would ensure that the identities of the participants would remain confidential throughout the study and in subsequent reporting on the study. To ensure confidentiality, interviewees were given a pseudonym. These steps ensured that I adhered to the key ethical principles as proposed by David Silverman (2010). In addition, the research proposal was submitted to the UWC Ethics Committee who confirmed that the research methods and approach met the ethical requirements for a social research project like this study.

I personally took notes as a backup of the interviews. All collected data was strictly guarded in my private Gmail email account that is secure and safe. I personally loaded the acquired data from participants, and only I had the password and access to the account. In addition, as a backup, the data was saved on a USB which uses my fingerprint as a password. The notes were kept in my office, which has a secure and locked system at SU where I am currently employed.



## SECTION FOUR

### Findings and Analysis of Findings

#### 4.1 Introduction

In this this section, I analyse the data I collected from participants of the #UWCFeesMustFall protests of 2015-2016 who were social movement activists. These participants were all registered UWC students during this period and were members of the Leadership and Social Responsibility (LSR) Office attached to the Centre for Student Support Services (CSSS). The analysis focuses on how and what the UWC activists and the broader university community learnt from student activism during the 2015-2016 #UWCFeesMustFall student protests.

Popular adult education conceives of learning as occurring through various means, and that such learning is often associated with adults' lived experiences during a process of co-creating knowledge in their contextual location. Experiential learning occurs in multiple contexts which include formal, non-formal, informal, and incidental contexts (Fenwick, 2001). In the case of the #UWCFMF student protests, it can be assumed that experiential learning ensued while activists were involved in pursuing their objectives. This section thus analyses how and what activists and the broader university community learnt from student activism during the 2015-2016 #UWCFeesMustFall student protests.

Some of the conceptual themes for analysis arose from the interviews. I start with providing a profile of the activists within the #UWCFMF movement.

#### 4.2 Contextual Information

The participants involved in the #UWCFeesMustFall social movement were familiar with the struggles of numerous students on campus as some of the participants experienced the same socio-economic backgrounds as many of the students. Access and affordability to HE are issues of concern for students and others wanting to engage in post school studies, and it was these issues that galvanised the students to constitute themselves as the #UWCFMF movement. The issue of the affordability of tuition became solidified at the top of student demands and was documented in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) UWC Fees Must Fall (UWC Fees



Must Fall Responses, 2015) between the #UWCFeesMustFall movement and the university management. The following response of a participant supported this perspective:

Fees were high and students could not afford [it]. Fees were expensive (Participant 2, September 06, 2019).

Another participant explained the context at UWC at the time and why the student activists went about their actions, and confirmed that:

A lot of students could not pay their fees because of financial problems (Participant 5, September 27, 2019).

She continued and drew a link between limited financial resources and the threat of “being excluded”.

The fact that high tuition fees are barriers for working class students is not novel as another participant pointed out that:

The ruling party included in its internal discussion documents a call for free higher education (Participant 3, September 06, 2019).

She continued and explained:

To me education is key. It must be accessible to all. Some years back, the government made a political commitment whether through a political statement or manifesto that higher education must be free (Participant 3, September 06, 2019).

Thus, the students’ actions were directed at intensifying pressure on the government to concede to their demands.

The student activists had their own understanding of what they thought the role of UWC management, and the government should be when it came to the issue of access to higher education. Based on this understanding, a call was made by the student activists on campus to garner support for their cause. Visuals and digital posters were created, and these different approaches and methods gives an idea of the work that student activists engaged in to bring attention to their demands. For example, the activists created various artefacts that focused on the issue of fees as well as the purpose of the protests to keep the student community informed. This included a discussion on a digital poster calling for a “Free Education Discussions” (see Appendix 3).

However, the student activists understood that they still had to put pressure on the government as indicated by a participant:

The students said education must be accessible. But there must be a commitment [from the government] to say by when... (Participant 3, September 06, 2019).

The sentiments expressed here are crucial, because the then President of the Republic of South Africa, Jacob Zuma, in an interview during the period of the #FMF student protests, conceded that free education is indeed possible (Wild & Mbatha, 2015).

The demand for free education was not limited to UWC and this call was echoed by students from the working and middle classes of several South African tertiary educational institutions. The following participant stated:

Fees Must Fall was a national call. It was not only for a specific university (Participant 1, September 06, 2019).

As a result of the historical racial classification of South African higher education, one tends to find mostly black students at historically black institutions (HBIs) and mainly white students at historically white institutions (HWIs). The demographics of students registered at UWC, however, makes it unique in comparison to other universities in the Western Cape. It can be said that the diversity of the UWC student population mirrors South African society; that is, the student population is mostly the poor, working or middle-class students that were historically classified as blacks and coloureds. In 1998, Thabo Mbeki, the then Deputy President of South Africa, suggested that South Africa is a country of two worlds. One of these worlds, mainly white middle-class, is prosperous and globally integrated while the other, largely black and poor, lives in grossly underdeveloped conditions (Tapscott et al., 2014). Therefore, when looking at the majority of UWC students through the lens of economic status, the economic nuances of the latter world seem probable for some of UWC's students. Judging by the students' call for fees to fall in 2015 and 2016, it then appears that such unequal socio-economic conditions still prevailed.

Similarly, as in the past when student activists from UWC were unified by their political ideology struggles under apartheid, student unity, regardless of class, race, or gender biases, was evident at UWC during the 2015-2016 protests. Lalu and Murray (2012) state that UWC defied racial classification and government policy and, in fact, became the first South African

university to officially open its doors to all racial groups. Thus, student unity and activism were familiar territory for a HBI like UWC during the 2015 and 2016 protests.

It is evident that the #UWCFMF activists were conscious of the UWC legacy of activism and student struggles. A participant reminisced about the history of student activism at UWC during the late 1990s. He compared his previous experience at the institution to the current 2015-2016 evolving student activism led by student activists. He revealed:

I was here before in 1999, then, we never burnt the library when we were protesting, because those things belong to us, not the management (Participant 1, September 06, 2019).

This view is consistent with the historical context of student activism at UWC before the democratic dispensation. Cele and Khoen (2003) described the nature of student protests in black universities under apartheid as heterogeneous as students vented their frustration against the state and institutions of higher learning.

Under the post-democratic dispensation, student needs directed to higher education and government have changed, politically. During apartheid political emancipation was paramount. In the democratic dispensation, the Constitution of South Africa guarantees human rights for its citizens. Stemming from this is the issue of access to education which the government sees as key to establishing an equitable society. This was also envisioned in the Freedom Charter document in the mid-1950s. However, the economic material conditions of apartheid have remained for many previously disadvantaged people and access to higher education has fuelled the need for a better life. Feasibly, for some UWC students, education is the only resource to address and redress the socio-economic imbalances caused by apartheid. The following participant stated:

I know the government failed the students because free education is one of its promises. For example, the Freedom Charter says the doors of learning will be opened for all (Participant 1, September 06, 2019).

Participant 1's comprehension of the role government should play in addressing the protestors' call for access to higher education is clear. From the participant's perspective it seemed that the Freedom Charter was abandoned by the ruling party once it took over political power from the Nationalist Party (NP) in 1994 after winning the first democratic elections in South Africa. Could this mean the ANC government's developmental policies or a lack thereof, might have

contributed to the anger from protesters? Adam et al. (1997) in their book, *Comrades in Business: Post-Liberation Politics in South Africa* put forward the following:

The ANC's intentions were noble; from the clauses of the Freedom Charter to the policy goals of the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) and the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). Foremost among these were the eradication of poverty, inequality and the creation of a government the people which would epitomise austerity and sacrifice and rid the country of exploitation, greed and corruption. (p. 160).

However, Adam et al. (1997) acknowledge that the government abandoned the pro-poor RDP policy in 1996 for a neo-liberal market policy known as the Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) in order to pacify the capitalist system. Therefore, Participant 1 made the point about the government's deviation from the Freedom Charter. Since the abandoning of the RDP policy the government adopted a pro-business GEAR policy which meant sacrifices and austerity which resulted in cutting needed investment in higher education.

This background provides the context and links it to the student profile at UWC during the #UWCFMF student protests in 2015 and 2016.

### **4.3 Findings and Analysis of Findings**

#### **Learning through activism**

While the abolition or a reduction in tuition fees was the primary motivation behind the #FMF formation, student activists soon learnt that contextual factors affected their goals. Interacting with different groups of students, the #UWCFMF activists learnt they needed to educate as well as consult with foreign students and other interested parties about why the fees must fall campaign was necessary. A participant remarked:

We became aware that international and students from the African continent, who were integral to the UWC student community, did not understand why the #UWCFMF activism must negatively impact their studies. So, in principle, it was necessary to consult all persons involved such as the government and concerned students and provide them with the reasons for the protest campaign (Participant 3, September 06, 2019).

The activists further learnt that they had limited power when it came to controlling and managing what happened in the name of #UWCFMF. Some activists perceived the extra-legal activities that occurred during the protest period as a challenge to the legitimacy of the movement. A participant expressed his frustration:

The challenges I confronted at that time were related to security. I had a problem with the acts of vandalism. [...] There was no security [guards], and no food, because we chased the security. There were also issues of rape... (Participant 1, September 06, 2019).

While Participant 1 viewed the delinquent behaviour as internal in the movement, and in moral-ethical terms, another participant activist questioned the university's leadership and management approach during the crisis:

Leadership doesn't really respond to students unless chaos is involved. We were angry, as students, because leadership did not want to come and address us, instead they would send some people. It was not a good experience to be labelled as troublemakers. We were shot at. We were harassed by police. I understand we were looting (Participant 2, September 06, 2019).

As the activists frequently had to interact with the university's leadership, they became aware that different contexts required different management styles. First, they recognised that the nature and context of the movement's activities and action did present the institutional management with significant challenges. A participant pointed out:

The student protests also exposed the leadership style and probably challenges of the university management (Participant 2, September 06, 2019).

This participant continued and explained herself:

In order to understand this matter, we need to pose a question whether the university management was equipped or had the necessary skills to deal with the FMF student protests (Participant 2, September 06, 2019).

The above issue is raised not to consider the validity of the statement but to indicate that the activists were exposed to different contexts which they had to interpret and name. Drawing on their experiences they were able to socially construct knowledge in unfamiliar contexts. The suggestion that #UWCFMF activists were able to construct knowledge in the context of

activism is evident in the following participant's response on how the university's management should have approached the conflict between themselves and the activists:

We are learned people. There was a need for more engagement between government, university management, and students (Participant 3, September 06, 2019).

This perspective suggests that some activists expected some learning to take place through a more consultative approach in resolving the conflicts during the protests.

The aforementioned contexts put the university management, government, and students at odds with each other as the study participants learned during the #UWCFMF student protests. In hindsight, these challenges, brought the plight of students in institutions of higher learning into the spotlight. During this period, there were various insights, skills and knowledge participants learned as a result of their activism and protests at UWC. For the first time, since the post-democratic dispensation, like their peers in the #FMF student movement, students at UWC organised themselves as a collective under the #UWCFMF movement to highlight their learning experiences at the institution.

The students' call to access higher education and free tuition bordered on a social justice quest for a more equitable society. This call is consistent with the spirit and keeping of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, which speaks to redressing the inequality of the past. Carmelita Naicker (2016) acknowledges the promotion of the right to further education as one of the fundamental rights which the state through reasonable measures must make progressively available and accessible. However, contrary to the spirit and letter of the Constitution, higher education became more expensive for students and their families. This was chief among the events that led to the call for free education as pointed out by the following participant:

[The] 10% ... annual tuition increase' proposal on the table gave rise to the student protests in 2015 and 2016 (Participant 3, September 06, 2019).

The student protests happened at the time government was having parliamentary debates about funding of some of its ailing State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs). Government spending priorities were questioned by students. A participant stated:



South Africa has been bailing out SAA, and SABC with a lot of billions [of Rands]. Instead, they should have invested that money in education (Participant 1, September 06, 2019).

The remark of Participant 1 reveals scrutiny of government spending from the treasury budget on the SOEs as opposed to investing in social good like education especially as the situation was aggravated by a decrease of investing in higher education. Jonathan Jansen (2017), a South African public intellectual, acknowledged that a decline of funding in higher education institutions in South Africa was the “primary driver of the crisis in South African universities” (p. 28) during the #FMF student protests. This view is supported by data from PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) South Africa’s (2015) report which confirmed the decline in funding of higher education. The PwC report reveals that “state contributions to university education declined from 49% at the beginning of the century to 40% by 2012, while the burden on students increased from 24% to 31% during the same period” (para., 2). This decline in financial support would have been felt particularly by students coming from poor households. Thus, at an institution such as UWC, students’ participation in the #UWCFMF protests may have been influenced by the declining financial support. A response from a participant showed cognisance of the fundamental value of education as he believed that there are also benefits for the state overall when it invests in education:

Education takes the burden away from the government (Participant 1, September 06, 2019).

Some scholars have taken a critical view of the debates about #FMF. While they recognised that the demand for free education was justified and well intentioned, they maintained that:

arguments against free higher education often cite its regressivity, in that it benefits the middle and upper-middle socio economic classes to which the great majority of students belong at the expense of the low-income taxpayers whose children are not well represented in higher education, as a reason to charge tuition fees and implement means-tested grant and loans programmes. (Marcucci & Johnstone 2007, p. 37).

Does the latter argument find relevance in the context of South Africa? When one looks at the call for free higher education in 2015 and 2016 from the student activists, the South African context is unique. One needs to consider the South African historical context of the legacy of oppressive apartheid laws in order to appreciate the call for free higher education in South

Africa was perhaps legitimate to the student activists as this call speaks to the redress of historical imbalances caused by segregation laws in higher education from which black people were largely excluded. Similarly, this call should not be separated from the earlier political demands that were made mainly by black people as early as the 1950s in defiance of the Bantu Education system that subverted black people's access to quality education (Mandela, 1994).

The students' understanding of their families' financial position seem to validate the protests of 2015 and 2016. A participant was mindful of this when he stated:

What is the moral justification to the parents of the students to even come and propose a tuition fees increase by 10%? (Participant 3, September 06, 2019).

Activists learnt through their participation in the activities of the movement and in the way the educational institution responded to their activism. One of these ways was the militarisation of the university.

### **Militarisation of the campus**

The university management responded in various ways to the protests at UWC. One that stood out for most of the participants was the use of private security and the police which resulted in the militarisation of the institution. Activists believed that the justification for this originated from the Minister of Higher Education and Training when he gave universities the mandate to use the police force and private security on campus to stop the protests. A participant cognisant with the *Higher Education Act 101* (1997) which promotes the autonomy of universities averred:

The Minister of Education said at that time that force can be used to control the situation (Participant 4, September 27, 2019).

For this activist, the Minister's statement created the impression that the Minister had the capacity to influence university policies politically. The compliance of the University's management with his recommendation caused another participant to perceive the university's response to the protests as militarisation of the campus:

They [university management] militarised the university and instead of listening to students they beefed up security (Participant 1, September 06, 2019).



This viewpoint indicates that some activists preferred “listening to the students” as a way of engagement with the university management as opposed to the police and security presence on campus at that time.

The police presence on campus exacerbated the learning environment as students responded violently to the militarisation of the campus. The volatility of the situation may have encouraged the heavy handed and violent tactical reaction by both the police and security officers deployed on campus. A participant recollected:

It was not a good experience, because we were labelled as troublemakers. We were shot at; we were harassed by police. I understand we were looting (Participant 2, September 06, 2019).

The acknowledgement by Participant 2 when saying, “I understand we were looting” is indicative that some students were also aware their actions were unlawful. Another participant remarked that some students’ actions may have contributed to the worsening situation:

Some students took advantage of the situation and people stole property. Again, security was a big concern (Participant 3, September 06, 2019).

Many students were adversely affected by the violence of the protesting students. A participant expressed her frustration with the violent interaction between the private security and the FMF activists:

Those of us who were not part of Fees Must Fall, [experienced the protest as] ... chaotic. There were fights that came from nowhere, then there was teargas from police (Participant 5, September 27, 2019).

The events were widely publicised in the mainstream media and on social media platforms. Both activists and non-activists acted as social journalists for social media. Activists understood that the nature of the protests, the militarised response, the students’ reactions, and the media around the action on campus presented the university with a difficult situation on how to manage student activism. Nonetheless, the police presence on campus was found to be unacceptable:

There was unjustifiable police force (Participant 4, September 27, 2019).

Here the participant is referring to the South African Police Services (SAPS). The reference to the “police force” carries substantive weight because in a constitutional democracy like South

Africa, one expects the police to use peaceful means when managing protests. The police were deviating from this and were using means reminiscent of the brutal force used to control protests such as the peaceful protests against “Bantu Education” in 1976 (Pityana et al., 1991) under the undemocratic and oppressive apartheid government.

This study found that the interaction between the activists and the “security” was a fertile context for activist learning. Reflecting on how their expectations of the university management’s response to the protests, activists became critical of some actions. From their perspective the university’s response to student protesters’ actions was reactionary, specifically, its deployment of the police on campus. A participant shared the following of the presence of police on campus:

The protests brought about a lot of police actually and with the police being on campus... (pauses and sighs) I felt like there was no control; police action was radical, violent, and unfair. When speaking about control, innocent students were also taken in police vans and locked up and assaulted (Participant 7, October 25, 2019).

It is evident that activists did not welcome the decision to bring the police and private security companies to campus. This participant perceived police action as “radical, violent, and unfair”. This expression suggests that the police used a heavy-handed approach against the protestors and bystanders. Moreover, the use of a private security company associated with the apartheid regime could have ignited violent student protests on campus. The participant underlined this notion by adding:

Even prior to the police, the unrest brought an apartheid security company [to campus] (Participant 7, October 25, 2019).

The choice of a security company associated with apartheid was not welcomed by the student protesters and created doubt about the association of the university with it as this participant revealed:

That also brought another challenge of who the university is working with (Participant 7, October 25, 2019).

Whether the security company was associated with the apartheid regime was not the key issue. The fact that it was deployed on campus to manage the protests became the big challenge for students. Student activists uploaded a picture (see Appendix 4) on social media platforms such

as the UWC Fees Will Fall Facebook page on October 31, 2015. The picture showed the name of the security company - Vetus Schola Strike Team – and it was explained on the social media platform that “Vetus means old....Schola means school....old school apartheid tactics against us”. This revealed that the activists were knowledgeable about the history associated with the security company chosen to work at UWC. The activists provided an opportunity for other students and campus community to learn about Vetus Schola’s association with the apartheid regime.

Participant 7 described his experience of the brutal treatment meted out by the police:

The police would come with stun grenades and rubber bullets. Students would use the tables to protect themselves and they would also use the tables and light the fire and would use this as a barrier. The fire was not to burn things but was for protection (Participant 7, October 25, 2019).

Thus, to defend themselves against the police brutality, the students came up with their own tactics. It is perhaps correct to imagine that student tactics were carefully strategized and executed.

Similar occurrences of police conflict with student protestors were happening simultaneously at other institutions of higher learning across the country. Allais (2017) alludes to the heavy police and security presence on campuses and the ongoing violent clashes between the parties. Parallel experiences could be drawn between #UWCFMF and #FMF student protests. Naicker (2016) also indicated to the state’s conduct, in particular the militarisation of campuses when she wrote, “The militarization of campuses and the use of tear gas, stun grenades, and water cannons against students” (p. 59). This approach may have blurred the rules of engagement and may be perceived as the act that diminished constructive student engagement and resulted in the failure of “intellectual tolerance” that Adam, Van Zyl Slabbert and Moodley (1997) opine about.

Communication challenges were another impediment student activists learned about during the protests. The study now looks at the communication and consultation between university management and #UWCFMF movement.

## Communication and consultation

Both the university management and the activists needed to communicate with their constituencies and with each other. The #UWCFMF activists were critical of the way the university management interacted and communicated with the student community throughout the protests. From the perspective of the activists, the engagement with students was limited on the side of the university's management which consequently led to higher levels of tension. Participants expressed these views:

Constant engagement with the students could have eased the tension between students and management (Participant 7, October 25, 2019).

One of the things that students were complaining about was the lack of communication from the heads of the university (Participant 5, September 27, 2019).

According to the participant continuous engagement could have hopefully resolved some of the challenges faced during the protests.

Several issues were raised by activists during the #UWCFMF protests. The call for the eradication of fees meant university finances would be affected by the student demands. Activists were particularly interested to know and contribute to the discussion about the university budget. A participant felt that budgetary processes should form part of the consultation between the students and management as can be seen from this comment:

Students should be involved in the budgetary processes of the university (Participant 3, September 06, 2019).

This suggestion would have afforded students an opportunity to learn more about university budgetary processes which include raising funds through student fees, government funding, donor funding and other forms of funding at the institution. Students might have re-evaluated their demands and opt for peaceful protests. Some students wanted genuine engagement between students and the university management as advocated for by the following participant:

[There should be] more redefining, discourse, and consultation (Participant 3, September 06, 2019).

According to Luescher et al. (2016), "The role of leadership both on the side of students (and supportive staff) as well as the university management seems crucial in both escalating and containing the protests" (p. 54). Participants felt that the lack of communication between the

students and the university management contributed to the volatility of the protests but was not only the fault of management:

Students struggled to communicate their needs in a way that the university management would digest [understand] it. There was disconnect between the university management and the students and this was difficult even though they [management] saw the issues, but the management perceived students as angry students (Participant 6, October 09, 2019).

This example could explain why there was a perception of a lack of communication between student activists and management. Participant 6 believed that the activists failed to communicate effectively thus resulting in the university management misunderstanding their demands. Another participant complained:

The university took its own time in communicating (Participant 4, September 27, 2019).

Concurring with this perspective another participant stated:

They [the university] should have responded to the demands of the students earlier or in a manner that was satisfying to the students (Participant 5, September 27, 2019).

When analysing the participants' responses, it seems that activists learned that both parties had communication challenges during the protests. This shows how complex the situation was between the students and university management.

This study now looks at the lessons the participants learned using technology.

### **The use of technology during the #UWCFMF student protests**

To communicate with their constituents, activists made use of technology. Student activists from UWC used online platforms such Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube and emails to learn and/or disseminate information to other students and the general university community. To achieve this, the activists themselves had to learn about how to create a Facebook or Twitter account and became knowledgeable of the capabilities and potential of the use of different platforms. They also learnt about the art of propaganda to persuade their followers, supporters, and opposition to support their cause. They learnt how to select catch-phrase terminology and

assemble the preamble which was the cornerstone of explaining the movement's purpose and ideology on the Twitter platform.

A participant highlighted the usefulness of technology as a tool for communication during the protests:

Technology was best for communication for students and university (Participant 5, September 27, 2019).

Activists used technology to learn about developments locally as well as nationally as the protests progressed. A participant stated:

And it was also being aware of what was happening in other universities (Participant 5, September 27, 2019).

Another participant articulated the benefits of the learning acquired by the activists from using modern electronic technology:

Use of technology made it easier for students to be informed as well as for the media and the public. The media was there to capture the dramatic events that took place and those [events] could be uploaded on social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube (Participant 7, October 25, 2019).

It was not surprising for the student activists to see some learning benefits using the multiple - digital online platforms. Communication, engagement, and access to information are some scholarly practices associated with a university culture. The availability of online news served an integral role for the sharing of information to student activists and for the university community to learn about the protests. Furthermore, student activists used technology as an effective tool for mobilisation purposes and to garner support from sympathisers of their cause to access free education. The availability of this information on online platforms meant that even the public learnt about the student protests from their devices:

We used Facebook, read news online, YouTube channels, emails, and WhatsApp. Social media played a huge role to mobilise students, set things bare, it went beyond students (Participant 6, October 09, 2019).

Analysing the feedback about the effective use of social media offered by Participant 6, it becomes evident how student activists learned to exploit the benefits of multi-online platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, emails and WhatsApp to communicate, mobilise, consult and



engage. On the Facebook page, called UWC Fees Will Fall, there were 9811 likes and 9840 followers (<https://www.facebook.com/UWC-Fees-WILL-Fall>, 2015) on its account which suggest that the student community wanted to interact with the views expressed on the Facebook page. The #UWCFMF student activists used the Facebook page for announcements of activities, programmes, mass meetings, venues for meetings, MOU among other things to keep the university community informed. The page also provided notices of mass meetings through a digital poster uploaded on November 15, 2016 (see Appendix 5). This shows how student activism at UWC evolved from the 20th century into the 21st century supported by the advancement of modern technology.

Modern technology helped with public support which was critical for the movement. This was confirmed by a participant:

It was a tool to get support from students and from the wider community (Participant 6, October 09, 2019).

Another participant affirmed this by stating:

Social media was also used as a tool to learn about what was happening in the Fees Must Fall student protests (Participant 4, September 27, 2019).

Participant 4 expanded on the significance of the use of technology during the #UWCFMF student protests for apolitical students:

Use of technology did make a huge difference. [...]. I wanted to know what the cause behind Fees Must Fall was, but I was not politically involved but I was behind the cause (Participant 4, September 27, 2019).

It is important to note that the participants' views illustrate that informal learning environments conscientised students who were not actively involved in the protests.

Despite the views that technology expanded awareness of the protests, another participant was cautious and sceptical of the media's intentions during the volatile protests:

While the students were going through challenges, the media was riding the bandwagon in order to capture the best footage on Fees Must Fall for their own benefit and followership. The more the video was opened the more it was subscribed in that channel' (Participant 7, October 25, 2019).

In this case, some student activists learnt to be critical about the intentions of the media. The ability to scrutinise, question and observe the media's practices as highlighted by Participant 7, exposes the media for its exploitation of the situation to increase their own following targets. The World Wide Web (www) was at the pinnacle of this rapid flow of information. The powerful use of social media provided an opportunity for some students, activists, university community, observers and the public to follow and to learn how student activists conduct their actions on online platforms to advance their cause.

Some academics also recognised the effectiveness of the social media during the student protests. Hlatshwayo and Fomunyam (2019) identify the role of social media, in particular twitter activism, in starting the #FeesMustFall movement.

While there were positive outcomes from the effective usage of modern technology in sharing their activities with the public, there were, however, some setbacks related to the use of social media in the environment of student activism. According to Ntuli and Teferra (2017), “[even though] digital technology such as the internet, assists students mobilizing for political engagement ... the utilisation of virtual activism strengthens social movements and mobilization, digital technology can weaken student activism in the classical space” (p. 64). This point should be noted, as this can contribute to the degeneration of “student activism in the classical space”.

Byron Miller and Walter Nicholls (2013) assert that “the classical place-bound notion of urban social movements provides few if any insights into how cities become incubators of and platforms for broader social movements—both spatially and in terms of goals” (p. 453). In the context of students, this means that the university space become a space for protests. It can be argued that the use of these new technologies redefined student activism at the institution, which was historically known for its “classical” student activism such as face to face mobilisation and direct participation in programmes organised by student structures. In fact, despite the closure of the university which limited the possibilities of direct action and mobilisation, the #FMF almost decimated the traditional sense of student activism at UWC because of the effective use technology of the #UWCFMF movement to advance their activism.

Students also constructed artefacts to assist them in their activism, advocacy, and mobilisation. I now examine the construction and use of artefacts during the student protests on campus and discuss how these artefacts facilitated learning within the activist community as well as beyond.



## **The use of artefacts: songs, graffiti, and the construction of the movement's culture**

Students created artefacts such as banners, songs, poetry, graffiti, and posts on electronic platforms. These artefacts not only contributed to the development of the movement's culture, but also contributed to facilitating the learning of activists and a broader audience.

Popular education promotes the use of codes to assist adult learning. Here codes are understood as or can be equated to artefacts. Consequently, the use of artefacts is generally accepted in adult education practices. Artefacts become tools to assist the learner in their sense making or to connect certain events to their everyday experiences.

The Facebook page, UWC Fees Will Fall, created by #UWCFMF, provided information on the activities of the movement and captured images of action during the protests. The platform allowed activists to post independently onto the page. Appendix 6 shows a sample of pictures taken and uploaded by the student activists onto the UWC Fees Will Fall Facebook page on October 21, 2015. Developing the necessary skills to conceptualise and digitise the artefacts implied significant learning opportunities for those directly involved in the #UWCFMF movement activities and events on campus.

Graffiti were written on multiple walls at the university to advocate key messages of the movement. Here, it can be presumed that the activists learnt from previous protests of how graffiti can be used to communicate ideas. The activists also produced banners they had to manufacture themselves in groups:

We produced banners for our public protest and groups were asked to brainstorm what should go onto the banners (Participants 3, September 06, 2019).

These banners and graffiti facilitated and ensured that the media, university community, and public could learn what the protests were about.

Protest songs played a dominant role during the student protests. The most popular song that some activists were fond of during the #FMF student protests was the decolonised version of the South African National Anthem, *Nkosi Sikelel' Afrika*, which was sung during protests. This was also the case with the #UWCFMF movement, as the decolonised version of the anthem omitted the English, *God Save Africa* and Afrikaans, *Die Stem* verses that are enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. The use of vernacular words for some in the movement carried a significant meaning in their quest and struggle to change their world.

This must be taken within the context of the South African history of colonisation and apartheid. The “national anthem” was also sung by student activists at the Student Centre at UWC. This was uploaded on the UWC Fees Will Fall Twitter account on October 15, 2016 (<https://twitter.com/UWCFeesWillFall>) (see Appendix 7).

This anthem is an example of creating new knowledge and new learning that ensued. Student activists had to learn and familiarise themselves with the new version of the anthem. This anthem was sung across South African universities when students gathered for their dialogues or meetings pertaining to the Fees Must Fall movement. Similarly, for political reasons, one can argue the student activists’ actions are reminiscent to the Guava Juice poem by Sandile Dikeni that became the anthem synonymous with youth resistance during the 1980s struggle. In Mark Gevisser’s profile titled *Sandile Dikeni, poet and radio broadcaster*, in the *Mail and Guardian*, a staff reporter, makes a reference to, “ ‘Guava Juice’, a paean to the Molotov Cocktail that he performed at rallies: ‘Shake shake shake my comrade ... shake that guava juice’” (1996).

Equally, the use of songs also involves learning in an informal context. Composition of the songs and the memorising of the lyrics of the songs create political meaning to the songs and it is through this process that learning unfolds for the student activists. In addition, some activists had to learn about the movement’s etiquette such as what attire and colours to wear. In some cases, struggle songs are sung to invoke emotions and excitement. It is no surprise that songs were particularly used by activists for the mobilisation of other students to join the movement during the protests as indicated by these participants:

When you hear songs, some students got excited and to others [students] this was not case (Participant 6, October 09, 2019).

Songs gave the protestors strength from residence and students from outside campus to join the protests (Participant 7, October 25, 2019).

Clearly the songs played an important role in shaping the culture of the #UWCFMF movement, influencing the passion of the student activists as well as conveying the key messages to outsiders.

For Participant 7 the songs gave an indication of the type of student activists who were at the forefront of the protests:

The tactics were strategic. It [song] was used in a large group of protestors and by the leaders. Those were radical guys and were fearless and those facilitated the songs on the ground (Participant 7, October 25, 2019).

The use of songs as a cultural symbol to drum up support was a creative way to promote student mobilisation. O'Halloran (2016) described the use of song during the #FMF student protests stating that "there were times when everyone in the room sang, borrowing songs from the anti-apartheid struggle, and revising some of the lyrics for the student struggle and the singing, clapping, and stamping of the feet echoed throughout the administration building (p. 93).

This background is important because as it gives an insight on the knowledge created by the student activists using artefacts. It also allows the activists to understand the mind-set of how social movement activists use their own unique devices such as artefacts to respond to police brutality.

Wandile Xaba (2017) wrote about other forms of resistance, like the one at Hiddingh Campus and the University of the Western Cape, where queer-positive, used art as a form of resistance.

The study now investigates the disruption of the academic programme.

### **Disruption of the academic programme**

To get the attention of the university management the #UWCFMF activists disrupted the university's academic programme. On the UWC Fees Will Fall Twitter account, there was a #UWCSHUTDOWN notice for the students and public to follow and to learn what was happening on campus during the shutdown. Official UWC communication was uploaded on this platform on October 10, 2016 (<https://twitter.com/UWCFeesWillFall>). Consequently, Twitter and Facebook platforms were used by the student activists as strategic channels for communication for students and university community during the disruption of the academic programme. According to some scholars, this tactic was used by other student activists at other universities as well.

O'Halloran (2016) described the concept of disruption:

for some it was symbolic or performative, for others as a matter of ensuring that no university activities could take place without their demands being addressed, for many a combination of these, likewise, the actions that students chose graffiti, interruption of

examinations, mass mobilisation - were motivated by different ideas of disruption. (p. 186).

A participant shared a view on the disruption:

Academic calendar was disrupted; classes were not taking place. Aims were being wasted for all parties (Participant 3, September 06, 2019).

This view problematises the reasons behind the student protests. In recent years academic debate in South African universities has also been about student access and student success. Then when one considers that students attend university to pursue academic success, the protestors' actions were against the very purpose of academic success at university. The disruptions affected the broader student community negatively, especially students at advanced levels of their studies. The participant continued:

The way some people lost time and may not be coming back to university was concerning. Some went to jail, lives were lost, and properties destroyed. Post-graduate students who use the lab, were also against time. A lot of plans were disrupted. A lot of facilities were shut down (Participant 3, September 06, 2019).

This participant it seems learnt about loss during the protests – time lost for teaching and learning, research purposes, and loss of lives.

The following participant disapproved of the unpleasant academic situation during the examination period:

You could not prepare for exams (Participant 4, September 27, 2019).

Learning to adjust was part of the protest movement. Protests intensified particularly during the exam period. The following response illuminated how the university community learnt to adjust to the academic disruptions:

The university departments made alternative arrangements to continue to meet the requirements of the academic programmes outside campus (Participant 7, October 25, 2019).

The university had to look for alternative venues off campus to ensure that students wrote their exams, thus, taking students out of their element. Some students continued their assessments using the university online student portal, iKamva, where assignments, assessments,

communication and reading materials were uploaded. Again, the use of technology assisted the university and university community to learn innovative ways on how to continue with the academic programme amid the academic disruptions as alluded to by the following participant:

Also, we ended up writing online exams (Participant 5, September 27, 2019).

The #UWCFMF student protests presented the student and university community with a plethora of learning lessons and it also presented some challenges for learning as the following response highlights:

Our learning was challenged in terms of our timetable. It forced us to adjust and to be flexible and to move towards a more flexible approach to the academia. Also, our context was challenged which also impacted the learning. This brought about anxiety towards our exam period (Participant 7, October 25, 2019).

Another participant lamented that:

We ended up not writing and we used our continuous assessment mark (CAM) or wrote the exam the following year (Participant 5, September 27, 2019).

This is evidence of some of the learning that participants claim took place during the student protest. It reveals how students from the movement had to construct their world during the protests to achieve their goals by challenging their practices and using different methods to learn. Simultaneously, UWC management had to respond to these protests in a constructive manner to ensure that academic success of all students was attained, and the academic year was not lost.

During the student protests, there were cases of sexual harassment, rape accusations and mental health issues that student activists were exposed to.

### **Sexual harassment, rape accusations and mental health issues**

Participants spoke repeatedly about incidents of Gender Based Violence (GBV) during the protests. This provided an opportunity to learn about GBV cases that was experienced by some students and the manner in which the university responded to these complaints. The following are responses from the participants:

There was also a rape culture, a lot of issues that encouraged the students to carry on the way they did. It was a quite a lot of things that the university neglected. It was silence or ignorance from the university (Participant 4, September 27, 2019).

There were issues of rape; there was no security, no food, and security... my concern was why don't we loot the barn, but we looted the dining hall where we ate (Participant 1, September 06, 2019).

There were cases of theft and cases of sexual harassment and the leadership did not do anything about it. It was quite concerning (Participant 2, September 06, 2019).

Without apportioning blame to the activists or the university, there was a sense from the participants that GBV allegations were concealed and the participants seem to suggest that the students were left to their own peril:

Security were not really working at residence (Participant 2, September 06, 2019).

Participant 2 continued:

Personally, I felt the university cares about the university and not the students (Participant 2, September 06, 2019).

Without any supervision from the university or authorities available at the residences, such behaviour could have been instigated either by some students pretending to be supporters of the movement or by outsiders:

I felt these are not really students. It felt like this has been high jacked by political men. Student protests sometimes are being high jacked when the government is not responsible (Participant 3, September 06, 2019).

Students may have had an impression that they were left to their own devices and the university left them to fend for themselves. It is conceivable that these incidents, as described by the participants, added an emotional burden on the students who were on campus during the volatile student protests.

Student activists used the protests to highlight the plight of rape allegations and awareness campaigns on campus. A night vigil was held on October 17, 2016 with the hashtag #RememberingTheFallen, #RememberKhwezi, #FeesMustFall (<https://twitter.com/UWCFeesWillFall>). Some of these events sought to address the allegations by womxn<sup>1</sup> student activists were uploaded on social media. On November 06, 2016, a video

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<sup>1</sup> a woman (used, especially in intersectional feminism, as an alternative spelling to avoid the suggestion of sexism perceived in the sequences *m-a-n* and *m-e-n*, and to be inclusive of trans and nonbinary women) <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/womxn>



titled, “Rape at UWC Silenced” was uploaded on the UWC Fees Will Fall Twitter account. The video addressed the issue of rape incidents that happened during the student protests. It allowed the womxn activists to speak openly about how the rape incidents affected womxn on campus and thus, called on authorities to address the issue.

Xaba (2017) brought the role of women and issue of rape to the surface during the #FMF student protests. She argued that the naked protests at UCT and Rhodes University against rape culture in the universities embodied a feminine stance to resistance. She emphasised that naked protests draw on the historical tradition of African women’s resistance and added that Nigeria, Liberia, Uganda and Kenya are among the countries where African women have used naked protests for over a century. Quintessentially, when looking at the #UWCFMF student protests, with these allegations becoming known, it appears that some female students were susceptible to GBV committed by their male counterparts.

There are important lessons that this study revealed from the data received from the participants. Firstly, within the context of South Africa, it should be admitted that rape and sexual harassment accusations within institutions of learning are serious issues that require attention from the university authorities and law enforcement officials.

The call against the outsourcing of workers at UWC arose during the interviews with the participants.

### **The call against the outsourcing of workers at UWC**

Rebecca Hodes (2016) expounds that “the protests, attributed often as the key catalyst in the movement’s emergence, may be understood as part of a broader pattern of civic action, pursuing new lines while echoing the old” (p. 141). Student activists were also concerned by the plight of outsourced workers on campus. The predicament of the working conditions of the cleaners and security workers was raised in the MOU of the #FMF student protests in 2015 and 2016. According to Lalu and Murray (2012), in the past UWC was commonly known as the University of the working class (Uwc). Thus, the inclusion of outsourced workers in the list of demands was not accidental as the #UWCFMF activists were cognisant of working-class working conditions at the institution. They demanded that security personnel and the cleaners must be insourced by the university. This act of civic duty by student activists was also consistent with the general #FMF protests.

[The] memorandum was also about workers at the university that they should not be outsourced (Participant 4, September 27, 2019).

From the Twitter account of the UWC Fees Will Fall movement, UWC activists went as far as asking donations for the legal fees of the workers (see Appendix 8). This is yet another practical example of the skills the activists had to learn to raise funds for the legal fees of the workers. As part of raising funds for the workers, amongst other things student activists had to learn to open a bank account in support of the workers. The #UWCFMF protests showed a keen interest in the struggles of the workers.

It is, therefore, apparent that learning transpired when the #UWCFMF social movement distinguished itself as a social movement which propagated for social justice not only for destitute students, but also for vulnerable workers within the institution. It is possible that some of these workers were in fact parents to students at institutions of higher learning and could not afford exorbitant tuition fees. These developments were also used as a direct challenge to the national government under the rule of the African National Congress (ANC) about its commitment to access and provision of free higher education in South Africa.

The study now looks at the role of the government during the student protests at UWC.

### **Role of the government**

The participants of the study were vocal about the role of government:

University is technically part of the government and it should be able to create a balance and it should sensitise students about issues affecting students (Participant 3, September 06, 2019).

This statement set the parameter between the state and universities as the latter are regulated by national legislation. Students were cognisant that public universities in South Africa are governed by law under the *Higher Education Act of 1997* and the *White Paper on Post School Education of 2013* in which student interests are enacted and preserved.

Some students questioned the government's role and approach during the student protests in 2015 and 2016. A participant commented:



In 2015 and 2016 the government was playing politics and it had no plan (Participant 3, September 06, 2019).

The timing of the announcement of the former President about abolishing the fee increase without informing cabinet was an interesting turn of events, as this announcement was made in December when universities were on recess. A participant expressed what he learned about role the government played:

Government was not proactive. They were diplomatic which again is unsafe for students at universities (Participant 3, September 06, 2019).

Nevertheless, the government's solution to the Fees Must Fall debacle received lukewarm response from some of the student activists as this participant believed:

The government was not sincere with the students (Participant 3, September 06, 2019).

It is without saying that the government's announcement of no fees increase, could have had a detrimental impact on the finances of a university like UWC. Participant 3 puts his argument for the free education call into this perspective:

The government was also guilty because at some time, the government said the education should be free (Participant 3, September 06, 2019).

It then becomes clear that students also learned how to hold the government to account on its promise that "the education should be free".

This participant analysed the manner in which the government handled the situation:

The government did more harm than good, because they continued to share that this is possible [free education], without taking into consideration that universities on their own are not capable in fulfilling these promises [free education]. It really did not help the situation when you speak out of the situation from your office in government compound to university staff speaking to students on a daily basis. It's different when you sitting out there than when you are with students. I suppose the government did not really have to account (Participant 5, September 27, 2019).

To fulfil its promise of free education, the government pronounced a 2% increase in the Value Added Tax (VAT). This regressive tax regime increase meant another financial burden to the already financially challenged citizens, let alone UWC students. It is well known that due to its

historical context, UWC and other former HBUs, were in a vulnerable financial position after the #FMF destruction to property, disruption of the academic programme, damage to its institutional reputation, the low morale of the staff members of the institution and a no fee structure for students.

This participant's response to the role of government was:

Government failed the students as it was their promise, because they said the doors of learning shall be opened (Participant 1, September 06, 2019).

The participants' responses provided insights of their understanding of how the government works in terms of provision of education in South Africa. The arguments somehow seem to balance the debate about the role of government and universities. It, nevertheless, exposes the declining investment in higher education in South Africa by the government:

I understand the enormous responsibility on the government to provide infrastructure, but to educate is key (Participant 3, September 06, 2019).

Participant 3 illustrated the difficult position in which government found itself after the defeat of the apartheid rule which provided good infrastructure mainly for the white minority. The democratic dispensation was confronted with its own challenges of providing services and infrastructure to all South African regardless of race or class. This placed the democratic government in the position of addressing all the historical inequalities of the past.

Participant 2 was critical of the government's stance towards the student protests, but she also felt that government should have responded to the protests better to appease the protesters:

When I think about the government, it's them against us. The government tried to mention whatever they promised to meet the needs of the students. Immediate response is very important when you see danger or conflict (Participant 2, September 06, 2019).

Participant 2 highlighted the importance of immediate response to conflict by the government as a means to deescalate tensions.

The following participant took a less critical view of the government, but raised her concerns about the Minister of Education's call for the use of force to control the situation:

The government played a huge role. I don't want to criticise the government. They were also part of the lengthy #FMF process. The government waited until other institutions formed part of #FMF. They did not see the need to respond at that time. The Minister

of Education said force at that time can be used to control the situation. Urhulumente ebebphambela umlilo [Government ignited the fire] [English translation from IsiXhosa] for quite a long time. At that time, the President response could have been made earlier. It was not impossible to provide free higher education. The government should have focused on the positives of #FMF; hence I say urhulumentent ebebphambela umlilo (Participant 4, September 27, 2019).

The participant was also adamant that the government was able to offer free higher education.

Participant 5 felt the government did a sensible job by providing some solutions during the #FMF protests:

I think the government handled it properly, because they included the students from middle class families. After it [#FMF] went to the government there were some solutions (Participant 5, September 27, 2019).

From inception the student activists learned about the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Bonginkosi Nzimande's approach to the student protests. Beyond that student activists learned about accountability and the role the government should play in managing the student protests. Student activists also learned about governance principles enshrined in the South African constitution:

Is the government not subjected to the Constitution? (Participant 4, September 27, 2019).

Participant 4 wanted the government to account for its role in the protests using legal channels. Participant 4 was resolute that the government should have been held accountable during the #FMF student protests. This determination gave the impression that the government may have neglected some of its duties during the during the #FMF protests. As part of student activists strategies to hold the government accountable, student activists posted on the UWC Fees Will Facebook page an invitation to UWC students, staff and workers to a joint march to parliament on November, 09 2015 (<https://www.facebook.com/985851094771502/photos/>). Please see Appendix 9 of a digital poster. In the poster, a hashtag for #FreeEducation and #ENDoutsourcing were the main themes of the poster. There were some learning outcomes associated with this march. Student activists were able to learn on how to organise themselves and get the campus community to rally behind their cause.

During this march other universities from the Western Cape marched to parliament, and this showed how student activists learned to work and organise themselves as a collective to find a collective solution. There was no doubt that in the call for #FreeEducation and #ENDoutsourcing, student activists learned about the challenges presented by the neoliberal policies the ANC government adopted and these resulted in inequality, exclusion and marginalisation of the poor in HE. Therefore, one can assume that student activists learned how to use democratic process such as marching to hold the democratic government accountable.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

This section provided a picture of what the participants of the study learned during the #UWCFMF student protests. The data collected expressed the participants' voices and showed how the learning experiences during the #UWCFMF student protests activities in 2015 and 2016 ensued. Also the study provided a deeper understanding of the #UWCFMF social movement from the perspective of the study participants.

During the analysis of the data in this study, there was evidence that was provided that student activists' experiences were enhanced during the #UWCFMF as they learned new ways of dealing with the challenges associated with #UWCFMF. As a result, the #UWCFMF social movement provided the students with the opportunity to learn how a social movement operate during militarised campus situations. The participants revealed the effectiveness of the use of new technology, and the role government played during the protests.

In the following section, I will provide a summary of this study.

## SECTION FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS

#### 5.1 Introduction

This study examined the developments and events associated with the rise of the #UWCFMF social movement student protests in 2015 into 2016. The aim was to gain insight into how student activism within a social movement contributed to the learning of activists. In addition to looking at the learning of the broader university community, there was a need to confirm why #UWCFMF was a social movement. Its activists revealed that there was perceived unity among the student activists *opposing the tuition fee increases through student mobilisation* which correlates with Diani's (1992) definition of a social movement as an entity containing "shared beliefs and solidarity" (p. 9) when the "plurality of individuals, groups and or organisations" (p. 8) engage in "collective action on conflictual issues" (p. 9).

As context influences knowledge construction and learning, this investigation started with recalling the rich political heritage and the historical background associated with the University of the Western Cape (UWC) under apartheid.

This study confirms that UWC's historic and active role in defying the apartheid laws at the institution inspired, at least, some #UWCFMF movement activists to continue on a social justice trajectory, as it pertains to the development of the South African national political discourse. Retrospectively, it is also important to take cognisance of the fact that in the 1960s students called for the "Africanisation of the university" (Franklin, 2003). This, at least, philosophically, has had a political significance on student activism at UWC which contributed to the transformation of the institution, referred to as "Bush College", which was designated for "coloured" people by the apartheid regime. Through social activism, UWC transformed from the so-called Bush College to an inclusive university which became known as the "home of the intellectual left" (Lalu & Murray, 2012, p. 106) which accepted black students during apartheid. Undoubtedly, UWC also became a community of learning for aspiring future academics and leaders of the new democratic South Africa. The call for the "Africanisation of the university" meant that it became a site of protest and resistance against social injustice. One could even argue that this institution, characterised by its continuous activism, became a

learning institution. This perspective is consistent with Eyerman and Jamison's (1991) insight which investigated the social cognitive praxis of social movements.

Returning to the focus of this research, it is important to recognise that all learning and knowledge construction occurs within a social and political context. Accordingly, I turn to describing the national contexts.

## 5.2 National Context and Local Learning

Learning within the 2015-2016 student movement did not occur in isolation. This study has shown that the #UWCFMF student protests were inspired by the national movement known as the #FMF which was inspired by or emanated from the events of the Rhodes Must Fall (#RMF) movement. The events that took place at UWC were neither unique to the institution, nor should the #UWCFMF be perceived as accidental in design, content or character. Instead, the student protests should be seen as being influenced by material conditions of poverty experienced by significant numbers of university students across South Africa which prompted the call for tuition "fees to fall".

The principal demand of the national #FMF movement was that university tuition fees must be reduced or abolished. Responding to this call, #UWCFMF activists drew on lessons of earlier activism that only through solidarity would political demands receive attention. It was this awareness that encouraged #UWCFMF activists to advocate that the UWC community make their voices heard collectively under the banner of the #UWCFMF movement. In concert, the activists propagated to denounce the proposed increase of fees. Activists' voices became elevated in the formation of the #UWCFMF movement which became an organising platform for collective action, activism, and mobilisation.

Informal interviews provided a thematic approach that sought to gain the understanding of the learning that transpired from the lived experiences of the student activists during the #UWCFMF student protests. Through semi-structured questions, the themes of what and how the learning occurred during the protests emerged.



The study has examined the following themes:

### *A call for access to tertiary education and free tuition fees at UWC*

Access to tertiary education and free tuition was the predominant demand of the students. This sentiment was captured in the data of #UWCFMF activists that: “[The] 10% ... annual tuition increase proposal on the table gave rise to the student protests in 2015 and 2016” (Participant 3). This demand was also evidenced by the relentless protests on campus through the use of digital platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.

### *Militarisation of the campus*

The university’s response to student activism was to militarise the institution by inviting the South African Police services onto campus as well as by introducing a private security company to return ‘law and order’ to UWC. However, this move increased the levels of tension and violence experienced on campus as student activism escalated to take on a more violent character. It was the presence of the police and the security company on campus that taught activists that there would have to be alternative routes in resolving the conflict at UWC and that mutual consultation was needed: “They [university management] militarised the university and instead of listening to students they beefed up security” (Participant 1).

The police presence on campus and their militaristic responses resulted in student retaliation causing the destruction of university property and the disruption of the UWC’s academic programme. A #UWCFMF activist describe the situation at that time: “The police would come with stun grenades and rubber bullets. Students would use the tables to protect themselves and they would also use the tables and light the fire and would use this as a barrier. The fire was not to burn things but was for protection” (Participant 7).

### *Communication and consultation between management and #UWCFMF activists*

This study has shown that student activists and university management struggled to communicate with each other effectively. Some activists confirmed this by stating that there “was [a] disconnect between the university management and the students” (Participant 6). From their perspective, the university management viewed them as “angry students” (Participant 6).



But these activists proposed that a consultative management approach would have been more productive in the context of the conflict.

#### *Utilising information communication technology (ICT) during the #UWCFMF student protests*

The #UWCFMF activists confirmed that information communication technology (ICT) assisted them to communicate and share information: “Technology was best for communication for students and university” (Participant 5). Using ICT platforms introduced activists to new information on a variety of subjects. It allowed them to ensure that their knowledge on the FMF movement remained current and it allowed movement activists to share their insight and analysis of developments with the broader university community. It permitted them to learn how to utilise the possibilities these technologies offered. The #UWCFMF activists also learned about other social struggles such as the Arab Spring that used ICT as a tool in their protests.

#### *Artefacts, songs, and the culture embraced during the #UWCFMF protests*

Artefacts and songs became transformed into pedagogical tools in the activists’ protest reservoir. Posters, graffiti, and ICT postings became the key artefacts through which ideas and activities related to the movement were communicated. In developing the artefacts of the #UWCFMF movement, activists learnt collectively how to use the different media to communicate, advocate and agitate. These artefacts were also used to defend and counter arguments in support or against the movement and its intended future vision. They were also used by activists to share their message, and garner the support of the students and the public: “We produced banners for our public protest and groups were asked to brainstorm what should go onto the banners” (Participants 3).

As reported previously, this research has found that activists constructed their knowledge collectively through their activism and by utilising available electronic technological platforms. This finding is consistent with arguments and propositions in scholarly literature which focus on social movement learning. In theorising collective learning, Eyerman and Jamison (1991) refer to the collective as a form of “cognitive praxis”, while Lave and Wenger (1991) speak of learning occurring within a “community of practice”. Kilgore (1999), on her part, introduced a theory of “collective learning” because “groups engaged in collective action

to defend or promote a shared social vision” (p. 91). It was through their activism that #UWCFMF activists promoted a vision to ensure access to tertiary education.

Vygotsky (1986) theorised knowledge construction as a social endeavour instead of it being an individualised activity. But for knowledge to be constructed, certain tools are essential which he identifies as language, culture and artefacts. This study has confirmed how artefacts, in the form of poems, song, graffiti and postings on social media became critical in developing knowledge about the movement as well as countering opposing perspectives. Language was used as a medium to communicate and transfer information from one site to another. Local activists shared stories related to FMF nationally in their social forums as well as through social media platforms. Language was also used as a tool to negotiate meaning. This occurred in meetings and workshops where activists decided on actions or tried to understand the development of the movement. It also became a reservoir or container of the culture of the movement through the use of the alternative anthem within the movement as reported in this study. This signals that the movement, in formation, became an anti-status quo formation with a distinct Africanist orientation.

Furthermore, the study demonstrated that during the 2015 and 2016 protests, student activists were united and worked as a collective. Activists acknowledged that learning occurred collectively which became evident in that the more experienced activists or intellectuals of the movement understood the tactics of how to respond to actions of the police. By being at the forefront of the protests, activists shared the tactics for others to follow. These attempts required cooperation and active participation from the movement members. Moreover, through their involvement in movement activities, activists were enabled to learn collectively. This learning was expressed to ensure they shared the vision and goals of the movement as well as work towards them.

For example, collectively, activists participated in marches, met the university management, protested against the militarisation of the university by police and used social media to communicate messages. This is consistent with Fuller et al. (2005) perspective that participation in social practice involves learning.

Learning as a result of activism occurred in different ways. As an illustration, the use of modern technology especially social media proved to be a learning platform for student mobilisation. This was confirmed by the activists when they stated that “We used Facebook, read news online, YouTube channels, emails and WhatsApp. Social media played a huge role to mobilise students, set things bare, it went beyond students” (Participant 6). This perspective is also highlighted by Ntuli and Teferra (2017). The authors state that student activism has evolved from the “classical space” to student activism in a “digital space” (p. 64). As a result, this has shaped the method, style and behaviour of student politics on campus during the #UWCFMF student protests.

Digital activism became a method of how the student protests undermined elected student leaders such as the official SRC structure. In a communiqué to the university community, the Rector averred that recognised governance student representative structures seemed to have been overtaken, *de facto*, by the new wave of virtual or digital student activism. In his view, this bypassed traditional institutional processes that normally force parties to discuss institutional matters affecting students guided by the legislative frameworks (Pretorius, 2015). By bypassing the formal processes, the #UWCFMF student activists’ tactics rendered the university ungovernable with unelected student activists who championed the call for fees to fall at the institution.

The interaction between the university management and #UWCFMF movement was relatively robust. This resulted in eliciting some disapproval of the movement’s engagement not only from management but also from student activists. This provided an insight that, perhaps, some student activists did not anticipate unruly behaviour from students at a university with a poor political stature like UWC. A movement activist recalled that: “I was here before in 1999, then we never burnt libraries when we were protesting” (Participant 1).

The above observation suggests that not all activists approved of all actions that occurred under the banner of #UWCFMF. Some activists expressed their discontentment of the tactics used during the student protests. To reiterate, Lalu and Murray (2012) heralded UWC as historically known as the “intellectual home of the left” (p. 106). The significance and the assumption underlying this statement is that intellectual engagement and debate were central and integral to the political tradition, culture, and heritage of activism at UWC. Some #UWCFMF activists

saw debate as a cornerstone of the UWC student political identity. Thus, from this perspective, some movement activists opposed the activities that resulted in the destruction of buildings and other university resources.

Consistent with Walters's (2005) observation, this study confirms that social movements are rich learning environments. This became evident in the analysis presented earlier.

There was learning that was discernible for the movement's activists. The learning was that student activism had transformed from the conventional activities of using the "classical space" associated with UWC's tradition and heritage of activism. Student activism had found a new home in digital activism that gave life to a culture of the hashtag movements in 2015 and 2016. Consequently, popular student protest movements such as the #RMF, #FMF, and #UWCFMF became popular social movements in higher education institutions nationally. This insight proposes that UWC activists had to learn how to use digital tools. The activists had to use these in their struggles for social justice as the developments affecting the higher education sector were publicised by using modern technology. Numerous activists recalled the value of ICT in their individual and collective learning: Participant 5 stated by her using ICT she became "aware of what was happening [at] other universities".

Moreover, local students' activities resembled some characteristics of other popular social movements like the #Arab Spring, and #FMF. The activities of these movements were readily available on the internet. Participant 7 stressed that the "Use of technology made it easier for students to be informed" Using social media, the stance and shape of #UWCFMF addressed some of the fundamental issues at the institution. These efforts were done online, and the use of technology tools such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and WhatsApp, demonstrated the usefulness of modern pedagogical tools. The social media platforms were used to share ideas that enabled learning for the student activists and university community. The movement's activists learned that these digital tools were not only used for strategising, communication, and learning purposes. Instead, the same technological pedagogical tools were utilised to put pressure on the authorities at the institution or government. For example, UWC student activists on campus utilised Facebook and Twitter platforms to mobilise support. The same tools were used to announce the mass gatherings on campus. Also, when the activists marched to national Parliament to share their grievances with the government, made use of social media.

As previously cited, it is known that the student activists' endeavours were neither directed only towards UWC, nor limited to the HBIs. However, activists' actions served as a national political call to demand access to higher education in South Africa at all HEIs. Therefore, it was evident what the students' collective endeavours were directed towards. They were utilised to put pressure on the government for its failure to adequately fund higher education in South Africa since the post-democratic period. This was expressed as disappointment: "I know the government failed" (Participant 1) the higher education students.

During the protest period the "South African [government] has been bailing out the South African Airways and SABC with a lot of billions [of Rands]" (Participant 1). This statement suggests that movement activists were knowledgeable of the skewed government spending priorities. Their analysis exposed how the government spent public taxes on state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in lieu of spending it on social development such as higher education.

The #UWCFMF transformed itself as it responded to multiple contextual issues. Initially, activism was characterised by peaceful demonstration which sometimes, turned into violent protests with the militarisation of the institution. In addition, while historically robust student engagement occurred through physical participation, the 2015-2016 participation in activism, in contrast, happened more on a virtual plane. This meant that the discourse of social activism at UWC also experienced a form of transformation.

Some activists were disappointed that some protests were inconsistent with culture of activism at UWC: "I am not sure if it was a learning highlight or learning lowlight. My highlight, I could not understand why we were burning libraries and computer labs. It was about vandalising what was useful" (Participant 1).

This revelation exposed a deviation from historical student activism at the institution. This was a powerful insight coming from some of the movement's activists. It expressed how student activists went about drawing on digital technologies to pursue their activism during the #UWCFMF protests. They also became reflective of their actions and activism. This gave observers insight into the nature of collective understanding and thinking of movements as activists were in the process of creating and constructing knowledge in action.

These insights are consistent with the theorisation in the scholarly literature that examined social movement learning (Eyerman & Jamison, 1991; Hall & Clover, 2005). This literature points out that the cognitive praxis of social movements is not a social drama, instead it is the social action from where new knowledge originates. I present the example of the strategies employed by #UWCFMF activists to weaken the resolve of the police: “You got teams of small groups and front runners and they were used as diversion and the police would follow them and that tactic would weaken the structure of the police” (Participant 7).

The above confirms that actions were not randomly employed by movement activists. On the contrary, it shows that strategic thought and deliberation went into some actions. It further signals the intricate planning utilised by the student activists. This was new knowledge which emerged as activists were participating and experiencing their activism. In other words, the movement developed its “cognitive praxis”. It was not an individual that did the thinking; rather, it was the movement as a collective that did the action and thinking. This interpretation is supported by Aziz Choudry and Dip Kapoor (2010), drawing on Holst (2002), who suggest that social movements are natural sites for radical adult pedagogy due to its utilisation of a “pedagogy of mobilization” (p. 4). This pedagogy describes “the learning inherent in the building and maintaining of a social movement and its organizations” (Choudry & Kapoor, 2010, p. 4). These characteristics were apparent in the manner in which the #UWCFMF student activists mobilised through artefacts and songs as some participants from the study highlighted. Inevitably, it could be expected that during the protests, in participating in a social movement, “people learn numerous skills and ways of thinking analytically and strategically as they struggle to understand their movement in motion” (Holst, 2002, as cited in Choudry & Kapoor, 2010, p. 4).

The prognosis sketched in this synopsis, does not negate any of the learning witnessed or learned at UWC during the #UWCFMF. The views expressed herein served as a useful instrument to get a deeper understanding of some of learning of the study participants during the student protests.



## 5.3 Learning during the #UWCFMF Student Protests

### 5.3.1 Student activists learning lessons

This study mainly focused on the local context and dealt with local students. However, there were similar protests that took place in other parts of the continent. It was therefore important when analysing the local context for the local students to learn from their international counterparts. This view finds relevance in the study because UWC also had international students registered at the institution during the #UWCFMF. This approach enriched the discussion from the participants in this study. It also assisted with the deeper understanding of the challenges that universities like UWC faced. The continental lens and view were essential to appreciate the learning insights from international students from the African continent.

This approach was probably necessary because many countries on the African continent achieved independence before South Africa became a democratic state in 1994. This afforded the local participants opportunities to learn about what worked or what did not work in the sphere of higher education.

Besides the international dynamics, local students expressed their learning experiences from the #UWCFMF student protests. Some, within the UWC community, perceived the actions of the movement as chaotic. In response to such a critique, movement activists retorted: “Leadership doesn’t really respond to students unless chaos is involved” (Participant 7).

Some movement activists learned about authority and the abuse of authority which became experienced as police violence.

Moreover, the study confirmed that activists’ learning occurred primarily in non-formal and informal contexts. The informal context is an important aspect of a student’s life experience outside of the formal academic curriculum. Social movements such as the #UWCFMF provided the space for and nurtured learning. This study proposes that learning in informal contexts should be nurtured. It is also suggested that informal learning should receive the same recognition and institutional support as the formal academic curriculum receives. This will have positive outcomes for any tertiary institution.



It is well-known that, by design, universities are contested terrain. This is particularly witnessed in the domain for the production and dissemination of academic knowledge. This poses a challenge for any learning that has been created outside the classroom.

This research can consequently inform further investigations into the academic value of knowledge construction and learning. The areas to look at should be within the pedagogy realm of informal and non-formal contexts such as social movements.



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APPENDIX 1



OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR: RESEARCH  
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26 August 2019

Mr AA Mdepa

Faculty of Education

Ethics Reference Number: HS18/6/27

Project Title: Social movement learning, student protest and higher education: an exploration of #FeesMustFall at UWC

Approval Period: 26 August 2019 – 26 August 2020

I hereby certify that the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Western Cape approved the methodology and ethics of the above mentioned research project.

Any amendments, extension or other modifications to the protocol must be submitted to the Ethics Committee for approval.

**Please remember to submit a progress report in good time for annual renewal.**

The Committee must be informed of any serious adverse event and/or termination of the study.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Josias".

*Ms Patricia Josias  
Research Ethics Committee Officer  
University of the Western Cape*

<http://etd.uwc.ac.za/>





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20 August 2019

**Request to participate in research focussing on the Fees Must Fall Protests at the University of the Western Cape: 2015-2016**

Dear Participant,

I, Anele A. Mdepa, student number 2040094, am a registered student in an intercontinental Masters in Adult Learning and Global Change (MEd) at the University of the Western Cape (UWC).

You are kindly requested to participate in my research study which form part of the requirements of the Masters in Education Degree I am registered on.

My investigation aims to answer the question: how and what has the university community learned from the student action and protests during #FeesMustFall activism and protests at UWC during 2015 and 2016 academic years?

You are requested to participate in an interview which will be guided by the following themes:

- The role FMF student activists played during student protests in 2015 and 2016.
- The learnings student activists gained during FMF student protests.
- The manner in which the UWC management addressed the FMF student protests in 2015 and 2016.
- The government's role during FMF student protests in 2015 and 2016.

In order to avoid risks to you as the interviewee, I will take steps to maintain confidentiality of information and protect you identity before and after the interview. I will use pseudonyms instead of using your actual name in the research paper, and related documents and presentations. I will also protect and secure data gathered during interviews for example by storing hard copies of interview transcripts at my office in a locked filing cabinet to which no one else will have access. Similarly, I

<http://etd.uwc.ac.za/>



will secure electronic copies of the data by using passwords to protect data in my personal computer.

There is no obligation on your part to participate in this research. Instead, participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to ask questions and raise your concerns regarding the study or to withdraw from the study at any time.

The researcher acknowledges the trauma some students suffered during FMF student protests in 2015 and 2016, and the participants of the study will be provided with therapeutic support for free of charge from a registered psychologist from the Centre for Student Support Services (CSSS) at the University of the Western Cape, if the need arises upon request.

My supervisor for this investigation is Dr Natheem Hendricks, Institute for Post School Studies, University of the Western Cape, and if you have any complaints about how I am conducting this investigation you should feel free to contact him at 021 959 3002 or [mnhendricks@uwc.ac.za](mailto:mnhendricks@uwc.ac.za)



UNIVERSITY of the  
WESTERN CAPE

Yours sincerely

.....  
Anele A. Mdepa

Student: MALGC

Student Number: 2040094

Email address:

[anelemdepa@sun.ac.za](mailto:anelemdepa@sun.ac.za)]

## APPENDIX 2

### LIST OF INTERVIEWS AND INTERVIEWS SCHEDULE

Participant 1 is a final year Advanced Diploma in Public Administration from the Economic Sciences Management (EMS) Faculty. (September 06, 2019), UWC Robben Island Archives Museum.

Participant 2 is a Computer Science student doing 3<sup>rd</sup> year. (September 06, 2019), UWC Robben Island Archives Museum.

Participant 3 is a currently a PhD candidate at the Science Faculty. (September 06, 2019), UWC Robben Island Archives Museum.

Participant 4 is an LLB final year candidate at the Law Faculty. (September 27, 2019), UWC Robben Island Archives Museum.

Participant 5 is an MPhil candidate at the Law Faculty. (September 27, 2019), UWC Robben Island Archives Museum.

Participant 6 completed her master's at the Arts Faculty and currently works at SU. (October 10, 2019), 14 Murray Street, Stellenbosch University.

Participant 7 is a master's candidate at the EMS Faculty, and is currently working at SU Tygerberg Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences (FMHS). (October 25, 2019), Tygerberg Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences.

**APPENDIX 3**

**Free Education Discussions**



## APPENDIX 4

### Vetus Schola picture



## APPENDIX 5

### Mass meeting digital poster



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## APPENDIX 6

### Artefacts/ Graffiti



Graffiti on the on wall at UWC uploaded on FeesWillFall Facebook account, October, 21, 2015



University of the left on the wall at UWC, picture uploaded on FeesWillFall Facebook account, October, 21, 2015



Artefact in form of graffiti posted on Facebook page on November, 08, 2016





## APPENDIX 7

### New decolonized anthem lyrics

Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika

Maluphakanyisw' uphondo lwayo,

Yizwa imithandazo yethu,

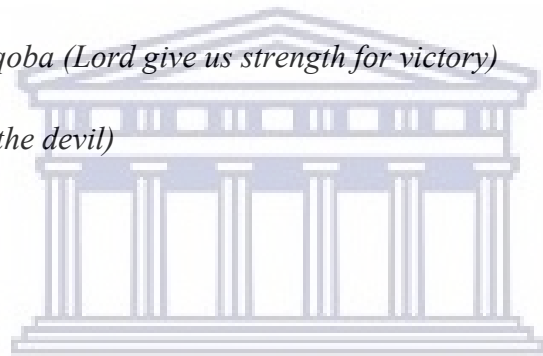
*Sibe moya munye (To be united in one spirit)*

*Noma sekunzima emhlabeni (Even through hard times in this world)*

*Sihlukunyezwa kabuhlungu (When we are painfully abused)*

*Nkosi siph' amandla okunqoba (Lord give us strength for victory)*

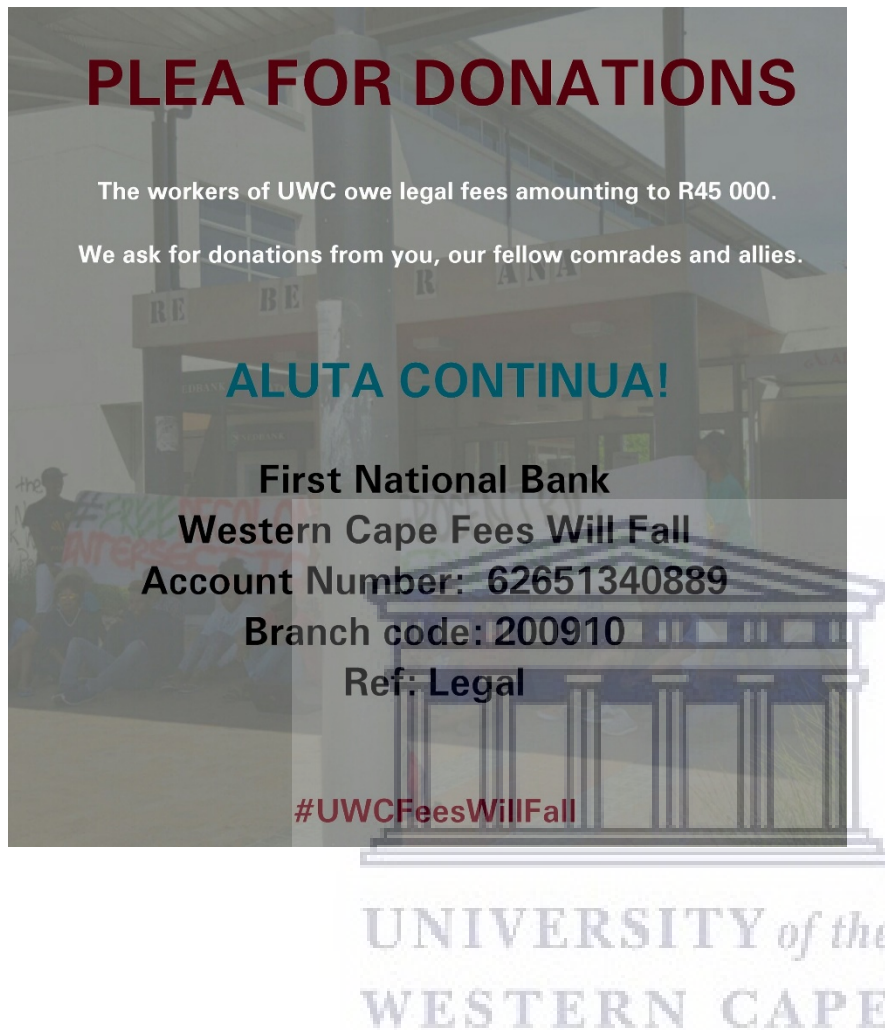
*Silwe nosathane (To fight the devil)*



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## APPENDIX 8

Plea for donations digital poster



**PLEA FOR DONATIONS**

The workers of UWC owe legal fees amounting to R45 000.  
We ask for donations from you, our fellow comrades and allies.

**ALUTA CONTINUA!**

**First National Bank**  
**Western Cape Fees Will Fall**  
**Account Number: 62651340889**  
**Branch code: 200910**  
**Ref: Legal**

**#UWCFeesWillFall**

UNIVERSITY *of the*  
WESTERN CAPE

## APPENDIX 9

March to Parliament digital poster

# #UWCFeesWILLFall Movement

ALL UWC STUDENTS, STAFF &  
WORKERS INVITED TO A  
JOINT(UCT, UWC, CPUT, US) MARCH TO  
PARLIAMENT

SCHEDULED AS FOLLOWS:

DATE: 09 November 2015 (MONDAY)

TIME: 07H00

MEETING POINT: RESLIFE BUILDING

#FreeEducation

#ENDoutsourcing

