'Asijiki' and the capacity to aspire through social media: the #feesmustfall movement as an anti-poverty activism in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

South Africa has been a democratic country for 21 years, yet racial and economic transformation appears to have stagnated. Recently, the accumulation of frustration and injustice amounted to a wave of student-led protests, the scale of which is unprecedented in the democratic period. This paper, while contributing to broader literature on student protests, focuses on a field that has received little scholarly attention; that of social media as a tool for anti-poverty activism. This paper presents a social media and personal narrative analysis of the October 2015 #feesmustfall student protests to highlight the value of social media in poverty reduction. We locate this paper within Appadurai's theory of cultural capacity – capacity to aspire [7]. The research findings illuminated the aspects of the politics of recognition, compliance and future orientation within the student narratives. The capacity to aspire framework further advocates for strengthening the capability of the poor and to cultivate their voice.

CCS Concepts

• **Applied computing→Law, social and behavioral sciences→Economics.**

Keywords

Poverty; social movements; Twitter; social media; social networks

1. INTRODUCTION

Student protests, "(…) incidents of student revolt or unrest which constitute a serious challenge or threat to the established order or to sanctioned authority or norms" [1], have a long history and

remain a feature of university life. In recent years, marches, sit-ins, petitions, pickets, placard demonstrations and disruption of institutional activity by students have been highlighted as a routine encounter in the country [2]. In October 2015, South Africa was swept by a wave of student-led protests, the scale of which is unprecedented in the democratic period. The protests shut down a majority of tertiary institutions including those of the authors; and these gatherings sent shockwaves across the country. The protests were also part of an international trend of higher education student protests that continue to take place across the world.

Comparable to South Africa's 1976 student uprising in Soweto – which saw thousands of black secondary school students protesting against a discriminating education policy which imposed an inferior education for blacks and prioritized Afrikaans as a language of teaching and learning [3] – the #feesmustfall protests can be described as the biggest act of youth defiance and an influential student movement in the post-apartheid period. The movement, which started as a protest against a 2016 tuition fee increment at one university in South Africa, quickly developed into a nationwide call for free and quality education. Its magnitude, influence and reach attracted both local and international attention in record time, mobilized students from over 20 institutions within a few days and became the most broadcast student movement in recent years. A feature of the #feesmustfall movement has been its reliance on social media (Twitter, Facebook, Youtube, Instagram, Whatsapp, and others) in creating awareness, building solidarity and mobilizing a national body of students. Likewise, these protests, through the use of social media, provided students with a tool for illuminating the poverty and inequality context in South Africa.

Although student power has been documented as far back as the thirteenth century [4], few student protests have received global attention within a short space of time as has the #feesmustfall movement. Social media has also been valuable in communicating the experiences of students living in poverty and inequality, and to use this experience to mobilize and to attract attention. It provided a voice to the poor that is not brokered by "poverty experts" [5]. It

also provided a momentum around broader social movements committed to the Nguni language term of "asijiki": 'no turning back' [6].

This paper presents an analysis of the #feesmustfall protests in South Africa to highlight the value of social media in bringing awareness to poverty reduction through higher education. Young people makeup a large proportion of the South African population (20 percent of the population is youth in the 15-24 year age group), yet they are the most vulnerable to poverty [31]. For example, this age cohort is the most likely to be, un(der) educated, unemployed or discouraged jobseekers [32]. Within this context, university students see their education as the pathway out of impoverishment for themselves and their family. Yet increasing fees and limited bursary and loan schemes threaten this opportunity and may well perpetuate the cycle of poverty and exclusion to a better life. This paper is located within three broad bodies of literature addressing a critical aspect of the #feesmustfall movement: student protests, anti-poverty digital activism, and cultural capacity – capacity to aspire [7]. For the scope of this paper, we limit our literature review on previous and current student protests, both internationally and from South Africa. We do this in order to highlight the uniqueness of the #feesmustfall campaign when compared to other historic student movements. Further, we discuss the value of social media in providing students with the tools of activism and thereafter the capacity to aspire for a better future and to express their frustration that many remain in poverty and that this future has not yet materialized.

2. STUDENT PROTESTS ACROSS TIME AND SPACE

Student protests have been a global phenomenon documented as early as the 1800s. In the USA between 1800 and 1875, students rebelled at least once at Miami University, University of North Carolina, Harvard University, Yale University, New York University and many others [4]. Early protests played an important role in a number of key movements including the European revolution of 1884, the Russian revolution in 1905, the Indian Independence Movement, the Chinese revolts of the early twentieth century, the Cuban revolt, Vietnam War and the Indonesian revolt of 1966 [4]. In the African continent "scattered historical accounts ...on the role of students during the colonial period point to the fact that the nascent student populations of the time joined forces with the emerging nationalist movements to fight for independence" [1].

Certain features of student life facilitate student collective action. For example, university students usually live in close proximity to their campus and to each other; a fact that further facilitates communication and cooperation [1]. Within this context discontent is shared easily and mobilization can be quick and often spontaneous [4,8]. Print media, and more recently television and radio have also shaped the reach of protests across societies and regions [1].

Student dissatisfaction, which leads to protests, arises from a number of different factors. Prior to the 1960s, dissatisfaction was largely over issues pertaining to university rules, such as regulation of housing and living standards [8]. There have been exceptions, such as the June Rebellion of 1832 depicted in *Les Misérables* in which students joined with workers and anti-monarchists [8]. However even in the wave of student protest movements that broke out in 1968 which focused on politics and social values [8], in Mexico and Japan discontent was a result of police officials entering universities without any formal invitation from campus officials [9,10]. In Mexico for example, the protests were initially attributed to youthful rivalries over campuses [10]. However, the riot police entered campus premises and indiscriminately beat students and university staff; thus making riot police's presence the immediate cause of discontent [9].

From the late 1960s – although still concerned over issues pertaining to the university – student protests have been deeply entangled in non-academic issues [1,8]. During the 1970s and 1980s African students were an active political force in the independence struggle of the then breakaway British colony of Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), South West Africa (now Namibia), South Africa and other African countries [1]. In 1988, Nigerian students were at the forefront of the protests by workers and civil servants against "increases in the price of petrol, the cutting back of civil servants' fringe benefits (housing and other allowances) and the dissolution of the Nigerian Labour Congress" [8]. During apartheid, South African, American and Canadian students were leading demonstrations around the South African national struggle for a non-racial society. For example, in the 1980s, the student protests played a contributory role in the fight to end discriminatory state structures, which led to the imposition of "a state of emergency" [1]. Campuses in the USA and Canada had used protest to urge divestments from South Africa as mechanism of global pressure to end apartheid. Student protests across time can be local or global in nature, also being part of larger societal campaigns fighting for equality and social justice.

In 2010, the use of social media became a part of social movements when student protests on education and the environment in Chile were facilitated online through Facebook [28]. These protests were later facilitated offline as protesters were moved to the streets. While these protests did not garner international attention, they did however bring about legal and political changes in the country [28].

Recently, widening access to tertiary education has been on the political agenda in many countries. There is also a concern that a number of students cannot finish their higher education due to financial constraints. Annually, about 25 percent of students in South Africa leave tertiary education because of financial exclusion [2]. Added to this, about 100 000 students withdraw from university because they can no longer afford higher education. Koen et al argue that the greatest concern of a majority of black South African students from disadvantaged backgrounds is not whether institutions will accept them, but whether their financial security is enough to sustain their studies to completion [2]. The insecurity of education completion coincides with the emerging use of contemporary social media such as Twitter and Facebook to broadcast events and activities as they take place, which becomes instant access to information from a wider selection of informants than depending on mainstream television or radio media. For example the use of the hashtag (#) can be used within messages, particularly for Twitter, and the multiple users who use a hashtag following a popularized phrase can then be easily searchable on the internet. All those hashtag posts can be filtered, read and viewed together as people post on Twitter. With that said, student protesters in South Africa started to use the phrase #feesmustfall or #fmf as the social media link to the movement that emerged in October 2015 to address the high cost of higher education.

2.1 The South African Context

In June 16 1976, South Africa witnessed an unprecedented uprising of black secondary school students who protested against a discriminatory education policy [3]. This policy, referred to as 'Bantu Education,' was designed strategically by the apartheid government to develop a generation of subservient and unskilled black workers [3]. A series of violent protests and boycotts took place at schools in Soweto. These were in opposition to Afrikaans medium teaching and a response to police who fired on the marching children as depicted by the iconic image of the dying Hector Pieterson [11].

The June 16 protests made way for a number of defiance campaigns. During the 1990s, such student activism was general and widespread in South Africa [12]. This period ushered in the 1994 democratic elections and the hope for a 'new' South Africa grounded in "freedom, democracy and human rights" [1,3]. The African National Congress' (ANC) 1994 election campaign promised free education and a better life for all. These seemed plausible at the time, as the country was consumed with hopeful energy and fertile positivity. However, the desired "Rainbow Nation" was soon tainted by reports of corrupt government officials, the mismanagement of resources, continued white privilege and the lack of material transformation in the country. Analyzing the structural basis for persistent poverty, Carter and May (1999) concluded that South African still faced a long walk to economic freedom [13].

Today, two decades since the birth of a democratic South Africa, racial and economic transformation appears to have stagnated [32]. A case in point is the slow racial transformation of students and staff within the higher education sector and the persistence of curricula and symbols reminiscent of South Africa's colonial and apartheid history. Student activism for a change in the system has persisted since 1994 and a study of twelve historically black South African universities found that disruption of academic programmes and aggressive student behaviour have occurred throughout the post-apartheid era. [2].

This frustration culminated in the October 2015 #feesmustfall campaign and the shutdown of universities and streets across the country. Superficially, this movement appeared to be about university tuition fees, but fundamentally it challenged the lack of decolonization in and transformation of both South Africa and higher education. Free education has been presented as a goal of the ANC since it adopted the Freedom Charter in 1955. It has been promised at each election since 1994. Education has also been constructed as one of the few ways South Africans can hope to escape poverty. Having spent 20 years waiting for the government's promises of 'a better life' and 'free education' to materialize, it is apparent that young South Africans are growing impatient [32]. In addition, the current standards of living have seen the cost of daily life rise due to inflation and food costs due to climatic changes, thereby putting more pressure on already limited household budgets [31]. In South Africa, over 45 percent of individuals are poor [38]. Within the higher education context, the Ministry of Higher Education has recognized the role of The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) in supporting poor students [30]. NSFAS was setup as a loan and bursary initiative to ensure that poor students are able to access higher education [29,30]. The scheme only partially funds 17 percent of students and these students would need to come from households with an annual income threshold of R122 000 (about $12,200) to be eligible. Yet annual increases in tuition fees, high unemployment, rents and limited income from household wages reflect a vulnerable situation for a large majority of South African students. The October 2015 student protests show that South Africa's 'born-free' generation, those born in the post-apartheid era, are losing hope that these promises will be fulfilled and feel their liberation is not yet complete.

2.2 The Move towards Informational Activism

The nature of protest and activism especially among young people appears to be evolving. This, particularly so in its medium of awareness raising, its platform for quick communication and in documenting the events as they unfold from the eyes of the protesters. Historically, student protests have relied upon conventional broadcast and print media, planned meetings and used word of mouth to organize, mobilize and communicate the messages of discontent. In France during the 1968 protests, mobilization was made possible through radio and limited television broadcast. In South Africa, the Soweto 1976 student uprising was organized over a protracted process of meetings and planning by the students [33]. The power of television and radio media and word-of-mouth offered student protest movements the momentum to be wide reaching and garnered support on a massive scale. To gain widespread mobilization of other students, the Soweto student leaders coordinated meetings through word-of-mouth [11]. Nkinyangi highlights how there is power and immediacy of the mass media, especially television, in conveying messages simultaneously to millions of people around the world, at the time, it radically altered perceptions of how change can occur [1]. However, we understand the limitations of mass media and word of mouth, in many of the cases, mobilization in a number of historical protests was relatively slow and would be facilitated over a number of days or weeks [11]. Furthermore, radio and television media may be interested in protest events, should other stories gain more airtime or the political interests of the station may not be aligned with protest (i.e., government owned media entities), thereby providing no coverage on various campaigns. The reliance of mass media and word-of-mouth for activism remains useful; however, they remain limiting to those who wish to engage more in-depth with the campaigns or protests.

Today's technological advancements and the evolution of social media, notably Twitter and Facebook and communication tools have offered more channels through which to communicate, widening the reach and speed of protests both nationally and internationally [28]. One of the first protests to gain global recognition for the use of social media was the 'Facebook revolution' of Egypt [28]. While not necessarily related to university students, the Egyptian political protest saw thousands mobilized utilizing Facebook and Twitter as a means of communicating the meetings. Halupka sees the nature of contemporary civic engagement as an evolving process to be a fluid mix of new digital action within traditional political participation. He suggests a new term, information activism, whereby activities in digital expressions has a spectrum of participation and at every level are now part of the process of political change [34]. This new concept however does not come without critique. Clicktivism, slacktivism, filter bubbles and other use of social media for awareness raising for certain campaigns are seen as 'non-political', providing superficial information raising or providing a mirage of participation in politics. Halupka identifies as Type 1 of basic engagement of people who were not participating previously and providing personal opinion. Type 2 politicization are those who take one step further, those who digitally engage in the public along with such actions as mobilized

protest. Social media is used to quickly communicate messages of mobilization, awareness of campaigns, and document unfolding events (in some cases, those which would not show up in traditional media nor through the lens of protesters). Type 3 is engagement with government through digital means through legislation and taken up by the appropriate government department. Unpacking these topologies help to frame this study within the emerging realm of how social media is being used in reshaping activism and political participation or movements.

The South African #feesmustfall movement has also been noteworthy in its use of social media, particularly through Twitter, to spread the message and mobilize people in disparate locations across the country and amongst a wide variety of students and workers. One source was estimating that 300 tweets were sent every minute regarding the protests during the height of the October 2015 protests [35]. In addition, this movement and the available social media platform have been significant in allowing for students to express their plights of poverty and inequality while remaining within higher education and the country at large. The remarkable speed at which students across the country mobilized merits more attention and a deeper analysis. Through immediate communication channels such as texting application, Whatsapp and through Twitter sharing tools, information on higher education protests was shared instantly; in ICTD, the inquiry of social justice through means of social media has become a worthwhile investigation. This paper, while contributing to broader literature on student protests, focuses on a field that has received little scholarly attention; that of social media as a tool for anti-poverty activism within the context of higher education in South Africa. The paper unpacks the usefulness of social media as an instrument for mobilization around issues of poverty and inequality, particularly among poor university students. Furthermore, the paper focuses on the #feesmustfall from a Type 2 information activism perspective, especially through using the social media capacity of poor students to express a need for change, re-imagine their future and voice their resistance to unequal conditions inherited from their history.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Under current competitive conditions and limited government budgets, there is a trend of restructuring tertiary education institutions to become efficient through means of flexibility. This is not only through workers' contractual arrangements, but through the platform of course delivery), massification and corporatization [15, 16]. The retreat of government in their role within tertiary education is particularly seen through funding cuts. The constitutional right to education, which also promotes access to education for all, seeks to ensure that the state provides the means to assist those unable to afford the cost of education, particularly the poor. Through this right, the citizens would have a fair opportunity to become involved in the skilled workforce and become active within the global economy. However, the devolvement of state provision is creating a model that allows only those who can afford the costs or those who can access loans to enter into the academic fraternity. In a country like South Africa where historic inequality and poverty have disfigured its landscape, the trend away from the right to education is creating a national and international crisis. This is apparent from protests for reforms in higher education that have taken place in many countries in 2015, including the USA, UK, Germany, Brazil, Ghana, Nigeria, Zambia, Kenya, Indonesia, Canada, Uganda, Bangladesh, Ethiopia and South Africa.

3.1 Capacity to Aspire

An approach that would assist us in better understanding the recent events including the #feesmustfall movement from a poverty perspective is through Appadurai's concept of the 'capacity to aspire'. Capacity to aspire refers to "a navigational capacity which is nurtured by the possibility of real-world conjectures, and refutations compounds the ambivalent compliance of many subaltern populations with the cultural regimes that surround them" [7]. It is the refusal of the vulnerable or disadvantaged to be indecisive about the circumstances of today's society.

The refusal is also against the conditions of poverty, the condition that suppresses the poor from attaining their dreams [17]. Many South African students have been raised within poor backgrounds and have yet to see the democratic and economic change promised to their parents as well as themselves [31]. Latest poverty figures show just 45.5 percent of individuals or 22 million South Africans are classified as poor (using the upper-bound poverty line R620 adjusted to 2011 using consumer price index (CPI) adjustments) in South Africa [38]. Therefore this group has reached a point to rise up, be aspired for change and use their voice to "debate, contest, inquire, and participate critically" [17]. Such a view is well situated for several of the South African tertiary institution students in framing their protest as not just the need to lower the tuition fees for their studies, but rather, as dissent to the persistent structural inequality they feel that applies to their lives as they struggle financially to obtain their university degree. Further, aligning themselves with out-sourced workers at universities, the student movement also has recognized the plight of an increasingly casualised labour force in South Africa.

Capacity to aspire falls within the frame of the multiple dimensions of poverty. Sen's work looks beyond the ideas of wealth and money as the sole indicators of life improvement, and rather "places freedom, dignity and moral well-being at the heart of welfare and its economics" [18]. Underlying Sen's development of freedom, (Chapter 11: social choice and individual behavior), is "the relevance of values and reasoning in enhancing freedoms and in achieving development" [18]. Critiques against the possibility of "reasoned progress," includes the argument that since humans have such a wide range of self-interest, it cannot be possible for us to come together towards a social action or a call for justice. However, Sen argues that it is in fact "(…) a sense of justice that is among the concerns that can move people and often does" [18]. He contends that humans can share social values and organize to defend such as through "institutions of public action and protest" [18].

The capacity to aspire complements this idea that people can share in a common social action or for justice. The fight for equality in education in this case, allows us to hear the lived experience of poor students within the higher education system. The uniqueness of October 2015 and the use of social media specifically, and communication technologies more generally, can also be explained through Toyama's (2011) amplification theory [19]. He argues that ICTs are amplifiers of existing dynamics and therefore an alliance of socially just minded people can share or voice their thoughts together publicly and engage in reaching the future that we wish. Lastly, scholars in the field of ICTD have used the framework of aspirations to foster and amplify people's hopes [20, 21]. In this paper we advance this theory by understanding that ICTs can be used to communicate the aspirations of the poor, and in this case, students from disadvantaged backgrounds, to

express their disappointment of slow change from past promises and their hopes for a better future through protest.

3.2 Research question and three heuristics

This paper seeks to ask the question: can we observe the strengthened capability of the poor through the amplification of their "voice" through ICT? The recent October 2015 events in South Africa provide an opportunity to hear young persons' understanding of their future orientation and their rejection of the current market structures of tuition fee increases. This paper uses gathered data from downloaded images, tweets, and the lived experiences of the authors and students and the data is then analyze to understand students' experiences of higher education and poverty in post-apartheid South Africa.

This data will be analysed through three concepts within Appadurai's theoretical concept, the capacity to aspire: the politics of recognition, compliance and future orientation. Firstly, there is the "politics of recognition", or ethical compulsion to admit that there are those who live and share a worldview much different from one's own. Once the politics of recognition is established, there are markers which note the acceptance of the views of the other. Appardurai states that "certain use of words and arrangements of action that we may call cultural, may be especially strategic sites for the production of consensus and critical matter for anyone concerned with helping the poor to help themselves" [7]. These politics of recognition and social markers are used in this study to understand the marginalized voice which came out during the #feesmustfall campaign, particularly the voice of low income and disadvantaged students.

More specifically, we analyse the data to understand the expressions of student voice through the complements of social media and on-the-ground protest. Through this student perspective, the aim of the movement was to bring this voice together and produce forms of cultural consensus in order to advance their interests of wealth, equality and dignity. We investigate these concepts through the personal reflection of the co-authors who participated in the protests as well as review tweets and other social media messages during the #feesmustfall week of the October 2015 protests. All authors are either students or staff or both at a South African institution and we are jointly motivated to participate in the protest as we believe in social justice; we ourselves deal everyday with the realities of frustration as well as resilience of our student colleagues who attempt to create a better life for themselves and their family through the advancement of their education.

Appardurai makes two points about the concepts of poverty and culture of future orientation. Firstly, the context of the student, we ask whether there is an application of "a deeply ambivalent relationship to the dominant norms of the societies in which they live." In the analysis we try to gain whether or not there is an "irony… allow[ing] the poor to maintain some dignity in the worst conditions of oppression and inequality" [7]. More specifically, the paper analyzes the personal reflection of place in society, and challenges of the poor in their perpetual battle within a concept of "compliance" or that there is "deep moral attachment to norms and beliefs that directly support their own degradation" [7]. We try to observe through the data whether such is the case. "The poor are frequently in a position where they are encouraged to subscribe to norms whose social effect is to further diminish their dignity, exacerbate their inequality, and deepen their lack of access to material goods and services" [7]. However in this paper, we reflect on those in this protest who are against compliance of the social norms, they have had enough of the social norms in society. Rather, they fight for the recognition of and resistance against the continuation of poor conditions that surround them and their family's lives.

Lastly, the concept of future orientation allows for the navigation towards the future of a person and derives the prospective path for a person to bolster one's self and changing the current conditions of one's well-being. Rather the protests are seen as the historic and opportune moment to take on an intervention of change that will have positive results for the students and lead their lives towards a future that they want. Furthermore, the student protest converge with larger societal issues, mainly the ongoing push to ensure that citizens are secured decent and improved job opportunities as opposed to the emerging trend of low wage, flexible work activities, seen as 'outsourcing' for the poor. Workers united with students in a shared sentiment for their children and in a more secure future for themselves. Some of the strongest messages from the protest included the refusal of a future that replicates the past. One term which resonated with future orientation was the Nguni language "asijiki" or translated to 'we will not retract' or "an evocative phrase used in youth politics during the liberation struggle, which means literally "we do not turn back" [22]. The term projects a commitment to a resolution of social justice and economic emancipation and has been used in other southern African countries, including by Zimbabwean informational activist, @BabaJukwaAsijik. These concepts help explain the capacity to aspire within the #feesmustfall campaign.

4. METHODOLOGY

In this exploration of emerging forms of activism through social media, we use qualitative methods to collect and analyse data. The study consists of content analysis through the review of social media posts, as well as autoethnography (method discussed below). Firstly, we used the data of social media posts during the height of the main protest because the main and most up to date sources of information were found in social media rather than mainstream media. Also, the mechanism to follow or read about the protest came through the Twitter hashtag, #feesmustfall which was then used as reference to the protest. As for the content analysis, the study downloaded data (using an online twitter archiver tool) of the most 'popular' tweets (i.e., most re-tweets and favourites in tranches of 1000 re-tweets, 500 re-tweets, 200 re-tweets, and 5 re-tweets and proportion of 1 re-tweet) using the hashtag #feesmustfall during the height of the protest, 19 to 25 October 2015. Over 6500 Twitter messages were analyzed. The top tweets provided a sense of sentiment highly supported by those following the campaign. Besides Twitter message content, we also collected other social media content mainly through images, voice recordings and video from the following sources: Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, blogs, Sound Cloud, YouTube, and Flickr using the hashtag #feesmustfall. These platforms were chosen mainly through inductive process, as we conducted a search of the hashtag, emerging social media content would then be archived and analysed. The images mainly provided visual representations and video of the placards being displayed or songs or messages being shared by the students. We further complement these data with the autoethnography, both participating in the protest in October 2015 and using participant observation (via daily field notes) during the movement by the co-authors who attended these protests. Autoethnography was used because we as authors are working and living within the South African tertiary education system, some of our authors also engaged as participants of the protests themselves, providing a snapshot of the unfolding events during the height of the mass campaign. The use

of autoethnography, or the use of our own experiences, brings insight when certain phenomena or perspectives would otherwise be neglected in the conventional production of knowledge [36]. Positioning of self is brought to the fore in this type of method particularly as a legitimate source of knowledge in relation to the knowledge context, in this case the student protest in South Africa. In other words, the entrenchment of the authors in conversation and solidarity with the student protest makes the researchers an integral and alternative way of knowing. The latter includes notes taken during the protests and personal reflections by these co-authors.

A textual analysis was used, similar to that of Cuiker *et al.* [24]. We utilise inductive analysis, which is when "patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data"; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis" [23]. We systematically identified key words and phrases that emerged from the content and these texts were coded, with their categories developing substantive personal meaning of the student protesters. We focused on messages highlighting the disadvantage and vulnerable well-being of student lives. We further grouped emerging themes into Appadurai's concepts within the capacity to aspire: politics of recognition, compliance and future orientation [7]. In this sense, the methodology includes aspects of reflective topical autobiography, a method of analysis proposed by Johnstone [25]. Through triangulation of the themes of Tweets/personal narratives of students around education and poverty, we present our findings of marginalization, 'being belittled', and future orientation.

We are aware of the limitations of the online Twitter archiver tool in downloading the masses of messages as well as the possible exclusion of some tweets and some voices who were not interested in the protest. However, for the purpose of this study, we develop an in-depth method to review the use of social media interwoven with author personal narratives . The limited scope of this paper allows us enough space to feel there is still value in reviewing the proportion of social media data and personal reflections.

5. NARRATIVES ON POVERTY AND EDUCATION THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Students' narratives that surfaced through social media as a result of the #feesmustfall campaign are numerous. While the aim of the campaign was to bring attention to university annual increases to student fees, student perspectives were much broader than this one goal. One of the striking themes revolved around poverty and inequality in South Africa. Through social media, the world was exposed to images of placards online that not only revealed descriptions of current impoverished conditions of students but it also documented the on-the-ground social movement across all campuses in the country. Many students used social media and this protest as the medium to have a voice and express their daily struggles, frustrations and their hope for the future. For instance, when I, Ndumiso, joined the protests, at three universities in the Gauteng province and later at the ANC's Chief Albert Luthuli House and the Union Buildings, the narratives that emerged from a number of protesting students was that of daily poverty at home and at the university. One young male student from one university in the city of Pretoria asked me why it had become so easy for them (as young people and students) to be ignored. He further indicated that he and his 'comrades' were prepared to "expose" the injustices in the country, and their cellphones were the one tool they had to fight the system.

We are here {[Union Buildings] to also shut it down. We will burn it and <u>take pictures</u> for the world to see our anger. Our parents are poor at home and we are their only hope" (one Author's recollection. Translated from isiZulu)

General viewpoints and expression from protesting students complemented this position. This was captured and observed through the use the #feesmustfall throughout social media.. During the most intense period of 22-23 October 2015, social media was used to convey the immediacy of the issues of the students as they noted that their fight was more than just about high tuition fees, but about rights to education which appear to be blocked when fees are unaffordable to the poor. Furthermore, the larger South African context of poor service delivery of sanitation, water, housing, unemployment articulates the lived experiences of gaining a higher education and expresses the greater struggles we wish to overcome for a better life in the future.

#FeesMustFall is more than fees. It's abt (sic) #SouthAfrica ppl's rt to quality education, esp working class, black, poor.

Don't be distracted by 0%. It literally means NOTHING has changed. Fees remain the barrier between the poor and an education #FeesMustFall

Also, social media, through various placards or recordings of personal narratives, captured the emotions and experiences of poor students. For example, I, Chumani, made news headlines when cell phone footage of myself and one of the prominent South African politicians had a profound argument regarding poverty, exclusion, inequality and the proposed 11 percent fee increment at the University where I studied. The video quickly went viral (46 541 views in a single day) across different social media platforms, to further fuel the students' protest. The following is a transcription from that encounter.

My father died last year in October LA . . . under your jurisdiction. he died in a shack, he waited there for eight hours, dead in the same house that we live in. Why are you having fun while we have things like that in this country . . . . you are complaining about the size of a toilet, I work with the bucket system Every day my parents have to walk outside in the rain and have the sun scorching them to get to a bloody toilet. What is that? We have one tap for fifty houses in this city, in your city. Why are we living on a wetland that is under a nature reserve in the LA Sense in your city, please explain that to me? This eleven percent is personal to me. If my mum loses her job in January, absolutely nobody of her seven children will be able to go to school, we will die. Our parents are living on mines . . . . as we speak. Now this eleven percent is going to take away the . . . . and here's what I'm going to tell you. You have to do something about this, this is not a joke.

Social media was used to relay the message of poverty experienced personally by students at the gatherings. The protest is amplified through social media providing a means to show the student challenge against economic oppression of the past and present. It also exposed the persistence of racialised tension especially through inadequate resource availability in South Africa which filters down to poor black South African students. With rising costs, these same students are unable to afford registration and tuition fees and this impoverished state thereby perpetuate current conditions of exclusion from higher education.

The #feesmustfall movement was affected directly by the conventional television and radio media as the students also relied on them to relay their grievances and struggle to the world. The television media capitalized on the campaign and in most of the

cases, failed to relay the real broader message of equality. Often, broadcast media cited students as unruly, violent and deviant. The broader message of poverty, inequality and exclusion did not surface outside of social media as the broadcast media rather propagandized these grievances by portraying students negatively. My (Ndumiso's) observation of the violence that ensued at the Union Buildings for example was a direct reaction to the threat of police presence and their moving closer to students. However, the media in this regard suggested that the violence was caused by unruly students.

While some students used placards to share information around their poor backgrounds, or they were broadly seen to express their struggles and resistance through social media outlets, our study is also cautious of the silencing of voice through the very same digital tools. Firstly, we question the equality of tweets reaching the global audience as they are provided within the online platforms. The analysis found that most tweets which were popular (indicated through the number of retweets and marked as 'favourite') came from local celebrities, social media consultants and in one case a politician. Between October 19-23, 2015, only 20 tweets that reached over 1000 re-tweets and/or favourites, of those one was identified as a UCT medical student. The rest appears to be from celebrities such as United States television talk show host Trevor Noah (South African born), or the South African Minister of Sport attempting to ride the bandwagon and boost their public image. This questions the voice dominates in the twitter sphere. Furthermore, methodologically, the team experienced challenges in retrieving all messages from #feesmustfall given the limited capacity of the free version of the Twitter archiver tool itself, and the prohibitive cost of the professional version which appears to focus on its commercial application. Secondly, I, Chumani, participated in an online chat where I was responding to questions on race, my voice was moderated and not included within the online platform. #stellies rage. While this is beyond the focus of this paper, future investigation of censorship in these forums is noted.

Through social media, there was still the chance to democratize media space which was previously limited to a few media sources. Various television news channels at the time had provided limited coverage of the student protest at parliament and at the union buildings. The coverage and discourse chosen for national broadcast was usually that of anger and violence, and use of heavy police force. The framing of students on conventional media was to place students in negative light. They narrated the movement as based on the goal of a 0% increment and not emphasizing the financial exclusion and outsourcing of jobs in a country with a high unemployment rate (currently at 24.5% of the working population [37]) and lack of free and quality education. The movement was not only about registered students but those who have been excluded for financial reasons and future generations who will miss out on educational opportunities should structural conditions remain the same.

Social media provided a space for students which were not shared by conventional media such as television and broadcast radio. Conventional media was sure to cover police barriers and student protesters shouting at authoritative figures. Students used the online space as an alternative story, an opportunity to share their personal stories through photo, video, audio, placards and through Twitter or Facebook messages. They wished to influence others to not think of the protest merely as a violent expression of disobedience. Rather, the #feesmustfall movement found students wanting to express and to make heard their daily struggle of disadvantaged students. This space allowed the nation to not only

know about the plight of poor students, but shared the alternative images of non-violence, prayer vigils, and cleaning of residences, which was not shown on television. This became the medium for students to express themselves and have the feeling of being heard, particularly personifying poverty and giving poverty a face. Those who sympathised with the protest had also set up platforms and sent tweets for ways to donate airtime, food and other basic needs to students who were participating in the protests. In this case it is the students from marginalised backgrounds who are supported through fragile mechanisms that with any increase of their current expenses would disallow them the dignity to complete their education or their degree programme. These student perspectives are presented as narrative and through social media messages in the next section.

5.1 Marginalisation and Gender

Students from over 20 universities in South Africa participated in protests as many were faced with the problem of a possible university study fees increment. However, more broadly, the protest wished to address the socioeconomic issues such as poverty that many of the students face.

Students are on a study aid and/or bursary, loan and scholarship, and such financial mechanisms are in some cases not distributed as are promised in their bursary agreements, nor are the amounts enough to pay fees; this continuous uncertainty brings stress to poor students throughout the year. The student's inability to pay for their studies meant that they could be excluded academically because of the lack of finance [2]. Within the Twitter feed, this sense of marginalization was reflected in messages about being poor and the humiliation and anxiety of being able to cover the expenses of university.

Actually, the fact that every year I must prove to Nfsas that I'm still poor is offensive. #FeesMustFall" (National Student Financial Aid Scheme)

too rich for NSFAS, too poor for fees, and too black for a bank loan"

Yall don't see the bigger picture, Current Fees are too high, poor Black people still can't afford university, NSFAS is a trap #FeesMustFall"

Reflecting on the tweets and participation in the protest, the sentiments point to concerns about a democracy that was expected to bring freedom, liberty and equality.

Further, issues of gender also came out strongly. The first images of leadership within the initial campus protest were of the student-elected representatives, both of whom were women. Interestingly, the movement was mainly lead by female students instead of just participating as protesters. They adorned their heads with 'doeks' or African head-scarfs and their narratives both on the ground and social media came out clearly. The social media reflected this leadership to be a revolution led by women and complementing this, was the hashtag #patriarchymustfall.

In regards to student perspectives, narratives and placards had attempted to draw attention of poor students being highly vulnerable from the high cost of fees. What I Ndumiso observed at one university for example were young women protesting for their voices to be heard. They held placards pronouncing that they can no longer rely on alternative means of gaining sustainable livelihoods. For example, one student expressed on their posterboard that they had opted for sex-work to earn money for her education. In a few placards, the use of commercial sex work terms like "sugar daddies" (otherwise portrayed as men providing

gifts and presents to young, most likely vulnerable women) or references to single motherhood symbolised how female students may be resorting to extreme coping mechanisms in order to financially survive and cover the costs of their years in tertiary education. Furthermore, the expressions of single mothers who, despite being the most vulnerable to poverty, are making financial sacrifices to ensure that their children receive a higher education, was highlighted. Such choices of expression are an attempt to recognize the efforts of students and family members and to give dignity to the hard work and efforts required to ensure the completion of a student's education.

10%?? There aren't enough sugar daddies Habib!! (The vice-chancellor of Wits).

My mom is too single for these fees #Uprising

The presence and voice of women was clear and could not be ignored. However, the media focused primarily on male participation to the silencing of the stronger female voices. Social media again play a critical role in capturing the narratives of women protesters and their leadership inter alia. A striking example was a Facebook post by one of the female leaders at Wits who wrote:

Comrades for too long we have allowed a system that perpetually excludes the poorest of the poor from the gates of higher learning. For too long we have allowed lilly white councils to mercilessly dictate how we should live, how we should eat, how we should study and what we should study.

The above quote is a woman navigating through the country's socioeconomic landscape and calling for solidarity among the poor. The issue of marginalization further cut across generations, and the #feesmustfall movement sought to expose it. Female students were in essence also protesting for their families and future generations, as articulated by another University of the Witwatersrand female student on Facebook:

Comrades we have neglected our mothers and fathers being abused at the hands of outsourced companies on our watch on our campus under our gaze. For too long young people in our country have been marginalized and abused for being born poor… It must never be forgotten that it was us as students who remained resolute and determined in our commitment to free education. It is not just for us or for next year, it is a legacy for generations to come.

References were made to promises of a better life at the dawn of democracy in 1994 that have failed to materialize amongst many of South Africa's poor families. The social media messaging of the voice of the most vulnerable students hopes to provoke a sense of empathy from the nation and the global for their attempts to improve their lives through higher education within the context of extraordinary expenses and conditions set up for their failure.

To underprivileged students, education has been seen to be the main tool to directly change their futures. For students freedom is the ability to continue with their studies and a violation of that right would be being excluded on the basis of money. The students were clear about exposing how high cost of education limited them from pursuing their aspired careers. Some of the tweets referenced a cycle of poverty, where higher fees can stop the poor from studying.

How will I become an educator if I can't educate myself

Apartheid said you are not educated, stay poor. Democracy says you are too poor, stay uneducated. Its been 21 years. #FeesMustFall

Our parents were sold dreams in 1994, We are just here for our refund.

This last Twitter message brings forth the democratic promises made to South Africans by the elected 1994 government. In this situation, students have understood the changes that their parents had expected within a new non-racial society, economic emancipation, social justice, and the chances to redress the inequalities of the past. Rather, the students question whether the promises of a better life made to their parents have been realized. The promises included the re-circulated post of the African National Congress (ANC) poster "free education for all". Students at the protest raise the issues of accountability for the changes promised 21 years ago.

5.2 Belittlement and honour

Breaking down educational barriers would include breaking down the colonial structures that are still in power and that can invisibly (and visibly) perpetuate an implicit feeling of belittlement amongst students. When I, Ndumiso, visited the University of Pretoria during the protests, we spoke of transforming the entire campus. For them, breaking colonial cultures had to start at their campus, which according to the Black students I spoke with, was another hub of White supremacy. Also, among the resolutions presented at the ANC headquarters was the idea of decolonizing academic spaces and allowing black students access to these spaces. The sense of struggle I observed by following students was beyond fees increment. Students' poverty rendered them vulnerable and in a long spell of desperation. There was a proposed fee increase of 10% from the 2015 to 2016 tuition and this resuscitated an anger that had been harbored for prolonged periods. The depth of this anger was revealed at Parliament and then at the Union Buildings when students refused to run when faced with the threat of police stun-grenades.

The high and persistent inequalities of South Africa reproduce a social norm whereby a small number of underprivileged students graduate, instilling a false sense of hope onto the underprivileged mass. Without bold action to break the social norm is then a failure of change experienced by many students who are in fear of being part of a population of unskilled and uneducated workers to be exploited. The pursuit of business 'as usual' when the inequality amongst students is so great is a day-to-day injustice faced by poor students. As one student in the YouTube video stated, 'money is shoved in my face'. The arrogance of the wealthy and those in power serves to belittle the poor student.

On October 23, 2015, the South African President, Jacob Zuma, promised to address the students. When the time came, he chose not to present himself in front of the parliament buildings where the gathering took place. Prior to this, the Higher Education Minister had mocked the #feesmustfall campaign by jokingly stating his own hashtag #studentsmustfall [27]. Such lack of leadership amongst the main political party was seen by the students as arrogant and continued belittlement of their existence.

Fissions were already appearing the student movement itself, and in some cases, students were belittled by their protesting peers. Some tweets were calling students from the township campuses as 'agent provocateurs' sent in by the ruling political party to disrupt the peaceful protest. This framing was used to be divisive, to attempt to belittle the efforts of poor students who are tired of humiliation handed to them, and further separate the movement from its cause by dissecting the movement in to subgroups.

Those mocking TUT Students display the same disdain that gvt has shown to poor black township kids & they see no contradiction #feesmustfall

However considerable momentum has been gained by 23 October as expressed by the placard:

they tried to bury us; they didn't know we were seeds.

5.3 Future Orientation

The end of complicity and silence was a theme derived from the students' perspectives. The refusal of allowing the same patterns of society to continue and rather a better future was framed by many within the movement.

The feeling on the ground saw many privileged students reluctant to join the movement in many universities; they are aware that the success of the campaign would grant the underprivileged students direct opportunities. The underprivileged would acquire the required skills and qualifications and they would then compete for future jobs. Many of the #feesmustfall activists are first generation students meaning that they are the first in their families to attend varsity or university. This means that their success in higher education is the way out of poverty for their families and not obtaining a degree could lead to future suffering. Some of the students who took part in the strike that week had lost family members in their homestead, but the same students continued to demonstrate and did not go home; they had no choice but to stay because their futures depended on it.

Tweets also complemented student perspective as this period being a time to negotiate their future. One protester expresses his determination to break the cycle of generational poverty through his aspiration to one day becoming a veterinarian. This post particularly reflects on the past and previous employment of his family and through his aspired career choice, the student expresses his interest in an alternative path.

My Grandfather was a garden boy. My father is a garden boy. (won't happen to me) I wanna be a VET" [1,010 Retweets and 715 Favorites]

Furthermore, accompanying the #feesmustfall hashtag was #endoutsourcing hashtag. In including this hashtag, the movement tries to implicitly connect the issues of contractual low-wage labour and poverty to the financial burden of students. This alliance of student and worker is complementary. As expressed by one author, today's students will be the skilled workers of tomorrow. The students do not want to arrive at their place of work under the conditions of flexible, low wage short-term contractual labour. Therefore if students do not protest now, we will have to do it as workers. Outsourcing becomes the symbol of the worker, the low wage worker who may likely be the mother or father or guardian of the children at the varsity. It tries to link the context of students who come to university but placed under heavy pressures: financial (in trying to find the means to pay fees and maintain their everyday lives as well as support those who remain back home) and emotional (the family is counting on your educational completion so that you will be able to find a good paying job to support them all). The alignment or alliance between students and workers was strategic and powerful.

Children were also mentioned as part of future orientation amongst student protesters. There was a twitter image of a class of young children with notes of their future jobs, should they be allowed for such dreams to be realised if they are able to receive free quality education. Young students in uniforms from a local elementary school were also shown holding up a #feesmustfall

cardboard placard in support of the campaign. One facebook entry speaks about the ability to explain to their future children the reason why there is no longer financial exclusion from tertiary education in South Africa, explaining that it all began with this campaign.

When my grandchildren can't imagine the pressures of financial exclusion, when the only criteria to study at the next level is ability on academic grounds… I pray God grants me a chance to tell about where it started…

In summary, student narratives of poverty around a lesser known concept of the 'capacity to aspire' project themes of marginalization ('politics of recognition'), being belittled ('compliance') and future orientation and these themes were clearly articulated during the early period of the #feesmustfall movement through various social media platforms.

6. LESSONS LEARNED FROM #FEESMUSTFALL

The #feesmustfall protests opened up opportunities not just for the students, but also for poor and marginalized South African citizens. These protests have shown how the 'voiceless' citizens can start to challenge their poverty and look into the future with positivity. More so, this movement has introduced a new wave of cultural affiliation and social movements that denounce political loyalty in favor of addressing poverty and inequality. This is not unique to South Africa. Other movements have emerged across the world including #blacklivesmatter or #Protests.

The protests in South Africa may have the potential to be a turning point in this country's history. This is a turning point which also has a symbolism of 1976 and the symbolism of the digital age of youth. The stories about youth at university are now evident and widely debated including their struggle with fees, refusal to be trapped in the system - debt, racism, high costs of living, structural inequality. These coalesced during October, 2015 into a common voice refusing to see the perpetuation of poverty immobility. Then the digital platform, Twitter and Facebook has facilitated and in its structure itself to include a hashtag on #feesmustfall influences or even amplifies the widespread disaffection for the current mode of South African and global society

What is not being articulated is the rage, hope, disappointment, fear, force, frustration, commitment and pain that students need to put up with at school and home. The students recognised that justice was needed before equality because it was not only about the increment but the threat of ongoing poverty. Equality recognise people as equal and grants them opportunities on the same terms. The students believe that they deserve a better future because they work hard despite their current conditions.

Appadurai (2004) argues that cultural affiliation has almost entirely been viewed in terms of loyalty. He further cautions that this view pays very little (or no) attention to exit and voice. In this paper, and closely linked to Appadurai's beliefs, we contend that voice is critical in engaging the question of dissent [7]. The October 2015 movement showed an emerging dissent away from the status quo and political party loyalty that has historically shaped the protest space in South Africa. Using social media as a platform for protest, students spoke in solidarity with a single voice about their poverty, inequality and oppression they face in and around spaces of education.

The capacity to aspire framework further advocates for strengthening the capability of the poor and to cultivate their voice

[7]. In this regard, social media, and Twitter in particular, has a played a significant role in facilitating poor students grievances. It has more importantly given these students an easy and fast platform to articulate their desperation and destitute. Similar to the work of Amartya Sen (1999), the #feesmustfall movement has played a significant role in placing matters of freedom, dignity and moral well-being into participatory governance [18]. The movement is about restoring the dignity and self-esteem of the disadvantaged non-white people who have been deprived of their basic human rights and exploited by the delegates and ambassadors of capitalism, while they remain poor, landless, inferior and shameful. This is captured by on tweet:

#FeesMustFall is a GLOBAL VICTORY. Higher education remains inaccessible for the poor worldwide. Dear SA youth: you are shaping the WORLD!

As is evident from the Twitter analysis presented in this paper, the poor, students in particular, are frequently in a position where they are encouraged to subscribed to norms that further diminish their dignity, exacerbate their inequality and deepen their lack of access to services" [7]. The #feesmustfall movement has been a quest to reverse this status quo. Through its capacity to aspire, social media has strengthened the capacity of students to exercise their voice and oppose vital direction for collective education as they desire. In essence, social media has emerged as the voice of the students. It has become a cultural capacity that engages social, political and economic issues "in terms of ideologies, doctrines and norms which are widely shared and credible" [7]. The capacity to aspire is strengthened through practice, repetition, exploration and refutation. The #feesemustfall protests has achieved this endeavor and conceived as a navigational capacity for future prospects.

Finally social media tools have also been the virtual location for the circulation of strong South Africa and black consciousness figures. From Nelson Mandela, Thomas Sankara, Steve Biko, Chris Hani, to Frantz Fanon, their famous quotes and their images were strewn on Facebook feeds, re-tweets and Instagram shares. These images cultivate the African student spirit to re-call the inspiration of strong leaders of the past and to continue the struggle for the future these leaders had fought for. The circulation of these inspiration messages is an important step towards de-colonisation.

7. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the expression of students' lived experiences through the placards shared on Twitter and messages documenting an alternative view of the protest helps to articulate the active and capable information activism amongst South African students during the October 2015 #feesmustfall protests. Being at the protests and within the tertiary education systems that set the bar on registration and tuition fees, we, the authors, see these placards translated to the lived experiences and the everyday struggle of our students looking for ways to pay their way through a three or four year degree. The protest and social media used to monitor and share these experiences provided testimony of the resilience of our students to truly fight for their education, in order to meet a better future for themselves and their families.

While these capabilities of voice were clearly expressed and heard, even through an alternative lens of peace and an aim for non-racialism, the student protests did not come peacefully. As students and staff who participated in the protest in different ways, we felt the presence of police infringed the student's constitutional rights; as their presence caused students to feel

threatened and heightened the risk of violence. In some cases, students were treated as criminals, which was traumatising because they initially embarked on a peaceful protest. They were abused and belittled with words and actions even from the South African Minister of Higher Education and Training. Many campuses saw physical clashes with the use of stun grenades, rubber bullets and tear gas from the police. There were also reports of assaults by students on students, as well as on academic staff and the university paramedics. The damage to buildings and university assets has been substantial. The #feesmustfall students were not spared the violence of the police brutality. The country has a history of police violence; not only during the apartheid era, but in the new democracy and an example of the brutality towards strikers would be the August 2012 Marikana massacre in which 47 mine workers were killed. This comparison of violence is shared to provide context of South Africa where this is a daily expression of life as well as the frustration and fear taken up by the poor. These police tactics are a mechanism to dismantle the voice of the frustrated students, portray poor students as the continued social norm as uncivilized, and further belittle their efforts for a break away from current social norms.

From the time of this final publication submission, the #feesmustfall campaign remains unfinished and protests by students and workers continue across the country. All universities have not raised the tuition fees for 2016 and the national government have helped to increase the provision of bursaries to needy students. However, high costs of living, limitation of affordable housing, the retention of colonial artifacts in the pursuit of a decolonialised institution and the growing student support for outsourced workers to be paid a decent wage (instead of R1700-R2200 or $170 -$220 USD a month) have seen protests continue into 2016. Campuses have become securitized zones and contingency plans, ironically include the use of social media and ICT, have been put in place to contain the impact of future protest action on the teaching program. ICTs have been a useful tool to complement the social movement for young academics to voice their struggles and demands for the future; we continue to observe their use in the months to come. 'Asijiki' is profound amongst the student protest in South Africa and globally: there is no turning back to the conditions of the past, and we re-imagine a future worth living for through these struggles.

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