

## **SUMMARY**

In October 2015, students from the University of Witwatersrand (WITS) engaged in passionate protest after an announcement that university fees were set to increase by 10.5% in the following year. Nearly concurrently, students from the University of Cape Town (UCT) gathered to demand the felling of the statue of Cecil Rhodes. Both protests, termed Fees Must Fall and Rhodes Must Fall respectively, saw the spread of visually striking images, spread by the activists, news stations and spectators to the events on social media sites. My dissertation explores the role of visual activism from the Fees Must Fall movement with a focus on how the protest imagery both characterised and motivated spectators to side with the cause. With the American hashtag movement Black Lives Matter and Rhodes Must Fall as comparative case studies, I investigate the iconography of the movements, focussing on the use of the clenched fist gesture, images of pain and suffering, as well as transformation portraiture. I further explore the online dimension of the sharing of visual activism images and speculate as to how social networking sites encourage political activists to engage in affective arguments through their visual communication.

**Title of dissertation:** Online visual activism in the #FeesMustFall university protests (2015-2016)

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**Degree:** Magister Artium (Visual Studies)

## **KEY TERMS**

Fees Must Fall, Rhodes Must Fall, Black Lives Matter, visual activism, affect theory, hermeneutics, activism, iconography, student protests, apartheid, social media

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**ONLINE VISUAL ACTIVISM  
IN THE #FEESMUSTFALL UNIVERSITY PROTESTS  
(2015-2016)**

BY

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for the degree Magister Artium (Visual Studies)

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

		Page
	LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS.....	vii
	LIST OF FIGURES.....	ix
1	INTRODUCTION: THE NETWORKED AGE OF ACTIVISM.....	1
	1.1 Background to the study: the rise of Web 2.0 and its role in visual activism.....	1
	1.1.1 Types of social media and definitions.....	2
	1.1.2 The struggle visualised: #BlackLivesMatter, #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall.....	5
	1.2 Need for the study.....	14
	1.3 Overview of the chapters.....	15
2	APPROACHES TO VISUAL ACTIVISM.....	17
	2.1 Philosophical approaches and theory.....	17
	2.1.1 Visual activism unpacked.....	19
	2.1.2 The feeling body: affect theory.....	21
	2.1.3 Hermeneutics and visual activism.....	24
	2.2 Definitions and clarifications.....	26
	2.3 Methodologies and literature review.....	28
	2.3.1 Literature review.....	29
3	PROTEST IMAGERY: A COMPARISON OF VISUAL ICONS IN #BLACKLIVESMATTER AND #FEESMUSTFALL.....	35
	3.1 Virtual communities and the #BlackLivesMatter and #FeesMustFall movements.....	37
	3.2 Icons that stir: activism in and out of the social media space.....	43
	3.3 Re-imagining political standing through gestures.....	56
4	AFFECT AND SOCIAL MEDIA: SHARING IMAGES OF RESISTANCE ONLINE.....	59
	4.1 Anti-apartheid movement protest imagery.....	61
	4.2 Bodies under siege: capturing injuries, violence and resistance in the RMF and FMF movements.....	69
	4.3 The affective impetus of online images of the FMF movement and the RMF movement.....	77
5	VISUAL ACTIVISM IN SOUTH AFRICA: TRANSFORMING UNIVERSITY SPACES.....	80
	5.1 The space of appearance in the virtual realm.....	83
	5.2 Seeing and being seen: surveillance culture and activism.....	89
	5.3 Creating a “rupture”: decolonising through visual iterations.....	93
6	CONCLUSION.....	100
	6.1 Summary of chapters.....	100
	6.2 Contribution of study.....	106
	6.3 Limitations of study.....	107

SOURCES CONSULTED ..... 109

## LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1	6
Figure 2	8
Figure 3	9
Figure 4	11
Figure 5	17
Figure 6	18
Figure 7	19
Figure 8	24
Figure 9	30
Figure 10	45
Figure 11	46
Figure 12	47
Figure 13	49
Figure 14	51
Figure 15	52
Figure 16	54
Figure 17	55
Figure 18	57
Figure 19	57
Figure 20	67
Figure 21	68
Figure 22	69
Figure 23	70

Figure 24	Screengrab from the #FeesMustFall #NationalRally Facebook, 2016, Johannesburg.....	71
Figure 25	Wandile Kasibe (photographer), “Shackville” erected on the UCT campus, 2016, Cape Town.....	75
Figure 26	Fees Must Fall protesters destroying public property, photographer unknown, 2016, Johannesburg.....	76
Figure 27	Ashleigh Furlong (photographer), Destruction of art at University of Cape Town, 2016, Cape Town.....	77
Figure 28	Andreas Georghiou (photographer), <i>I voted</i> , 2015, Pretoria.....	88
Figure 29	<i>Apartheid: a crime against humanity</i> , photographer unknown, 1985, location unknown.....	89
Figure 30	Sethembile Msezane, <i>Chupungu</i> , 2015, Cape Town.....	93
Figure 31	Pythokritos, <i>Winged victory of Samothrace</i> , 190 BC, Louvre, Paris.....	97



## ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS

<i>Affect</i>	Intense feeling that precedes cognitive interpretation during an event
<i>amaShoba</i>	Tufts of cows' tail used in Zulu traditional culture
<i>ANC</i>	African National Congress
<i>API</i>	Application Programme Interface
<i>Black Consciousness</i>	A movement started by Steve Biko that stood for black empowerment
<i>Black Panthers</i>	A political organisation founded in 1966 by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale.
<i>Black Power</i>	An umbrella term for the global black consciousness movements spanning the years 1960 to 1980.
<i>BLM</i>	#BlackLivesMatter
<i>Bottoms up approach</i>	Lateral information spread occurring on SNS
<i>CCTV</i>	Closed-Circuit Television
<i>Conscience collective</i>	Term conceived by Emilé Durkheim describing the formation of traditional communities
<i>Durée</i>	Term conceived by Anthony Giddens stating human action should not be considered as separate events but rather by a continuum of one proceeding to the next
<i>FMF</i>	#FeesMustFall
<i>Gemeinschaft</i>	A sociological term connoting kinship or community
<i>Gesellschaft</i>	A sociological term referring to impersonal societal relationships
<i>NP</i>	Nationalist Party
<i>PAC</i>	Pan-Africanist Congress

<i>RMF</i>	#RhodesMustFall
<i>Rupture</i>	Concept by Nicholas Mirzoeff, and involves making unequal situations more visible or asserting a right to be recognised and empowered despite those unequal circumstances
<i>SADF</i>	South African Defence Force
<i>SAPS</i>	South African Police Service
<i>SASO</i>	South African Student Organisation
<i>Shackville</i>	Shack erected on the University of Cape Town campus
<i>SNS</i>	Social network sites
<i>Space of appearance</i>	Places outside of the private realm, where individuals can coalesce and act
<i>Supertext</i>	A conversation between different mediums which supersede time and space.
<i>UCT</i>	University of Cape Town
<i>UFS</i>	University of Free State
<i>UJ</i>	University of Johannesburg
<i>UKZN</i>	University of KwaZulu Natal
<i>Virtual community</i>	An abstract social system based on mutual feelings rather than institutional relations such as religion or family blood-ties
<i>Weak-ties</i>	The theory that acquaintances are more influential to an individual than close friends
<i>Web 2.0</i>	The movement from static web pages to dynamic, social sites emphasising user contribution
<i>WITS</i>	University of Witswatersrand
<i>Affect</i>	Intense feeling that precedes cognitive interpretation during an event
<i>API</i>	Application Programme Interface

<i>BLM</i>	#BlackLivesMatter
<i>FMF</i>	#FeesMustFall
<i>Gemeinschaft</i>	A sociological term connoting kinship or community
<i>Gesellschaft</i>	A sociological term referring to impersonal societal relationships
<i>RMF</i>	#RhodesMustFall
<i>SNS</i>	Social network sites
<i>TUKS</i>	University of Pretoria
<i>Weak-ties</i>	The theory that acquaintances are more influential to an individual than close friends
<i>Web 2.0</i>	The movement from static web pages to dynamic, social sites emphasising user contribution

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION: THE NETWORKED AGE OF ACTIVISM

#### 1.1 Background to the study: the rise of Web 2.0 and its role in visual activism

The world is connected in an unprecedented manner. Communication technology has evolved to where a person can instantaneously send a photograph or video to anyone connected to the global network. Smartphones have transcended their role as cellular devices and have transformed into portable computational systems. With just a click of a button, a smartphone user can send emails, schedule their meetings for the week, or track their sleeping patterns from the previous night. The increased connectivity that comes with smartphones and other new media technologies has changed the way individuals interact on a micro and macro scale. Ben Han (2011:1) describes the phenomenon as a “user-generated technoculture” that places social relationships at its centre.

The coming of Web 2.0 marks the shift from monolithic text-heavy Internet platforms to dynamic collaborative experiences where creator and user work together to produce content (O’Reilly 2005:[sp]; Han 2011:2). Web 2.0, a term coined by Tim O’Reilly at a conference in 2005, represents a space of potentiality. The coming of the second Internet age meant that any individual with web access, from any background, could contribute to the conversations facilitated by the socially centred assemblages (Pătruț & Pătruț 2014:vi). With access to a network of friends, family, acquaintances and strangers, users can easily broadcast their political views to a widespread audience.

My research focusses on the potential of visuals as tools of activism on web platforms, and I explore how certain images are used to encourage people to side with political causes. In my research, my main case study is the Fees Must Fall revolution (FMF), and I use Black Lives Matter (BLM) and Rhodes Must Fall (RMF) as comparative cases. Although my research does not exclusively focus on social media, it is mentioned extensively and thus, requires definition and clarification right at the beginning.

### 1.1.1 Types of social media and definitions

The assemblages which dominate the “participative web”, a term offered by Bogdan Pătruț and Monica Pătruț (2015:v) in their description of Web 2.0, are labelled as “social media”. Pătruț and Pătruț (2015:vi) pinpoint six characteristics of digital media that fall under the social media umbrella. The first feature is that the technology should be free to use; the second is the ability to openly circulate and access public information on the site; the third characteristic is the ability to freely broadcast information to an audience of any size; the fourth feature refers to the general accessibility of the technology; the fifth characteristic is the “real-time” functionality of the technology and the last characteristic denotes the malleable nature of the technology and its ability to change format at any given moment.

Han (2011:55) further delineates characteristics which describe the interface of “social network sites” (SNS). SNS differ from other types of social media in their direct focus on connectivity between members. The aspects constituting SNS for Han (2011:55) are users’ access to a profile within the template of the system, the expression of users’ connections and followers on the site (whether that be privately or publicly); and lastly, users’ ability to negotiate their list of connections through hyperlinks.

Activity on the web is increasingly controlled by the corporations that create SNS platforms. The corporations can censor and regulate the discussions on their sites, as well as direct personalised information to their users (Couldry & van Dijk 2015:4). The three major corporations mentioned in this study are Google, Facebook and Twitter.

Although Google’s search engine is not by definition a SNS, the company’s subsidiaries, communication technologies and office suites fall under the realm of Web 2.0. Conceived in 1995, Google began as the brainchild of University of Stanford students Larry Page<sup>1</sup> and Sergei Brin.<sup>2</sup> Having become frustrated at the lack of hyperlinked citations on academic sites, the two conceptualised the Internet as a web of various websites which work like academic citations in a research paper (Battelle 2005:1). Instead of sourcing individual links on different forums, the duo aimed to create direct access to citations via clickable links that filtered the most relevant

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<sup>1</sup> Larry Page (1973—present) is an American Internet entrepreneur and computer scientist. He co-founded Google with Sergey Brin in 1998 and, as of writing, serves as CEO of Google.

<sup>2</sup> Sergey Brin (1973—present) is a Russian-born Internet entrepreneur and computer scientist. Brin, as of writing, serves as president to Google’s parent company Alphabet Inc.

searches. The most relevant, in other words, the most 'linked' (or referenced) citations were then the easiest to find (Battelle 2005:2-3).

Since succeeding in their pursuit to organise the Internet, not including sites on the deep web,<sup>3</sup> Google has transformed into a multinational company specialising in various web-based products and services. Most relevant to the study is Google's image-searching tool which also offers reverse image-searching.<sup>4</sup>

Mark Zuckerberg<sup>5</sup> launched Facebook in 2004 as a network for Harvard students to match names with the faces they encountered in their classes (Phillips 2007:[sp]). The technology soon spread to other colleges in the United States, and globally to anyone with a working email address in 2006. As opposed to Myspace,<sup>6</sup> its competitor at the time, Facebook's profiles were not customisable via HTML and focussed on function over form.

Han (2011:57-61) attributes Facebook's triumph to the uniformity of its profile interface. Instead of the fully customisable profile offered by MySpace, Facebook's standard profile template directs attention to its other features such as tagging, individually curated newsfeeds, and the ability to upload photographs. To use the site, an individual or company must first register for a Facebook profile with an email, create a profile, and add connections to communicate with on the network. Facebook, as of writing, is the largest SNS in the world and its key feature is, arguably, the visual rendering of the user's social relationships through a web of connected nodes (Han 2011:57; Most Famous Social Network Sites 2017).

Twitter, a short-messaging SNS created by Noah Glass, Jack Dorsey, Evan Williams and Biz Stone in 2006, features a status sharing system called "tweeting" (Carlson 2011:1). The character numbers of the "tweets" are limited to 140 characters, classifying the site as a microblogging platform. Participants opt to "follow" other Twitter users, meaning they can access another user's tweets and activity on a real-time newsfeed.

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<sup>3</sup> The deep web are Internet sites not accessible by standard web engines.

<sup>4</sup> An individual can drop an image directly into Google's search engine and view visually similar images.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Zuckerberg (1984 – present) is an American entrepreneur and computer programmer. He is the chairman and chief-executive officer of Facebook, and as of writing, the fifth richest person in the world (Mark Zuckerberg 2017:[sp]).

<sup>6</sup> Myspace is a social networking site launched in 2003 by founders Tom Anderson, Chris DeWolfe and Jon Hart and dominated the social networking scene from the years 2005-2008 (Stenovec 2011:[sp]).

Individuals partake on the platform by reading, re-blogging and responding to the tweets of other people on the site. Originally only attributed to Twitter, although Facebook and another social media platform Instagram<sup>7</sup> have also adopted the function, is the use of the hash-tagging function. Brian Ekdale and Melissa Tully (2014:68) describe as an operation which “sets the parameters of discussion” on the site.

The potentiality of social media as a political space naturally progressed from the creation of familial networks. Ekdale and Tully (2014:78) describe how the structure of discussion changes to a “bottoms-up approach” with the introduction of the hashtag. Their use of “bottoms-up approach” refers to the spread of information from an individual nodal point and the eventual reaching of data to other nodes in the network. Han (2011:2) concurs with Ekdale and Tully’s (2014:78) bottoms-up approach description, and adds that the hegemonic structure of political discussion, with politicians and political analysts at the top, is disregarded with the lateral structure of social media.

The idea that anyone can post an image or video, and have it seen by a global audience leads to the phenomenon of online peer recognition and engagement as the qualifiers for social importance (Couldry & van Dijk 2015:3). In a similar vein, Manuel Castells (2010:3) implies that networked spaces now define what is significant in cultural and social structures offline. Given the contentious nature of words such as ‘culture’ and ‘social’, it is necessary here to delineate the use of these words in the context of this study.

Stuart Hall (1997:2) defines culture as a “set of practices”, as opposed to previous associations of the word with a “set of things”. Instead of culture describing the sum of all the creative pursuits in society, Hall (1997:2-3) rather positions culture as a practice of valuation. He explains that the meaning determined by culture is not static but is constantly negotiated by the members of a given society. Cultural meaning is then expressed through modes of representation, through language or other media forms, that either conform to or defy the standard set by previous representational forms (Hall 1997:3-4).

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<sup>7</sup> Instagram is an instant photo and video sharing platform available as an application and a website on mobiles and desktop computers.

Following Hall's definition of culture, Nick Couldry and José van Dijk (2015:3), Castells (2010:358), as well as Han (2011:3) assert that public engagement with online media often have consequential offline implications. In other words, they state that videos and images on the Internet are increasingly determining the discussions and practices outside of the constraints of the familial networks in which they spread.

Social refers to the forums where those processes of meaning-making are challenged and discussed, whether that be online or offline (Couldry & van Dijk 2015:2). Following Couldry and van Dijk (2015:3), as well as Han (2011:3), social developments are increasingly centred in online spaces encouraging user-generated information and collaboration from a diverse membership.

Within the communities on the web, the circulation of certain media lead to intensive discussion and engagement by members inside and outside the community or group. At times, the flow of images, and the intensive discussions thereof, culminate in mass demonstrations when members of the group become outraged at perceived injustices (Hillis, Paasonen & Petit 2015:3). In these online communities, photographs and videos are distributed to disrupt or problematise injustices faced offline. The sharing, manipulation and positioning of media to incite individuals to political action, whether that be online or offline, is referred to as visual activism (Bryan-Wilson, González & Willson 2016:20; Mirzoeff 2017:17).

#### 1.1.2 The struggle visualised: #BlackLivesMatter, #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall

Modern day protests are increasingly defined by the visuals which come to inform and incite the movements. The most relevant visuals materialise through their intensive exchanges on online-based platforms. This study looks at the hashtag movements FMF, RMF and BLM, and explores how images were used online to give credence to the causes. With all the movements, the general assumption is that exchange of visuals, as well as associating hashtags and captions, played a crucial role in their formation. The following section defines the three movements and highlights the more impactful events in their conception.





Figure 1: Screenshot of surveillance footage of Trayvon Martin paying for his ice-tea at the store, Florida, 2012. (ABC).

In 2012, the death of 17-year-old African American teenager Trayvon Martin at the hands of George Zimmerman sparked outrage in the United States (Mirzoeff 2017:29). The following is an anecdotal recounting of the events by journalist Charles Blow (2013) at a yearly lecture on racial relations at the University of Florida:

On 26 February 2012, while visiting his father's girlfriend home in Sanford, Florida, Trayvon Martin visited a local convenience store to buy a can of ice-tea for himself. Before he left the house, Martin adorned a grey hoodie to shield himself from light rain.

Martin reaches the store, pays for his goods (Figure 1), and begins his journey home while on the phone to his girlfriend. On his way home, he is spotted by George Zimmerman (Blow 2013:1). Zimmerman, a civilian neighbourhood-watch member, is armed with a 9mm gun in a holster. The man calls the police mentioning Martin looks like he is "on drugs or something" (cited in Blow 2013:1). Zimmerman mentions that Trayvon Martin is a black male and reports to the dispatcher that he looks suspicious (Blow 2013:1).

Zimmerman proceeds to follow Martin down the road in his car, which allegedly alarms the teenager who begins to walk quicker. Zimmerman informs the dispatcher he is going to pursue the teenager and ends the call. Witnesses recount Zimmerman confronting Martin, engaging in a physical altercation with Martin ending in the teenager's death by gunshot (Blow 2013:2).

Zimmerman is then taken into police custody where, soon after entering, the supervisors at the precinct release him with no charges. The account ends with Zimmerman eventually charged with Martin's death but is later acquitted of all charges. It should be noted here that Blow (2013:6), who is a journalist for the New York Times, mentions in the transcript that he struggles with his role as a reporter and a social rights advocate, alluding to some bias, perhaps, in his recanting of the events.

In 2013, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi began circulating the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter on Twitter after Zimmerman's acquittal. The posts which feature the hashtag focus on exposing the brutality faced by young African-American men at the hands of predominantly white police officers (Garza 2014:[sp]). The Black Lives Matter 'herstory' defines the movement as the following:

Black Lives Matter is an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks' humanity, our contributions to this society, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression (Cullors, Garza & Tometi [sa]:[sp]).

Therefore, Black Lives Matter (BLM) did not merely remain an Internet hashtag but catapulted into a "political" and "ideological" collection aimed at tackling specific real-life issues. In summary, the movement began from a singular articulation of the cause "#BlackLivesMatter", but through the resounding nature of the utterance, the term reverberated among audiences worldwide and rallied enough support to become a social organisation. Peculiar to the spread of the movement is the way in which photographs and videos were used to document and incite individuals to join its ranks (Stephen 2015:[sp]); Paul 2015:7; Mirzoeff 2017:29).

Although Martin's death was substantial to the birth of BLM, it was the death of African American teenager Michael Brown in August 2014, where the circulation of visual media online (Figure 2), especially on social media sites, became pertinent to the spread and informing of the cause (Mirzoeff 2017:29). Images of the aftermath of the violence, as well as the protests that followed were shared by numerous individuals worldwide.



Figure 2: Still from convenience store, “Ferguson Market”, surveillance footage of Michael Brown confronting a worker before his death, 2014, Ferguson. (CBS

The circulated imagery shows different perspectives of Brown’s death, as well as his activity prior to the fatal shooting. The official United States’ Department of Justice’s (2015:6) memorandum states that a clerk at Ferguson Market reported that packs of cigarillos were stolen by Brown and Dorian Johnson, also pictured above, (Figure 2) on 9 August 2014. Darren Wilson, a Caucasian police officer, encountered Brown and Johnson walking down Canfield Drive (Department of Justice 2015:6).

In the memorandum, as well as in an interview with ABC journalist George Stephanopoulos (2014), Wilson states he commanded the two boys to walk on the sidewalk of the road, when they refused, he cut off the road using his car as a roadblock. Wilson then attempted to open the door of his vehicle, however, the door’s opening was reportedly obstructed.<sup>8</sup> Wilson’s account of the events, as well as the accounts of other witnesses, state that Brown then reached into the car, grabbed the police officer, and punched him. The policeman stated that he had no time to reach less lethal weapons in the altercation and reached for his gun. Brown and Wilson struggled over control of the gun resulting in Brown’s hand being shot by Wilson.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Either by Brown forcefully pushing it closed or by the impact of the force on Brown’s body rebounding it shut (Department of Justice 2015:6).

<sup>9</sup> DNA evidence corroborates with the account that Brown had his torso and hands inside the vehicle as there is evidence of Brown’s DNA on Wilson’s collar (Department of Justice 2015:6-8;

Brown then ran eastward down the street with Wilson in pursuit (Department of Justice 2015:7; Stephanopoulos 2014). Eye-witnesses, reported in the memorandum as credible as well as Wilson, state that the police officer began shooting Brown when it appeared that the teenager turned around to "charge" toward the policeman (Department of Justice 2015:7; Stephanopoulos 2014).



Figure 3: Goodbye, Cecil John Rhodes, 2015. Photographed by Tony Carr. (Wikipedia).

Several eye-witnesses assert that prior to Brown "charging", he held up his hands with his palms facing outward toward Darren Wilson in what was perceived by some as a gesture of surrender (Department of Justice 2015:8). Brown's body was left in the streets for several hours where individuals took further mobile footage of the aftermath of the shooting.

Following Brown's death, online users began to rally and respond to the perceived injustices on social media, again, using the BLM hashtag. The outrage created by the

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Stephanopoulos 2014).

widespread, mostly online-based discussions culminated in mass protests in Ferguson in November 2014.

According to research conducted by Melissa Brown, Neil Fraistat, Rashawn Ray and Edward Summers (2017:1804-1805), most of the tweets using the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter contained the theme of black individuals versus white individuals killed without consequence; the second being “displays of solidarity and activism”, and the third referencing historical acts of prejudice.

In South Africa, tension began building in the University of Cape Town (UCT) in March 2015 after student activist Chumani Maxwele led a protest on the statue of Cecil Rhodes<sup>10</sup> (Loader *et al* 2017:232). Maxwele and a dozen other students threw faeces at the statue of Rhodes which sat in Madiba’s Circle on the campus grounds. Frustrated at having to pass a figure who symbolised oppression daily, the students argued that colonial markers have no place in a supposedly transformed university space (UCT: Rhodes Must Fall 2015:[sp]). The statue was removed in April 2015 (Figure 3), and in the months which followed, various sub-protests erupted, most aimed at disrupting perceived racial bias on campus.

The hashtag #RhodesMustFall defined the movement; its utterance accompanied with shared images (Figure 4) of protesting students. To add credence to their campaign, the RMF activists created a Facebook page, outlining their demand for a university space devoid of colonial markers and more inclusive of African imagery (UCT: Rhodes Must Fall 2015:[sp]).

In 2016, in line with their manifesto to remove icons that “exoticise the black experience”, Rhodes Must Fall protesters entered the Smuts Hall, Fuller Hall and Jameson Hall, removed artwork off the walls and burned them (van der Merwe 2016:[sp]). In total, the group destroyed 75 artworks, some, somewhat ironically, were completed by anti-Apartheid activists (Pertsovsky 2017:[sp]).

In early 2016, the group erected a shack on Residence Road in objection against white students being chosen over black students for student accommodation (van der Merwe 2016:[sp]). The shack, entitled Shackville by the students, became an icon for the economic disparity experienced by financially destitute black students, as

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<sup>10</sup> Cecil Rhodes (5 July 1853 – 26 March 1902) – Prime Minister of the Cape Colony from 1890 – 1896, was a British businessman, figure of imperialism, and mining industrialist.

well as workers, on campus. The shack was soon torn down by university staff, but the images of the forceful tearing down of the structure only made the RMF's points more poignant.



Figure 4: Screenshot of student demonstrating use of the #RhodesMustFall hashtag on Twitter, 2017. Taken from Twitter account. (Twitter).

Concurrent with the RMF protests, students at the University of Witwatersrand (WITS) in Johannesburg began protesting the 10% fee increase set to hit most major universities in South Africa (Dugmore 2015:12). Heather Dugmore (2015:12-13) states the average living cost of undergraduate students stands at R40 000 to R50 000 a year with less than 100 000 South Africans earning more than a R1-million a year.

According to a report by Statistics South Africa (2015:6) outlining youth unemployment ranging the years 2008 to 2015, the unemployment rate of youth (ages 15-34) has doubled in comparison with adults (ages 35-64) every year since 2008. An increase in fees would have left many students in financial dire straits. The youth were angered into the biggest student uprising post-1994.

Although there were various splinter protests causing the shutdown of the various universities across South Africa at different points, the main protest took on the title #FeesMustFall. Due to increased social media engagement, the movement came to a head on 23 October 2015. The disillusionment with the financial status of the country, coupled with bleak economic prospects after graduation fuelled the students to march *en masse* to the Union Buildings<sup>11</sup> situated in central Pretoria. Busses of students were transported to Church Square, Pretoria where individuals gathered to prepare for the march.

At the Union Buildings, activists voiced their discontent with the university fee structure, as well as with the governmental response to the increase. Police and protestors clashed toward the end of the gathering when protestors began to set tires alight and pelted police cars with bricks. Two weeks following the protest, President Jacob Zuma<sup>12</sup> announced that there would be no fee increases for the subsequent year (Ndelu 2016:99). In 2016, then Department of Higher Education Minister Blade Nzimande declared that fees would increase by no more than 8% for the year 2017. The FMF protests continued and transformed to push an agenda of free, inclusive universities.

In an analysis of FMF, the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (2016) broke down some of the key motivators behind the campaign. The contributors for the analysis are largely student researchers; however, many of them personally participated in the RMF and FMF protests. In line with the RMF protests, the FMF activists echoed cries for the breaking down of colonial structures on campus, the transformation of staff to represent equal representations of gender and race, as well as better working opportunities for the largely black maintenance staff (Langa 2016:6).

The goals of the RMF and FMF movements urge decolonialisation of the South African university culture. The activists demand the upping of black representation in previously white dominated spaces and equal financial opportunity for all. In the BLM Ferguson movements, one the leading issues was police brutality against unarmed African-American women and men in predominately black populated areas.

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<sup>11</sup> The Union Buildings, situated in Pretoria, South Africa are the official seat of the government, as well as the office of the President of South Africa.

<sup>12</sup> President Jacob Gedleyihlekisa Zuma (1942—present) is the current serving president of South Africa, and has been in office since 2009.

Apparent in all the movements are captured moments shared on SNS, configured to bring attention as well as empathy to the plights of the activists. Julia Bryan-Wilson, Jennifer González and Dominic Willsdon (2016:20), as well as Mirzoeff (2017:17) place significance on those spaces which the protesters occupy. The occupied spaces are not merely arbitrary places to campaign but are envisioned as transformative through the performative appearance, as termed by Mirzoeff (2017:17). The appearance of bodies in historically laden spaces, and importantly, the visual capturing of their forms in movement is an assertion, for Mirzoeff (2017:18), of personal agency.

For the BLM Ferguson activists, Mirzoeff (2017:18) emphasises that public domains, the spaces of transition, such as roads, railways, and sidewalks connecting one area of the city to the next, are important for occupation. By marching in public areas, the BLM protestors are proclaiming their right to be present, claiming the right to be seen and to engage in looking, as well as declaring their right to safety in the streets.

The RMF activists protested mostly in spaces at the University of Cape Town campus which acted as constant reminders of South Africa's colonial past. Some of the halls on campus still hold the names of colonial figures, which the RMF protestors saw as acts of violence against black people (UCT: Rhodes Must Fall 2015:[sp]). The FMF activists marched to the seat of the government, as well as the South African parliament, breaking outside of the university space and into public spaces with reformed colonial histories. The assertion of the students' bodies places the supposedly reclaimed post-democratic spaces of South African governmental buildings into contention.<sup>13</sup>

Placing bodies in combative spaces to stimulate dialogue, as well as the discussion of the body in political situations falls under the umbrella term of visual activism. Visual activism, as defined by Bryan-Wilson *et al* (2016:11) encompasses elements of preceding visual culture studies theory, but also actively rejects detached approaches to academicism, emphasising a more "hands-on" approach.

Mirzoeff (2017; Bookchin, Brown, Ebrahimian, Enmedio, Juhasz, Martin, MTL, Mirzoeff, Ross, Saab & Sitrin 2013) vanguards a type of militant practice that rejects logocentric approaches to academia. Instead, he encourages a visual activist method

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<sup>13</sup> The first democratically elected South African president, President Nelson Mandela, had his inauguration at the Union Buildings (Union Building 2011:[sp]).



that also engages in ground-level political activity. In contrast, Shannon Jackson (2016:265) critiques the involved approach. She points out that radical politics may delve too close to “certainty” about activist causes; militant approaches may lean too close to extremism and sanctimony (Jackson 2016:265).

Visual activism theory, then, takes on two forms: the first is a more academic approach in studying the role of visuals in activism, and the second, a combative method where research is used to assist activists on the ground (Ross 2013:9). This study uses theory from visual activism, hermeneutical approaches, as well as affect theory to analyse how online visuals are figured to incite individuals to political action. For the purposes of this study, the research takes on a more detached approach in an attempt to avoid personal bias.

## 1.2 Need for the study

Hashtag movements re-configure how modern-day protesters engage with protest imagery. No longer are people informed just by traditional media, such as newspapers or televised news, but also by digital social assemblages that they can interact with.<sup>14</sup> The BLM, RMF and FMF movements provide fascinating case studies in determining how images are configured online to appeal to mass audiences.

Significant to the study is the digitisation of the images via their uploading from smart devices. Mirzoeff (2017:28) and Gillian Rose (2016:293-294) point out that photographs, when uploaded onto computers and other digital apparatuses, take on the form of data. The data is imprinted with information such as timestamps, location, the resolution and the size of the image.

Although this study will not delve into the specifics of data, the focus is rather on how the digitisation of images changes how individuals receive and interpret photographs of activism. The digital turn in media transforms the way people interact with imagery: photographs and videos are uploaded or taken by computational devices and then shared with other people through corporate-mediated networks such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.

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<sup>14</sup> On Facebook, for example, news readers can add comments to news stories and interact with other users on forums about the articles they read.

The transformative potential of online photography lies in the ability to quickly share images, to configure imagery for maximum audience impact and the archival nature of social media sites. On the latter point, Nadav Hochman (2014:1-2) implies social media change the way images are viewed, and thus, perceived by audiences; images are seen in real-time yet they are also stored on the applications which they are uploaded. In other words, images in the SNS archive can potentially be re-distributed if there is a sudden need for them. The ability to have constant access to photographs through online sites therefore has widespread political implications when images are re-hashed or re-purposed for activist causes.

### 1.3 Overview of the chapters

The research is split into three parts; the first part focusses on protest iconography from both BLM and FMF; the second section discusses images of violence on bodies who are resisting power with reference to RMF and FMF; and the third segment addresses how visualism or, what Mirzoeff (2015:316) terms “visual thinking”, motivates individuals to partake in political action.

As aforementioned, all sections use FMF as the main case study for analysis. BLM is focussed on more as the secondary case study in the first section and RMF in the second section. All sections of the research focus on the composition of images on web platforms.

Section one compares images from BLM and FMF with attention to how certain protest iconography inspires a sense of community and kinship among members of a virtual community. The section compares two examples from each movement and uses sociological theories to unpack how groups are formed online. Ferdinand Tönnies<sup>15</sup> (2001) among other theorists are referred to situate social theory in the realm of the virtual.

An aspect of this section explores how Tönnies' (2001:10) 19<sup>th</sup>-century concepts of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* still have relevance in modern conceptions of group relations. *Gemeinschaft* refers to the ways that human-beings form bonds of community and *Gesellschaft* connotes the removed, formal relationship forming the

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<sup>15</sup> Ferdinand Tönnies (1855-1936) was a German sociologist and philosopher who contributed greatly to the field of sociology.

workings of society. Although Han (2001:67-68) suggests the idea of a close-knit community no longer exists. He implies that tribal kinship has been replaced by affectual relationships. In other words, the idea of community is re-configured not just through the virtual medium but also through the bonds of intuitive symbolism.

The second section analyses how images of bodies in FMF and RMF are used to resist traditional media's portrayal of the protesters and investigates the role of affect in the circulation of visual activism images online. Questions of how images are configured to be impactful and inciteful are addressed. Four images from FMF, and two images from RMF are analysed to determine how the visual activism of the protests inspired intensive discussion and engagement. That is not to argue that the images selected for analysis are specifically manipulated for maximum impact, but rather, my approach is a hermeneutical interpretation of the photographs to determine how they motivate empathy for the activists' causes.

Sarah Ahmed (2004:131) implies that because of the networked nature of interaction on the internet, certain affective imagery's impact increases with their circulation. She refers to this phenomenon as affective "stickiness". Stickiness refers to the way that sentiments of authenticity and gravity increase with the circulation of certain images.<sup>16</sup>

The last section addresses how "visual thinking", or the transformation of spaces through the insertion of resistant symbols, as well as the capturing of those moments is an indicator of social change (Mirzoeff 2015:315). The focus in Chapter 5 is on how certain online transformative portraiture or 'movement art' attempts to create empowering narratives for the subject, while still being subject through the surveillance of the online network. The section explores the implications of web voyeurism on visual activism.

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<sup>16</sup> The more a highly polarising image is circulated, the less its contents will be questioned. Multiple re-tweets of media, for example of a man going on a racist rant reinforces an argumentum ad populum interaction with the media because there is an assumption that the contents are indisputable.

## CHAPTER TWO

### APPROACHES TO VISUAL ACTIVISM

#### 2.1 Philosophical approaches and theory

The FMF and RMF campaigns inspired mass, heated engagement both online and offline. Online, individuals took to various social media platforms, sharing images and text posts, heatedly discussing the movements as they unfolded. Real-time, on SNS, provided a means for news agencies to immediately inform the public about developments. Offline, students and supporters of the movement flocked to points of congregations, some spectating, others physically participating in the rallies and marches.



Figure 5: #MbokodoLead: women leading #FeestMustFall movement, Johannesburg, 2015. Photograph by Marco Longari.

Alongside the sometimes glossy, formalised coverage by traditional news agencies, members of public captured on-the-ground images of the bodies in protest. Professionals and amateurs alike captured the scenes which came to define the movements. Some photographs are triumphant, with fists in the air (Figure 5) or arms interlinked in acts of solidarity. Others are more violent, showing bleeding rubber bullet

wounds and policemen wrestling with protesters in the streets (Figure 6). Using visuals, a narrative of empowerment carried the protests to their respective cumulative points. The movements became characterised by collective images that shared the students' offline experiences to their online networks.



Figure 6: Policeman manhandling a protestor with onlookers, Cape Town, photographer unknown, taken from Zweli Mbhele on Twitter, 2015.

Beyond the uploaded videos and photographs, social media users further engaged with the uploaded content by adding their own tags and captions, original images and photo-manipulations. Unlike less collaborative mediums such as television or print, the online space allows for continual interaction with the visuals encountered. As such, various theoretical approaches are needed to fully engage with the realms of protest imagery as well as the intensive dominion of online exchange.

As my research necessitates an engagement with activist practices regarding visuals, as well as the exchange and experience of visuals in the online space, my theoretical approaches encompass visual activism, affect theory and hermeneutics. It is important to note here that the three theoretical fields are not exclusive in my research, with hermeneutics and affect theory falling under the overarching theme of visual activism.

Each approach requires defining, as well as clarification of their relevance to my research.

### 2.1.1 Visual activism unpacked

In visual culture studies, the term visual activism was brought to the fore as a theoretical approach, as well as a practice in March 2014. In 2014, a two-day conference entitled *Visual Activism* was organised as the biennial conference of the International Association of Visual Culture (IAVC). There, 100 speakers and 200 other attendees and participants converged to discuss the relevant intersection between visual culture studies and activist practices. The term originates from photographer Zanele Muholi<sup>17</sup> who uses “visual activism” to describe her intimate photo-documentation of the black lesbian community in South Africa (Bryan-Wilson *et al* 2016:7). Her artworks legitimise the relationships of South African lesbian women who face corrective rape and assault, especially in townships.

Pertinent to Muholi’s work is the idea of the assertion of presence through the imaging of community. Using the body, (Figure 7), Muholi blurs the lines between private and public, offering the viewer a chance to glimpse into personal moments between lovers; her photographs bringing the idea of visible presence into contention. Visible presence refers to the legitimisation of a group through continued representation (Mirzoeff



Figure 7: *Beloved V*, 2005, Johannesburg. Photograph by Zanele Muholi.

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<sup>17</sup> Zanele Muholi (1972— present) is a South African artist and visual activist born in Umlazi, Durban.

2017:18). Muholi's photographing and exhibiting of intimate moments between lesbian couples is directly related to Mirzoeff's (2017:21) notion of the "right to appear".

Subject to humiliating practices such as physical abuse and corrective rape, especially in rural communities, Muholi unapologetically shows the private, intimate moments of her subjects, including herself, to the public. In doing so, Muholi uses her photography as a type of humanising practice – to showcase intimate lesbian love on her own terms. The photographs are visual statements of the community's right to existence and dignity, or the right to be present in the spaces outside of their homes.

Inseparable from the aesthetic appeal of Muholi's artwork, is her challenging of ideas of acceptable displays of sexuality and race in the South African context. Denise Noble (2005:132-133), following Frantz Fanon (1963; 1986), discusses the framing of black identity in cultural spaces where black bodies have been historically disenfranchised. Fanon (1963:127-137) implies that collective representation acts as means to counteract structures of oppression. Humanisation, for Fanon (1986:216) is achieved in the act acknowledgment of the other, what he refers to as the "recognition" of value. The black man, for Fanon (1986:164), gains legitimacy, or recognition, when he is acknowledged as a person before his racial signifiers.

In the re-framing of bodies and through the insertion of a visual presence the previously disenfranchised are empowered to assert identities away from *just* being black or *just* being gay, for example (Noble 2005:134-149). In a subtle demand for recognition, Muholi's photographs play with proximity, gazing and adornment to exhibit the community's multifaceted identity and their right to be seen on their own terms. Muholi's work brings into question the role of images in motivating political action. Following the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster<sup>18</sup> and the Arab Springs, participants in *Visual Activism* questioned how visuals shape activism and conversely, the effect of activism on visual culture as a field of study (Bryan-Wilson *et al* 2016:5).

Globalism and World Wide Web (Web) connectivity has led to the dual effects of creating an informed public and creating more forums to speak directly to those in

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<sup>18</sup> The Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster was an energy mishap that occurred on 11 March 2011 following the 15-metre devastating tsunami in Japan. 100 000 people were evacuated from their homes following the leakage of nuclear energy (Fukushima accident 2018:[sp]).

power. Because of the nodal nature of the Web, images seamlessly pass through forums, inflaming and informing users of protest activity.

Activist communication is both limited and expanded by web mediums. Communication between demonstrators is limited by SNS directive algorithms and limiting communicative tools to some extent but simultaneously expanded by access to a broad network. For example, on Twitter, a user can communicate messages to a widespread audience, however, the site's word-count is simultaneously limited to a mere 140-characters. The broadening of social reach coupled with the limitation in message format begs the question of how communication transforms to meet the requirements of the system. Visual activism encompasses the way protestors use SNS as a tool to increase visibility for their causes, as well as the means the site is used to enact social change.

My research follows the visual activism of BLM, FMF and RMF protestors, as well as artistic and public documenters of the events. The body of the work is informed by theoretical approaches to visual activism as formulated by Bookchin *et al.* (2013), Bryan Wilson *et al.* (2016) and Mirzoeff (2015; 2017). Capturing bodies in protest requires theory that studies the nuances of human emotion, as well as the types of material that attempt to fuel participants to engage with advocate movements.

### 2.1.2 The feeling body: affect theory

In the age of social networking, many personal connections are increasingly mediated through machines. Online content is filtered through sites and received by individuals who interact with both the content and other users. Ken Hillis, Susan Paasonen and Michael Petit (2015:1) posit that sending out images to the broader web is a bid for attention, if users agree or align with your material, their response is largely positive, promotional or encouraging. If there are people who disagree with the content, the interactions may take on a negative tone, becoming inflammatory, anxiety-ridden or even threatening.

With the expanse of communication between parties following the coming of Web 2.0, the ability to capture and hold the attention of an online audience has turned. Web platforms encourage multi-party dialogue as opposed to information relayed from a sole source. The collective buzz of Web 2.0 is eloquently described by Jodi Dean (2010:90):



Every tweet or comment, every forwarded image or petition, accrues a tiny affective nugget, a little surplus enjoyment, a smidgen of attention that attaches to it, making it stand out from the larger flow before it blends back in...

Dean (2010:89-91) illustrates how clusters of intense “attention” on a network lead to intense moments of sensation in SNS users. These intensive moments are indistinguishable at any given point but are still palpable in their sensational ripples. The concentrated moments of emotional communication on SNS are defined as affective exchanges.

Following Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987), as well as Baruch de Spinoza (1883:[sp]), affect is outlined as the pre-cognitive sensations that shape human interaction. Spinoza (1883:[sp]) proposes that there are various sensations felt by the body before they are understood on an intellectual level. Those emotions, for Spinoza (1883:[sp]) cause movement or action, whether intended or not. Affect theory focuses on affective potentiality of studied objects to incite, stir and move individuals to cultural change or political action on a micro and macro level (McManus 2011:1; Hillis *et al.* 2015:3).

Affect theorists explore environments where these intensities pass and speculate on their social effects. Affect theory is by no means an exact study, although some studies do employ evidence from psychological, physiological and neurological studies.<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, determining the exact influence of affective exchange on online platforms is oftentimes problematic.

As network interaction is often analysed in affect theory, regardless of whether that be online or offline, there is some uncertainty in determining how any single person would react to emotionally moving material. In the case of this research, there is some difficulty in determining how a single person would react to an image that they may come across online without the inclusion of rigorous interviews or surveys.

As a result, much of the work that utilises affect theory is done in a *post hoc* manner, identifying moving cultural material which *potentially* causes intensive interaction, or

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<sup>19</sup> For a more detailed account of different approaches to affect from these fields, refer to Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (2010:4-6).

understanding the paradigm contingent circumstances that lead to emotionally charged communication.

Potentially is emphasised here because even though, again, a single exchange may lead to a cumulative event, it would be fallacious to argue that all people react the same way to images. It would be also be erroneous to argue that all further emotive interactions with certain media are influenced by one single affective interaction.

To determine if either case were true would require intensive research on how users respond to certain images. Although a sequence of potential affect may theoretically be plottable, as SNS do create visible maps of general interactions, envisioning a virtual map of all the affective exchanges during the politicking of BLM, FMF and RMF to determine accumulative attention is beyond the scope of my research.<sup>20</sup>

In the second part of my research, I analyse particularly moving images from the #FeesMustFall movement, as well as moving images from the Soweto Riots and speculate their affect in the online and offline space. The study looks specifically at images of bodies in protest, global depiction of suffering in the online space and images of bodies suffering in the South African context.

The selected images rely on my subjective interpretation of what could qualify as moving to a larger audience. However, in the more intensive study about the Ferguson and the BLM movements, conducted by Brown *et al* (2017:1804), the researchers pinpointed key recurrent themes in the images and text shared with the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter on Twitter. Their findings (Figure 8) showed a surprising correlation to my own previously selected themes, namely images of unification among protestors, photographic references to history and images of violence, specifically police brutality and protester injury.

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<sup>20</sup> Although not explicitly situated in affect theory, Deena Chalabi (2016) describes Burak Arian's interactive map *Networks of Dispossession* (2013) which shows the worrying relationship between Turkish government institutions and private corporations. Arian's work is an example of how hidden and complex relationships in a network can be unearthed and visualised.

Brown *et al* (2017) provide useful quantitative reference points for the interpretative claims in this research; however, there will be no direct claims about correlation of visual activism themes in the BLM, FMF and RMF movements. Equally rigorous academic study on the Twitter trends in FMF and RMF must be conducted before such claims are made, and to determine exact parallels is not the intent of this dissertation. The research, instead, relies on an interpretive method with consideration of historical and current circumstances that shape visual politicking online.

**Table 3.** #BlackLivesMatter themes.

	Percentage	Number
Blacks Killed with Impunity and Whites Not	43.24	224
Displays of Solidarity and Activism	34.36	178
Historical References to Discrimination	6.18	32
Demands for Policy Changes	5.60	29
Response to Race Card Claim	4.63	24
Media Double Standard	3.86	20
Humanizing Police Brutality victims	2.12	11
Total	100	518

Figure 8: Table of #BlackLivesMatter themes. 2017. (Brown *et al.* 2017:1804).

### 2.1.3 Hermeneutics and visual activism

As the nature of my research is about the sociality and receiving of activism images in the online environment, hermeneutics is employed as an investigative and conceptual approach. Other studies of political and activist media, namely those by Bryan-Wilson *et al* (2016), John Paul (2015), Mirzoeff (2015; 2017), Susan Sontag (2003), Ruth Kerkham Simbao (2007) similarly use interpretative methodology to consider the social and historical conditions which alter the experience of images. Significantly, hermeneutics focusses on historicity, ontology and subjectivity in interpretation

Hermeneutics, although originally used as an interpretive approach to biblical studies, its methodology has been applied as a philosophical approach to visual studies. Nicholas Davey (1999:7) implies that a hermeneutical approach to the visual necessitates an understanding of temporality and how meaning is distorted with each reified instance of the image.

According to Ian Heywood and Barry Sandywell (1999:x), hermeneutics focusses on media as meaning-making encounters with reciprocated social and historical

connotation. In other words, hermeneutics considers the subjective experience of the interpreter as much as the circumstantial context of the media. As an approach to research, hermeneutics does not attempt to speak for the viewer or assume knowledge, but rather contemplates the assumptions and drives which colour universalised iterations (Gadamer 1976:71, 209). Davey (1999:4) concurs, stating that the meaning of images is not limited to just what they show but allow for analyses of outside impactive circumstances.

As aforementioned, communication on the Web have limiting parameters, such as algorithms and platform-specific formats, which change the way information is exchanged (Ekdale & Tully 2016:68). SNS, specifically, use different methods to encourage interaction between users, such as unique profiles interfaces, short and long-form status updates, media posting abilities and comment sections. Contact at those points of interaction are further confined by strictures concerning word-count, allowed media formats, public vs privacy settings, as well as user-directed content.

The layout of SNS dictates the audience of content, as well as what content is seen and promoted (Rose 2016:300). Although SNS are free, many of the more popular sites are controlled by large corporations that rely on revenue to keep the sites running. The result, especially with those SNS which circumvent stringent verification of content, is communication catered to getting people to look. The lines between paid advertisement, fake news, personal promotion and genuine politicking become blurred in this process

The underlining assumption of my research is that media content aiming to gain political attention is specifically rendered to affectually incite an audience. In discerning the reason why certain gestures resonate with people to create a sense of kinship and community, a type of visual genealogy needs to be created, especially in the realm of the virtual where origin of representation is often not intensively considered in the name of immediate consumption.

The figuration of online content, however, is still inevitably culturally and historically specific. In the cases of RMF and FMF, both occur in the South African context where there are underlying issues of social inequality, post-colonial interactions and racialism. My underlying assumption is that SNS sites, in their alteration of time and space, specifically in their emphasis on immediacy over accuracy, lead to the creation

of ties which are based less on accuracy of remembrance and more on the emotive ties that tend to create connections between people and carry events to intensive cumulations.

Hermeneutics can then be described as a qualitative approach that looks beyond the formal figuration of images (though, the formal figuration is still considered), and determines underlying prejudices, assumptions. The approach interrogates for whom the media is created and also considers why certain images carry particular meanings (Heywood & Sandywell 1999:x). As the connotations dealt with in a hermeneutical approach can be ambiguous and dependent on their cultural context, certain clarifications need to be made regarding language and prior assumptions.

## 2.2 Definitions and clarifications

As the term social is used broadly in this research, referring to both interactions online and offline, the word needs further illumination. As opposed to the empirical connotation often attached to social sciences, the social here refers to the synthesised interactions between different agents in meaning-embedded settings (Couldry & van Dijck 2015:1). Those embedded settings, fall into the respective spheres of technoculture and traditional definitions of culture, as outlined above.

This dissertation rejects the idea of websites as neutral sites where interactions take place, and rather follows Couldry and van Dijck's (2015:1) definition of the social on Internet networks as the sum of reciprocal relations which create connections between individuals. Also considered within the realm of the social are phenomenological consequences of exposure to visual activism images and how those experiences effect communication.

Combined with Couldry and van Dijck's (2015) argument that the commercial bundling of site and sociality undermines deep cultural networks is danah boyd's (2015) assertion that weak-ties take precedent in determining user opinion on SNS. Weak-tie theory suggests that the opinions of acquaintances are more influential than closer friends in a social network.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Mark Granovetter (1983:220) asserts that weak-ties characterise the relationships among diverse types of people, as one might see in a political group on a SNS. Granovetter's (1983:220-223) research suggests that weak-ties are influential in bridging diversified groups of individuals together. The interlinking membership of individuals between groups, highly seen on SNS, leads to more

Tied in with the theory of the social as largely dialectical, as put forth by Couldry and van Dijck (2015:1), is the proposition that the visual language of activist images works off a kind of affectual conversation based on historical symbols of community and kinship.

The term activism, used broadly throughout this dissertation, relates directly to political resistance, in this case, articulated through forms of media, such as imagery and videos. Movements, as a related term, refers to politically motivated activities enacted by grouped individuals with a common purpose (Loader, Luescher & Mugume 2017:231).

Jackson (2016:174-175) correctly points out that the experience of activism potentially changes within those different media forms. A video may, in certain situations, be more affectually moving than a photograph (or vice versa). Jackson (2016:175) brings pertinent questions to the fore on how individual experiences with different types of visuals change their political power. As such, my research focusses on static images rather than videos for the sake of focus and clarity.

Visibility, and its relation to activism online, is categorised by Mirzoeff (2017:17) into three streams which he states have characterised protests since the civil rights era. He speaks specifically about racial violence, but his categories can be expanded to include all types of visual activism. According to Mirzoeff (2017:17), activism is made visible firstly, through the observing and articulation of scenes of injustice through smartphones, digital cameras, and other capturing devices; secondly, the capturing of embodied advocate action in public spaces, and thirdly, the subsequent spreading of information and media on SNS.

Mirzoeff's (2017:17) categories clearly demonstrate the three important sites of consideration that are put in other terms by Rose (2016:22-24) as the "site of production", "site of the image itself" and the "site of circulation". All three of these categories are considered in the research's methodology and are examined within a hermeneutical framework.

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varied ideas which are more readily received or rejected without personal ties being involved (Granovetter 1983:215).

### 2.3 Methodologies and literature review

Each section of the research focusses on analysing images which fall into three sub-categories. As previously detailed, the first section compares visual symbolism, specifically looking at online scenes of bodies in protest in both BLM and FMF. The second section looks at affective images and bodies in resistance in the South African historical context, as well as the on-going FMF and RMF protests. The last section investigates FMF and RMF images which directly challenge colonialism or remnants of Apartheid in their rendering. The work looks at how visuals can create powerful, nuanced political arguments but potentially at the cost of accurate recollection.

The methodology relies on hermeneutical interpretation with attention to affect theory and informed by theorists whose works have focussed on visual activism. Several elements require elucidation, such as how the images were selected for the research, if the selected images accurately represent themes of the movements, and how the digitised nature of the images may affect their experience.

The visuals chosen for interpretation in the body of text were mainly selected through Google searches<sup>22</sup> which led to the most relevant images associated with BLM, FMF and RMF. Other images were taken from Facebook and Twitter searches that yielded photographs from pages affiliated with the three movements. Google searches are designed to produce media with the most hits, creating a more comprehensive view of the most relevant images to each movement. Determining which visuals to select from the Twitter and Facebook searches, however, proved to be a more challenging task.

Using the Facebook “search” function, the selection of images changed with the varied queries of “#FeesMustFall”, “Fees Must Fall” and “FeesMustFall”. Such an alteration in results brings into question whether the audience of certain FMF images is as widespread as assumed. One person’s visual experience of FMF might be different from another individual’s depending on what search term they used to interact with the movement. My research was largely propagated through searching for BLM, RMF and FMF on the Google Images search function, the Facebook search function and the

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<sup>22</sup> Google searches are determined by an algorithm called PageRank developed by one of its founders Larry Page. The algorithm determines the importance of the search depending on how often sites link back to other sites in a set.

Twitter search function. In my search, I used the search queries with hashtags and without in order to get a more comprehensive number of images. Other images which I have selected for analysis have branched off those searches. My location, previous search history or SNS recorded interests could have determined which images were shown to me. For example, because I am a student at the University of Pretoria (TUKS), I may have been directed to more images from the TUKS FMF protests rather than from other protests countrywide. Rose (2016:301), in her description of digital methods, cautions that Internet sites often collect cookies to track an individual's activities, therefore catering to the previous browsing habits of the individual.

As Facebook does not reveal its searching algorithms to the public, and Twitter's search function relies on an Application Programme Interface (API) to thoroughly traverse its content, the origin of certain threads is hard to determine without the proper programming knowledge and software. My research, therefore, focuses on impactful images from the BLM, FMF, RMF in the broad online sphere, as opposed to searches defined by SNS trawling programmes.<sup>23</sup> The pictures are selected from subjective interpretation of affective impact; however, I am convinced that using the correct programme in the future will yield more in-depth research.

To counter the risk of this research being overly subjective and interpretative, the work of Lacea Loader, Thierry Luescher and Taabo Mugume (2017), research by Brown *et al* (2017), as previously mentioned, as well as intensive, advocative and qualitative research by Mirzoeff (2017) is utilised to deepen and inform the scope.

### 2.3.1 Literature review

The resources for my research range from sources on visual activism, affect theory, hermeneutic methodology. The full list of literature consulted is exhaustive, consequently, this review is confined to a few seminal sources.

#### *Visual Activism:*

1. Nicolas Mirzoeff (2017) *The appearance of Black Lives Matter*.

Mirzoeff (2017) follows the BLM movement from not just an academic perspective, but as an advocate and fervent follower of activist uprisings worldwide. The book follows

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<sup>23</sup> Some examples of SNS trawling applications are Keyhole, which is a hashtag tracking system or TalkWalker which is a software that tracks social mentions.



racial profiling, outlining how scopic regimes affected the Haitian Revolution, the period following Abolition, the civil rights movement and BLM. The work shows how images have long created conversations about power relations and produced a sense of agency for disenfranchised individuals.

Parts of the book show how images taken from dashcams, surveillance cameras and bodycams are intentionally edited to present a one-sided point of view from police officials and their representatives. Although Mirzoeff (2017:17) provides a comprehensive visual outlook of racial inequality in the United States as well as goes into significant detail about how BLM “appears” on online mediums, the work does, at times, come off as one-sided.



Figure 9: Ti-Rock Moore, *Confronting truths: wake up*, 2015. Mannequin sculpture. Gallery Guichard, Chicago. (Paul 2015:9).

Particularly in his description of the death of Michael Brown, Mirzoeff (2017:145) uses the following words:

This was a teenager with problems, certainly, financial and otherwise, but someone who had given himself a chance of getting past them. Not a violent monster.

However, having watched the surveillance footage (Figure 2), Brown is clearly being bullying or even threatening to the store clerk at the convenience shop that he visited. To portray Brown’s intimidating behaviour to be, as Mirzoeff (2017:145) implies, “teenage problems”, creates a cognitive dissonance when comparing Brown’s behaviour shown in the shop. In Mirzoeff’s radical approach to tackling police brutality and racial inequality, he risks ignoring circumstantial evidence that could affect how visual activism is perceived.

2. John Paul (2015) *Protesting police violence: Black Lives Matter and visual and performance art in the era of extrajudicial police killings*.

Following the circulated online videos of police killing unarmed African-American men, visual art and performances pieces emerged as to make sense of the deaths. Paul (2015:7, 25) calls the art “movement-art”, described as cultural work which promotes political activity, as well as encourages a sense of compassion for the event from the public. Paul (2015:7) describes the significance of “visual emblems” to create a sense of community and maintain a following, referring specifically to BLM.

With visually striking artworks such as *Confronting truths: wake up* (2015) by Ti-Rock Moore, viewers are forced to face the humanity of Michael Brown, as a teenager who was a victim of police brutality. The artwork instils an emotional connection with the teenager as opposed to seeing his death as another statistic.

By generating a catalogue of artworks, Paul (2015:22) demonstrates the emotive significance of works of arts connected to BLM and portrays a method of analysing visual objects of activism from a culturally and socially-situated point of view. Missing from Paul’s (2015) analysis is an emphasisation on the online element. Rather, his work focuses on the art that erupted from the BLM protests. Nonetheless, his musings on visual symbolism are useful in identifying how the increased visibility of socially impactful events leads to shared values or motive to politically act against perceived injustices.

3. Julia Bryan-Wilson (2016) *Journal of Visual Culture: themed issue on visual activism*.

The Journal of Visual Culture’s themed issue on visual activism combines works which discuss the role of visibility in political protest. Contributors provide definitions, examples and critique regarding the visual’s role in modern day activism. Following the conference at the Brava Theatre in San Francisco, the panel deliberated various issues including “environmental justice, queer tactics, networked activism, conflict zones, and population displacement” (Bryan-Wilson *et al* 2016:6).

Bryan-Wilson *et al* (2016) offer relevant examples of where visuals created strong political argument. To illustrate their point, they refer the actions of a Japanese man who, in a hazmat suit, hacked into the TV media airwaves post-Fukushima, pointed a

finger at the screen, then back at the nuclear plant. The man's actions and his appearance in the suit silently implied that the responsibility of the nuclear disaster fell on TEPCO, the Japanese electricity utility. His performance, through the digital medium, is then defined by Bryan-Wilson *et al* (2016) as visual activism.

*Affect theory:*

4. Ken Hillis, Susanna Paasonen, Michael Petit (eds) (2015) *Networked affect*.

Focussing on affective relations in the online space, the works in *Networked affect* (2015) re-insert the human factor into online communication. Under the premise that interactions on the web are defined by sensory experiences, the works follow the impactful corporeal impact of various social encounters defined by the parameters of digital spaces. With social connections increasingly defined by online aggregators, the authors trace how networked Internet sites become places of output for excessive sensory experiences. The authors show how the online environment is sometimes an outlet for those types of communication frowned upon offline, such as taboo or offensive interactions.

An example such a situation is Paasonen's (2015:27-30) chapter about a Finnish Facebook comment thread on a page titled *We Love Helsinki*. At a club event organised by the page, a Finnish DJ announced to the crowd that the men should get a grip and ask the females on the floor to dance. Angered at the assumption of heterosexuality, as well as the implication that the women were waiting to be asked to dance by men, a debate broke out on the event page between 173 users who contributed 728 comment posts. The result of the debate was far-reaching coverage, the event having been further discussed on blog-posts, internet news-sites and offline discussions (Paasonen 2015:30).

The works illustrate how emotive communication online can potentially lead to further interactions, or even motivate offline politically charged action such as in BLM, RMF and FMF.

## *Hermeneutics and Methodology*

5. Lacea Loader, Thierry Luescher and Taabo Mugume (2017) *#FeesMustFall: an internet-age student movement in South Africa and the case of the University of the Free State*.

Loader *et al* (2017) provide much-needed South African insight into the mobilisation of students in the RMF and FMF movements. The study, importantly, considers the spatial factors that characterise activism in the network age. The authors refer frequently to Castells' (2010) assertion that the speed and spans of online networks redefine the limits of communication. Also touched upon are longevity issues plaguing current South African student activists, such as the problems associated with establishing long-term political affiliations and the maintaining of community groups on campus.

As stated above, the use of the University of the Free State's (UFS) Redbook and the CBM (Citizen based monitoring) Social Media Analysis Report, both which recorded the media coverage of FMF spanning the dates of 15 to 23 October 2015, are used in the study. Loader *et al* (2017:235) expand on the students' demands, especially related to colonial symbols on campus, and the issues of language transformation to Afrikaans to English.

One drawback of the article is that it focusses specifically on UFS where the language issue is more pertinent than colonial symbolism on campus. The article, therefore, provides interesting insight on FMF as a hashtag movement, but there is less information directly relevant to visual activism.

6. Ian Heywood and Barry Sandywell (1999) *Interpreting Visual Culture: explorations in the hermeneutics of the visual*.

Heywood and Sandywell's (1999) book provides various examples of how to apply hermeneutical interpretation to visual texts. Davey (1999:4-5) breaks down the history of philosophical hermeneutics, referring to the origin of the word which derives from Hermes, the Greek messenger god. Hermes oversees the transmission of divine messages from the gods to the humans so that the mortals can understand them. Hermes' messages provide illumination for the often ambiguous messages that derive from the gods. Davey (1999:5-7) uses the mythological metaphor here to allude to the temporal nature of messages and to the fact that messages often contain ambiguous

meaning. Applied to art, hermeneutics attempts to reveal messages which seem to be commonplace or ordinary, revealing the prejudices and prior assumptions that shape a person's interpretation of texts.

My research, therefore, pulls from a variety of sources aimed to provide a comprehensive approach to both the visual material analysed, as well as to the interpretative method. The dissertation considers historical and current precedents of visual activism, affect theory as applied to research on online environments, and hermeneutical approaches to image and art studies.

## CHAPTER THREE

### PROTEST IMAGERY: A COMPARISON OF VISUAL ICONS IN #BLACKLIVESMATTER AND #FEESMUSTFALL

The following chapter interrogates the iconography of the BLM movement and the FMF movement. Instead of being unified by the traditional bonds of communities such as kinship, religion or nationality, I begin by positing that BLM and FMF rather form virtual communities. To substantiate my claim, I posit that through the sharing of certain easily identifiable protest icons, such as the clenched fist, members of the communities can stimulate feelings in certain viewers. I look at the use of the clenched fist in previous political circumstances and explain how the use of the gesture as a symbol of protest has deeply imprinted on the visual memory of individuals from the United States and South Africa.

I begin my argument by first describing the defining aspects of a virtual community, as posited by Howard Rheingold<sup>24</sup> and Castells, and then comparing those characteristics to definitions of traditional community put forth by Émile Durkheim<sup>25</sup> as well as Tönnies.

I maintain that online protest groups, such as BLM and FMF, to some extent, use visual activism to create connections through the stimulation of affective ties. Those affective ties are formed through the sharing of protest iconography among group members who intuitively understand and feel strongly about the visuals shared.

I venture that because the communities are based more on common feeling than traditional ties, the connections between members of the virtual group may not be as strong as, say, an official political party (which have in the past tended to rely on more face-to-face forms of campaigning such as door-to-door activism to gain attention).<sup>26</sup>

Instead, I posit that the groups depend on a different type of political presence based on the sharing of icons that stir intense feeling through the transmission of affect. I

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<sup>24</sup> Howard Rheingold (1947—present) is a social critic, teacher and writer who has specialised in the cultural and political implications of digital media since 1964.

<sup>25</sup> Émile Durkheim (1858—1917) was a French sociologist who combined empirical observation with sociological theory to establish the academic discipline of the social sciences.

<sup>26</sup> Nkosazana Dlamini (1977:28-31) who was vice-president of the SASO (South African Students' Organisation) recalls campaigning the ANC's political views to strangers outside of the country during apartheid.

conclude by positing that the ties uniting members BLM and FMF are based on the stimulation of fellow feeling, through visuals for example, rather than official political membership and other more binding affiliations.

To illustrate my point, I look at non-digital iconography where the focal point is symbolic hand gestures. I interrogate how those non-verbal indicators have been framed to inspire connection to a group or an individual's values.<sup>27</sup> I then look at how those icons are appropriated and re-invented by BLM and FMF visual activism to inspire invigorated meaning.

Using the protest gesture of the clenched fist as an example, I claim that the iconic gestures uniting the members of BLM and FMF have intuitive meanings in their current context because the protest icon has held deeply entrenched meaning in both American and South African history.

In the last section, I look at the iconography from BLM and FMF and describe how they have created new gestures to comment on their political messages. I show how FMF has appropriated past protest iconography to add meaning to the original gestures used in their activism. Lastly, I iterate how the groups use gestures to articulate intuitive messages that potentially resonate in their respective virtual communities.

Before any speculation is made about the visual activism in either of the case studies, certain clarifications need to be made on approach and definition. For the sake of accuracy, the pictures chosen were exclusively from SNS sites and not selected from a Google Image Search. Further, the selected visuals were chosen from Twitter with the BLM hashtag or BLM related hashtags (Figure 19), BLM affiliated Instagram pages with related hashtags (Figure 1), the Facebook page unofficially associated with the FMF movement (Figures 17 and 18) or pages which feature the FeesMustFall hashtag (Figure 20).

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<sup>27</sup> By non-digital, I mean that the images are not originally digital but have rather been originally photographed offline then uploaded to websites.

### 3.1 Virtual communities and the #BlackLivesMatter and #FeesMustFall movements

Following the Arab Springs, protest communities are increasingly decentralised, without core leaders and rely on SNS to spread information (Breuer 2012:1). Especially in countries where there is a high amount of media censorship, Anita Breuer (2012:4) states that the Internet provides a realm where activists can circumvent communication blockages and inform the public about government corruption and abuses against human rights. In her study of SNS use during the Tunisian Revolution, Breuer (2012:1-4) found there was an increase in the amount of political information received and spread through SNS. Further, she found that because of the exposure of injustices through social networking channels, individuals without prior political inclinations were motivated to act because of intense emotional responses to the information spread.<sup>28</sup>

Breuer's (2012:8-17) concept of information includes inflammatory messages against the government on blogs and SNS. However, she also includes the sharing of digital media, such as YouTube videos and photographs, that expose and challenge governmental larceny (Breuer 2012:15-16). Castells (2010:405) posits that the ability to both upload and capture various kinds of media on networked sites encourages users to enact a significant amount of their communication on SNS, in general. Individuals can speak to friends, family members and acquaintances on SNS, but are also able to engage in conversations with strangers, politicians, celebrities and other influential figures.

The attribution of the word community to the political exchanges on SNS is directly related to the formation of real activist groups on the sites through repeated exchanges. The line between a layman community member and an explicit supporter of a group is blurred as the rite of passage is reduced to a click of a button.<sup>29</sup>

Without official membership, the online political communities allow for varied levels of activist involvement, ranging from individuals who physically participate in protests, to

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<sup>28</sup> The Tunisian Revolution lasted from December 2010 to January 2011 and resulted in the removal of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali from office (Breuer 2012:1).

<sup>29</sup> For instance, there is an official BLM Facebook page and an unofficial FMF Facebook group. To join the BLM page, a user needs to 'like' the page to gain access, whereas the FMF group needs admin permission to be entered. I have not come across any other FMF groups with as many members as the #FeesMustFall #National Rally group on Facebook.



people who are campaigning against the movements, to mere spectators without deep interest.

The lack of formal structure occurs in *any* user's ability to participate in discussions, as well as with the creation of Han's (2011:11-12) conception of "collective intelligence" within the communities. Collective intelligence arises when the shared communication between users leads to the creation and distribution of knowledge by and for other members.

The result of collaborative knowledge-making, or collective intelligence is referred to by Han (2011:11), Christian Fuchs (2014:35) and Jan van Dijk (2012), as "participatory culture". The participatory culture of Web 2.0 allows users to create and share cultural objects that are meaningful to the group. The members of the group then decide which of those cultural objects take precedence within the networked communities.<sup>30</sup> Meaning-making, then, results through horizontal communication as opposed to coming from one authoritative source.

Although there are occasionally louder voices in the activist movements, Alicia Garza in BLM or Mcebo Dlamini<sup>31</sup> in FMF for example, the participatory culture of SNS allows for virtually anyone who is connected to the network to disseminate their views on the sites. The result is an amalgamation of expressions: dissenting and supportive symbolism which forms the visual statements of a virtual community.<sup>32</sup>

Virtual community, a term coined by Rheingold (1999:[sp]) in 1987, refers to an abstract social system based on mutual feelings rather than institutional relations such as religion or family blood-ties. The cultural exchanges occurring in virtual communities are different to those offline in that they curated to be easily consumable and relatable (Rheingold 1999:[sp]).

On SNS, where there are multiple modes of expression exceeding the offline limitations of time and space, the parameters that define discussion depend mostly on visuals that capture public interest (Castells 2010:406; Han 2011:10; Fuchs 2014:38).

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<sup>30</sup> The precedence of certain cultural objects is decided through attention accumulation aggregators such as the 'Like' button on Facebook or the thumbs-up button on YouTube.

<sup>31</sup> Mcebo Dlamini (1986—present) served as WITS Student Representative Council President before he was impeached in 2015. He was arrested for public violence, theft, malicious damage to property and assault.

<sup>32</sup> Dissenting opinion also includes the phenomenon of flaming or trolling where users are intentionally inciteful or controversial, usually to derail conversations into chaos (Paasonen 2015:34).

According to Castells (2010:403-406), *all*, offline and online, communication relies on the circulation and understanding of signs; however, he iterates that interpretations of icons online are less straight forward than in reality because of their potential to be distanced from their original contexts.<sup>33</sup> If, for example, an individual wants to engage with media material from the felling of the Rhodes statue (Figure 3), one can watch videos from traditional news media sources, look at footage captured from smartphones of protesting students or look at photographs from the digital camera of a bystander.

Multimodal networks allow users to look at the event from all angles, through the various perspectives and, potentially, in a way which is removed from situational context. Upon viewing the material, the user can then respond in ways they deem meaningful, either by text, hyperlinks, images or videos, depending on the format of the SNS.

Positive participation in virtual communities rely more on users' understanding and constructive engagement with the groups' shared expressions and less on traditionally uniting features such as race, gender or nationality. Traditional, here, refers to Durkheim's (1985:30) concept of pre-modern societies whose formation relied on a deep sense of shared morality or values. Durkheim terms the formation of traditional communities as the *conscience collective*; his definition straying slightly away from Tönnies' (2001:17) definition of *Gemeinschaft* as an "organic" structure.

*Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, prior to Tönnies' (2001:17) differentiation of the words, were used interchangeably in German. Following the Industrial Revolution, the shift from agricultural communities to urban, capitalist-driven society meant face-to-face relationships (*Gemeinschaft*) gave way to the more impersonal connections (*Gesellschaft*).

Tönnies (2001:18) refers to the biological, or in his words, "organic" aspects of social life which unite people as *Gemeinschaft*. The bond between a parent and child, for example, is the strongest uniting relationship according to Tönnies (2001:22).

*Gesellschaft*, on the other hand, forms the commercial, regulatory type of behaviour that stems from necessity rather than emotional organic connection (Tönnies

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<sup>33</sup> Such as through the continuous sharing of an image without explanatory text.

2001:52). The actions conducted in a *Gesellschaft* are carried out for the sake of selfish gain, but simultaneously, for the functionality of society.

Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft*, interpreted by Durkheim (1985:10) does not adequately encompass the changing values of a community. In a shift from orthodox structuralist views, Durkheim (1985:10) implies that the constructions that define community can take on a life of their own removed from original meaning. In other words, the symbolic structures which characterise orthodox religious communities could, in time, transform into orthodox secular societies based on the gradual transference of beliefs. Durkheim's *conscience collective* comprises of four defining characteristics: "volume", "intensity", "rigidity" and "the changing content of beliefs and values" (Giddens 1972:5).

*Conscience collective* includes the values of a group, as *Gemeinschaft* does. However, Durkheim (1985:30-45) further demarcates "volume" as the depth that similar beliefs are held by members of a community. He states that "intensity" is the degree to which an individual's cognitive and emotional attributes are esteemed, and "rigidity" as the extent which the moral code of a community is enforced.

The "changing content of beliefs and values" as aforementioned, refers to the tendency for cultural values to absorb and transform into new forms, or what Anthony Giddens (1984:3) refers to as the *durée* of human agency. According to Giddens (1984:3) human action should not be considered as separate events but rather by a continuum of one proceeding to the next. (Giddens 1984:8). If the actions of a group are interpreted in *durée*, then singular actions take less precedence, and the multiple actions of a group come to define that community's values or beliefs.

Durkheim (1985:35-40) struggles to separate his notion that superiority or advanced morality is somehow innately connected to a mechanised society. He implies that smaller communities have a devotional sense of duty to one another as community members as opposed to the ethical, by his implication, superior rationality needed to uphold order in a society.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> An example of devotional sense of duty would be a son loyally taking over his ailing father's business, as opposed to say, the ethical rationality needed to maintain fair competition between big businesses.

Giddens (1984:2-7), however, takes on another approach. He implies that the collective actions of a group are not just the cumulative actions of devoted or dutiful individuals, but are rather the result of mimetic, routine or conventional acts of bodies.

Fuchs (2014:36) and Han (2011:66) look to the above sociological theorists to explain the re-organisation of human relations online. Interpreting Giddens (1984:1), Fuchs (2014:36-38) states media comprises of structure and agency. Structure here is defined in the sociological or linguistic sense of the word, where established systems dictate the behaviour of humans. Agency refers to the human ability to undertake rational or irrational action (Giddens 1984:11). Following these definitions, Fuchs (2014:38) suggests that web platforms, as mediums, consists of both technological structure and the social actions of human agents who navigate that system.

The organisation of the groups on social networks, in some ways, follow the logic of traditional communities in Durkheim's *conscience collective* model. Firstly, although different for each community, every iteration of the group consists of individuals who hold a common purpose to some degree. Secondly, individuals, using symbols to indicate their affiliation to a group, engage in highly intensive exchanges with members both inside and outside of the community. Thirdly, group membership is allowed if contributors conform to the explicit or non-explicit rules of the group, and lastly, that the sustainability of the community relies on the negotiation of changing values based on fluctuating cultural conditions in the network. An example of fluctuating cultural conditions would be a hypothetical discussion on a forum regarding whether the burning of art in the RMF coincides with the group's outlined manifesto (UCT: Rhodes Must Fall 2015:[sp]).<sup>35</sup>

Some of the community's visual icons rely on the simulation of deeper encoded acts situated in collective memory. Other codes gain credence through their persistent iterations as they appear on the network. The continued relevance of BLM and FMF rely on those intensive exchanges stirred by the sharing of visual emblems that serve to unite the group and motivate outsiders to join the causes.

Giddens (1984:12-13) states that for a group of people to be considered, what he calls, a social system, there must be collective action based on the requirements of the

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<sup>35</sup> Artists whose work was burned includes anti-apartheid activist photographer, Molly Blackburn, commentators on the social status of black Africans such as Vusi Khumalo and Diane Victor.

community. In the case of the BLM and FMF protest groups, the assumption is that survival of the groups depends on continued reception of the activists' messages by members and non-members, acknowledgment of the movements' demands by those in governmental power (Loader *et al* 2017:232).

The continued existence of the community in the social system, for Giddens (1984:8-13), does not necessarily rely on the meeting of group goals, but in the cumulative actions of its individual members. In adding his "active" qualifier to the idea of community, Giddens (1984:6) foresees the need to include the concept of "flow" or dynamism into sustainment of a group.

In other words, due to increased connectivity online, the demonstrations of the group exist within a continuum of representation. In the realm of SNS, the visual activism for the respective communities needs to be consistent, but simultaneously those representations need to serve as legitimate axioms for the groups' values.

I have chosen images that are representative of the visual activism from BLM and FMF. For example, in both cases, there is the continued icon of the clenched fist which is repeatedly shown in the communities' SNS visual activism. Depictions of the clenched fist seem to instinctively point to previous iterations of the gesture, such as those seen in Figures 10, 11, 12 and 13 (Hughes & Parry 2015:305).

I argue that the protest imagery attempts to align itself with previous iterations of the same gestural forms through imitation, a phenomenon Castells (2010:405) refers to as a "supertext". A supertext is a conversation between different mediums which supersede time and space.

In other words, the BLM and FMF protest imagery not only refers to previous gestures, but also utilises new gestures (Figures 18 & 19) to express invigorated connotations of solidarity. The persistence and success of those gestures is determined by how well they connect with the feelings and values of other group members. Therefore, I posit that BLM and FMF sustain their existence of virtual communities through representing re-framed versions of cultural artefacts which kindle memories of stronger *Gemeinschaft*-like relations, or what Giddens (1984:6) refers to as the translation of values in *durée*.

Although there is a persistence of shared icons between the members of the virtual communities, that is not to say that there are no traditional uniting traits between group members. In fact, a study of tweets following the use of the BLM hashtag after Martin's death shows that most of the participants who engaged positively with the movement were black and female (Olteanu, Gatica-Perez & Weber 2015:1). The statistics from the study may indicate that certain members of a race and gender are able to attune to the group's values better than others.

However, because there are no requirements or official membership that force members of a group to physically meet with one another, there is less of a necessity to bond in a face-to-face manner. Individuals can anonymously affiliate with the movement without having to reveal their physical body. In virtual communities, I argue that connecting to other group members or meaningfully showing group association requires symbols that signal that an individual has intuitive understanding of the group's tenets.

### 3.2 Icons that stir: activism in and out of the social media space

Although there are various icons connoting protest, such as images of placards, groups of people marching or shouting in the streets, the clenched fist has persisted as an activist icon of power and liberation (Koole & Schubert 2009:829). The clenched fist gesture occurs in protest images from both BLM and FMF (Figures 11 & 13), even though the primary geographical location of each protests differs.

Even though the gesture is seemingly the same, I argue that the interpretation of the act and users' ability to connect with the gesture are based on the factors which are historically contingent and yet exacerbated by their circulation in the networked space.

Images of bodies have persistently been used to upset power relations, whether that be through photographs in newspapers, magazines or online (Branch & Mampily 2015:19; Sontag 2003:51, 81).<sup>36</sup> Jenny Hughes and Simon Parry (2015:302) assert that photographed moments of action are “theatrical” when bodies expose power relations. Theatre, according to Hughes and Parry (2015:302), draws attention to what is inside the frame, how the body acts according to its contextual situation and how the everyday is disrupted with the presence of the body.

In a social experiment conducted by Sander Koole and Thomas Schubert (2009:828), they found that men’s self-concept transforms through holding the clenched fist gesture. Through holding a clenched fist, feelings of assertiveness and strength are transmitted to the person making the gesture but interestingly, the study finds that the audience perceives a sense of power and boldness from the individual holding clenched fist. Koole and Schubert (2009:829) further state that the fist shows a readiness to use force as a means of gaining or regaining power.

In a similar experiment, Julia Fisher *et al* (2011:1147) studied how body gestures impacted the ability of an audience to differentiate between strong and weak arguments. They found that certain “high power gestures”, such as the fist and open body poses made an audience more receptive and confirming of certain messages. Further, they found that there are certain circumstances, such as divisive political situations, where individuals actively avoid contrarious information, especially when that information went against their existing beliefs (Fisher *et al* 2011:1147).

Following the findings of Koole and Schubert, as well as Fisher *et al*, I argue that the icon of the clenched fist works as a powerful visual argument, especially during times of political turmoil, because the gesture can wordlessly transmit a sense of strength and power to its holder. Due to the strong message transmitted by the gesture, the holder does not have to stringently argue why he or she deserves power. Aside from the intuitive meaning transmitted, the clenched fist icon has also been historically used as a powerful form of communicative gestures in both American and South African history.

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<sup>36</sup> Sontag (2003:51) mentions the “CNN effect”, or the idea that the media controls what deserves to be protested by directing attention to certain events.

I posit that among the participants who physically protested in both virtual communities, there exists a sufficient amount of historical knowledge informing the use of the clenched fist as a protest icon. I argue that because such icons are becoming increasingly embedded in public memory, sharing photographs of the gesture online acts as a powerful motivator in the BLM and FMF protests specifically because the gesture can easily associate sentiments of empowerment, while simultaneously activating a remembrance of past political contexts where the use of the gesture was extremely subversive.



Figure 10: Tommie Smith (centre) and John Carlos (right) extend their fists upward in protest against the treatment of African-Americans in the United States, Mexico City, 1968. Photograph by John Dominis. (ABC News).

A striking example of protest using the clenched fist icon occurred in 1968 with its use by Tommie Smith and John Carlos at the Mexico Summer Olympics (Figure 10).<sup>37</sup> The two American athletes held their fists in political dissent following extraordinary feats of bodily athleticism. With the American national anthem playing in the background, and the world's eyes on them, the two raised their clenched fists in a clear act of defiance.

The weight of their action is achieved through a type of theatricality. Smith and Carlos' used the clenched fist to draw attention to their political protest regarding the citizen

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<sup>37</sup> African-American athletes who both won medals at the 1968 Summer Olympic Games in Mexico and famously held up clenched fists to signify black power on the podium. Tommie Smith (1944—) won gold in the 200m dash and John Carlos (1945—present) won bronze.



status of black Americans as opposed to showing pride in their success on behalf of the United States. With the backdrop of the tumultuous political circumstances of African-Americans in the 1960's, as well as the addition of television cameras transmitting their act to a vast audience, Smith and Carlos elevated the clenched fist to a global protest symbol by using their televised presence to broadcast their visual activism.

In South Africa, the raised clenched fist is largely associated with Steve Biko (1946-1977) and the Black Consciousness movement where it features on the logo of the South African Student Organisation (SASO).<sup>38</sup> Members of SASO, a political organisation run by university-aged students aimed at black empowerment, began educating high school-aged students on the tenets of Black Consciousness, inspiring the mass gathering in 1976 (Ndlovu 1998:319).



Figure 11: Students protesting during the Soweto Riots, 1976. Photographer unknown. Johannesburg. (SA History).

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<sup>38</sup> The Black Consciousness movement followed the Sharpeville Massacre in the 1960's and propositioned for black Africans to become self-determining. The movement was founded by Steve Biko, leader of SASO.

In an image from the Soweto Riots, the clenched fist is held up by many of the protesting students (Figure 11). Some of the students are looking directly at the camera, holding placards and smiling jovially. Given the controlled atmosphere of black Africans in the heavily oppressive apartheid state, the gesture is both seditious and inspiring in the context.

Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu (1998:354) states that in the official Cillie Commission report<sup>39</sup>, a portion of the events of the day is detailed as follows:

10h30: Police patrols encountered unruly behaviour everywhere. Groups of people were milling about, the Black Power salute was given, and a defiant attitude was adopted towards the police.

If the Black Power<sup>40</sup> salute is the clenched fist, and also taking into consideration that a parent had to qualify that her eight-year-old child was not doing a Black Power salute after she was shot by the police a day after the Riots, I argue that the use of



Figure 12: Jacques-Louis David, *Tennis Court Oath*, 1761. Ink sketch on canvas, 400 x 660 cm. Musée national du Château de Versailles, Versailles. (The-Clever-Pup).

<sup>39</sup> The Cillie Commission report was compiled by Piet Cillie, a strong supporter of the NP government.

<sup>40</sup> The Black Power movement is an umbrella term for the global black consciousness movements spanning the years 1960 to 1980. A google search of the "Black Power salute" show links about the raised fist.

the clenched fist symbol by the Sowetan students represented a powerful moment in South African history.<sup>41</sup>

Notably, the photograph is taken eight years after the image of Smith and Carlos. But considering the censorship occurring during the Apartheid era, it is unclear whether the children would have had exposure to the image of the two Olympians. Leslie Anne Hadfield (2017:3), however, claims that the raised fist was adopted from members of SASO who read works by prominent authors in the United States' Black Power movement, indicating that the Black Consciousness movement may have appropriated the gesture after its success in the United States. According to Pallo Jordan and Mac Maharaj (2016:[sp]), the clenched fist as a symbol of resistance in South Africa occurred 'spontaneously' to the chant *Amandla Ngawethu; Matla kea Rona* translating to "The power is ours".

How exactly the clenched fist became associated with the Black Power movement is unclear, but the use of the raised fist has been associated with the worker's movement since the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Korff & Peterson 1992:71). Gottfried Korff and Larry Peterson (1992:71) track the iconographical evolution of hand signification in imagery of revolutions. They found that there is a migration of the primary gesture associated with the worker's movement from clasped hands in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century, to the clenched fist toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century.

Korff and Peterson (1992:71) state that during the French Revolution, clasped hands became associated with "binding loyalty". The hand gesture, which can be seen at the centre of Jacques-Louis David<sup>42</sup>'s sketch *Tennis Court Oath* (1761) (Figure 12) represents the moment of *fraternité* between the embattled French classes. The clerical estate, representing the Roman Catholic and Protestant factions hand in hand, represents the peaceful culmination of the violent uprising.<sup>43</sup>

Korff and Peterson (1992:71) state that the symbol of clasped hands representing fraternity had continued association, even up to the worker's movement in Germany

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<sup>41</sup> Onica, the mother of the child, said the following about the events '(Lilly) never gave the "Black power" sign and was not part of a crowd when she was shot.'" (National Archives of South Africa Vol 190/4).

<sup>42</sup> Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825) was a French painter specialising in the neo-classical approach.

<sup>43</sup> Figure 14 shows the coming together of the Roman Catholic priest, representing the upper-class an

in 1848 to 1850. Clasped hands are seen in the official symbol of the *Arbeiter-Verbrüderung* or “worker’s fraternity”.

Interestingly, Korff and Peterson (1992:77) state that it was only toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century, with the upward rise of worker strikes that the clenched fist came into prominence where it became associated with the working-class discontent in America:

The clenched fist first became a spontaneous gesture of protest, discontent, and readiness to fight during the strike wave of the 1880... and was quickly incorporated into the rhetoric of strikes and protests, often extending into threats of violence through the grasping of stones ready to be thrown...

*The Strike* (1886) (Figure 13) by German-American artist Robert Köhler<sup>44</sup> showcases



Figure 13: Robert Köhler, *The Strike*, 1886. Oil on canvas, 184,5 x 281,3 cm. Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin. (Artrenewel).

a protest with a clenched fist portraying a sense of militancy in the depiction as opposed to achieving a fraternal type of bond with those in power. Looking at the image in juxtaposition with David’s (Figure 14) sketch, the viewer gains a sense of urgency and anger which characterises the exchange. The man in the top hat is

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<sup>44</sup> Robert Köhler (1850-1917) was a German-American fine artist and art teacher.

spatially separated from the workers in his position on top of the stairs. Aside from the number of workers compared to the one industrialist and his one protégé, there is an emotional disparity implied in the image. The workers are dynamic, in conversation with one another and united in their discontent. The industrialist is still and emits an impression of coldness. The willingness of the workers to use force is portrayed in the worker on the right who is bent down, ready to pick up a stone.

The anger and the frustration of the workers is communicated through the gestural symbolism of the piece. The goal of the workers does not seem to be fraternity or peace, but an assertion of their power over the fictional industrialist. Looking at Koff and Peterson's genealogy of gestural protest imagery, the meaning attached to gestural icons, and the intended affect of those icons, is evidently context dependent. With the clasped hands icon, the projected sentiment is aimed at reconciliation and brotherhood (Figure 12), whereas with the clenched fist icon, the projected mood is more militant and forceful (Figure 13).

If one were to look at the protest gestures associated with Martin Luther King Jr.'s branch of the Civil Rights Movement (Figure 14), the symbol of the clasped hands is emphasised over the clenched fist associated with Malcolm X and the Black Power movement (Figure 10).

In their analysis of the clasped hands as a symbol of brotherhood, Korff and Peterson (1992:72) point to the emphasis Christian iconography places on clasped hands to promote fellowship among men. With knowledge of Martin Luther King Jr.'s philosophy of non-violence which are associated with his focus on the biblical love-thy-brother adage, it is interesting to see his followers adopt the clasped hand gesture (Figure 14) seen in Figure 12, where there is also incidentally a focus on Christian unification.

In comparison, the followers of leaders such as Malcolm X and the Black Power movement (Figure 10), who follow more socialistic, militant views, are seen using the raised fist gesture (Harper 1971:395). Although it would be a stretch to argue that King Jr. and X *consciously* appropriated protest iconography for their political views, there does seem to be a transferral nature to gestures, as put forth by Lesley Stern (2008:201).



Figure 14: People clapping hands and singing during the march on Washington D.C for jobs and freedom, Washington D.C, 1963, photographed by Paul Schutzer.

Stern (2008:201) argues that certain gestures can emit emotional power no matter how many times they are iterated. She continues, stating:

To understand why certain gestures possess such power, we should not attempt to decipher the meaning of the gesture but rather look to the intensity that impresses itself on our visual memory.

Stern (2008:208) proposes that the gestures that are migratory, in other words, able to induce movement in others. She argues that certain prolific gestures are innately charged with an emotional force, driven by their imprinting on a group's *visual memory*. Stern's (2008:208) argument considers that the affective circumstances where the gesture is raised plays a great role in the receiving of the gestures by others.

With Martin Luther King Jr.'s use of clasped hands in his protests, I argue his use of the icon draws on the transcendent values of Christian brotherhood and reconciliation, also seen in Figure 12. As King Jr.'s protest marches were often met with violent resistance from federal troops and policemen, the reconciliatory clasped-hands gesture stands as concrete, captured evidence of the group's values despite the extreme resistance the group faced.<sup>45</sup> I further argue that the certain gestures, such as the clasped hands and clenched fist gesture, are able to reproduce intense sentiments because they are repeatedly used in circumstances where the raising of the gesture is prolific.

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<sup>45</sup> An example of a march where King Jr.'s and his followers were met with violence is the Selma to Montgomery march, also known as 'Bloody Sunday'.

I propose that in order to generate that type of affectual propensity in viewers of the icon, the performance of the gesture needs to be intuitively understood as a subversive or powerful act according to the circumstances of where it is shown. However, I also purport that the meaning of the gesture can change if the renewed meaning is more intensive than its previous uses.



Figure 15: Walter Dhladhla, Nelson Mandela holding a clenched fist in the air after 1994 presidential victory, Cape Town, 1994. (PBSthisdayinhistory).

An example of my previous point occurs in the South African context, with images of President Nelson Mandela<sup>46</sup> triumphantly holding up a raised fist after being elected into power in 1994 (Figure 15). Mandela's use of the clenched fist disrupts a polarised view of the fist representing militancy and clasped hands symbolising fraternity. Mandela's clenched fist interpreted from a perspective post-1994 leads to mixed signification in its historical context: his pose is victorious, connotes black empowerment yet, with knowledge of his approach to re-unification post-Apartheid, reconciliatory, as well. However, differed interpretations would not be possible without prior knowledge of Mandela's legacy.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela (1918—2013) served as South African president from 1994-1999. He was an anti-Apartheid activist and political leader in the African National Congress (ANC). Mandela became a symbol for the resistance and is considered an icon of the South African struggle movement.

<sup>47</sup> Mandela, after he took the presidential office, dedicated himself to creating a diverse cabinet, including black, white, Indian and coloured members of parliament (Lyman 2014:22). South Africa, during his presidency, was known as the 'Rainbow Nation'.

Without appropriate knowledge of the South African political climate at the time, the gesture does not become meaningless. Rather, the interpreter will likely understand the action as a gesture of protest representing power or resistance, but the icon will not have the elevated meaning that it has in the South African context or in the American context. As Marcel Mauss (1935:75) asserts, the use of bodily gestures is primarily based on learned or long-established ways of moving; human beings learn how to act and understand what actions mean from those with authority.

The gesture of the raised fist is a learned gesture which relies on its repeated appropriation in different contexts; the icon loses and gains meaning depending on the respective environment where it manifests. On SNS, repeated visual activism gestures, such as the clenched fist, rely on iconic historical acts, those acts that hold authority in the collective memory. Iterations of the gesture aim to stir a knowing feeling among members of virtual communities without having the explicitly explain the meaning behind the icon.

A question here arises regarding how the meaning of the clenched fist icon transfers when it is shared in a networked environment and if the effect of its sharing is changed compared to real life circumstances. In BLM, the protestors in Figure 16 hold fists aloft while seemingly chanting or shouting. The repeated iconography of the raised fist combined with the added text on the woman's shirt "Latinos for Black Lives" visibly associates the woman with BLM activism.





Figure 16: Women holding up clenched fists in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement, location unknown, 2016. Photographer unknown.

The cultural symbolism of BLM could be relying, to some extent, on the previous protest gesticulation seen in the Black Panther movement,<sup>48</sup> for example. Members of the Black Panther movement whose prime political resolve was to end police brutality against black Americans, were known to use the clenched fist symbol to show affiliation to the group's values. The BLM "About" (sa) section on their official website says the following about their political aim:

The Black Lives Matter Global Network is a chapter-based, member-led organization whose mission is to build local power and to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes.

The 'About' section on the website does not denote an explicit correlation between the Black Panthers' political mission and BLM's, and it would be a false equivalency to imply that BLM are fashioning their movement after 1960's black militancy groups *solely* through gestures. However, I argue that the use and the subsequent sharing of a gesture that has been previously associated with the Black Panther movement will inevitably create an intuitive connection to that movement.

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<sup>48</sup> The Black Panther movement was a political organisation founded in 1966 by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale.

BLM attempt to re-use and refurbish the icon for their own political values because their principles match the Black Panther movement's ideals in a broad manner. Even though the affiliation between the two groups is never explicitly drawn, the sentiment is implied through the repetition of the clenched fist gesture.



Figure 17: Pretoria Girls High School student Zulaikha Patel stands with her fist raised next to lockers, 2016. Photographer unknown. (Facebook).

A similar argument could be made for the image of Zulakiha Patel<sup>49</sup> (Figure 17) distributed by a member on the FMF National Rally Facebook Page. Patel's raised fist represents her defiance against her high school's policies that allegedly do not allow black students to wear their hair naturally. Interestingly, although her reason for protest does not explicitly correlate with the tenets of FMF, the connection to the group's values seems to be in her use of the icon especially during the time of political turbulence.<sup>50</sup>

In her use of the icon as a young black woman, Patel's gesture of defiance recalls past uses of the icon and creates a present context for its use. Considering Patel is of high-school age, I argue that her use of the icon alludes to Mirzoeff's (2017:33) concept of

<sup>49</sup> Zulaikha Patel (2002—present) protested with other students about the policies on Afro-hair at the Pretoria Girls' High School in 2016.

<sup>50</sup> I could not find an explicit manifesto for the FMF movement, rather, my impression of the group's values is interpreted from being a member of the FMF National Rally Facebook page since 2016.

foreshadowing a changed future where colonial structures fall away, and black people are empowered, as will be expanded on fully in Chapter 5.

### 3.3 Re-imagining political standing through gestures

BLM and FMF used gestures to present the possibility of changing the present, but they also fashioned original icons that represented the symbolism of the virtual communities. Although speaking about cinema, Pasi Väliäho (2017:252) has the following to state about the possibilities of gesturing:

This is a dream where the projections of light and shadow on the silver screen merge with the psyche's internal productions and where the postures and behaviours of starlets and stars are assimilated into an individual's bodily repertoire – and where thus a 'programming' of our phantasies and gestures, and potentially a process of transformation of ourselves, takes place...

When interpreting visual activism images on SNS, understanding and connecting with the imagery outside of its original context relies on extrapolation of meaning beyond what the picture shows. The photograph becomes, what Castells (2010:406) implies, a mix between points in time where different messages *continuously* interrelate and refurbish themselves within the networks to sustain meaning. Those expressions rely on the use of past protest iconography, and to some extent, the invention of new icons to renew the affective feelings which motivate users to interact with the virtual community.

Regarding the refurbishing of protest icons, the implication is that simply repeating gestures which refer to past activist movements is not enough for online visual activism to sustain itself. Väliäho (2017:252) seems to concur on this point:

The programming of the bodily memory of gestures and the phantasies these gestures express is a question of the reinvention of ourselves as well as the world around us. Going to the cinema means the (re)discovery of who we could be.



**Megan Sims** @The\_Blackness48 · 12h  
Powerful picture we took today at Howard University #Ferguson #MikeBrown  
#MyaWhite #DONTSHOOT pic.twitter.com/ttdVg33n5w

Figure 18: Students from Howard University hold up their hands in an imitation of Michael Brown's alleged last actions before his death, Washington D.C, 2014. Taken from Megan Sims' twitter @The\_Blackness48. (Twitter).

For Väliaho (2017:252), there needs to be a momentous point of creation for the gesture to continually inspire belief in the viewer. The “Hands Up, Don’t Shoot” gesture, which has been continuously imitated by BLM activists after students at Howard University, led by student council vice president Ikenna Ikeotuonye, mimed the movement to a camera and then posted the image to Twitter.



Figure 19: Protestors hold their hands in an 'x' gesture in front of police officers in a #FeesMustFall demonstration, location unknown, Johannesburg, 2016. Taken from the Tshwane FM Facebook page.

The group, on the request of Ikeotuonye, were imitating the alleged last movements of Michael Brown before he was fatally shot by Daryll Johnson. The gesture here, although a direct reference to the “surrender” pose taken on by unarmed people at the face of gunpoint, is elevated because it represents the moments before the death of an unarmed, teenage African-American boy (Hughes & Parry 2015:300). In other words, the activists have appropriated a ubiquitous gesture, the surrender icon, and re-injected it with invigorated meaning specific to the BLM movement. The momentous point of creation is elevated through the added element of theatricality that is emphasised in the framing of the photograph and the sheer number of people willing to mimic the gesture (Hughes & Parry 2015:300).

In a different approach, the FMF activists seem to appropriate the clenched fist icon by subtly changing the original icon. Instead of just raising fists in the air, although some protestors do wield just one clenched fist, other demonstrators thrust both fists in the air in an X symbol (Figure 20). Where the X symbol originated as representational body language of the FMF movement is unclear, but the gesture does appear in many images on SNS associated with the movement.

The crossed fists manifestation of protest symbolism attempts to re-purpose the meaning of the clenched fist protest motif. Väliaho’s (2017:252) asserts that the importance of reinventing gestures is that original meanings attached to the icon can be transferred and revitalized or even changed in the new context.

Referring to the crossed fists, the meaning of the action can then signify some of the traditional meanings associated with the raised fist in the South African context as stated above, but more importantly, signifies the possibility of a changed future. Through engaging with past icons, the FMF and BLM activists can add credence and meaning to their respective communities. By using gestures, the groups create intuitive connections to past and current political situations, thus using the emotional intensity of those moments to create visual arguments for their causes.

## CHAPTER FOUR:

### AFFECT AND SOCIAL MEDIA: SHARING IMAGES OF RESISTANCE ONLINE

In fact, there are many uses of the innumerable opportunities a modern life supplies for regarding—at a distance, through the medium of photography—other people's pain. Photographs of an atrocity may give rise to opposing responses. A call for peace. A cry for revenge. Or simply the bemused awareness, continually restocked by photographic information, that terrible things happen (Sontag 2003:13).

Since the invention of the camera, photography has been used as a means of documentation and surveillance especially during war (Adams 2002:788; Sontag 2003:10). Aside from using pictures strategically to plan imminent attacks, wartime photographers have also been known to scour death-ridden battlefields, snapping graphic photographs of the injuries and mortalities following confrontations (Sontag 2003:7).

The photography of the bleeding wounds, the death and the terror which follow conflict go beyond creating the sentiment that war is brutal and unforgiving (Sontag 2003:10). Sontag (2003:10) infers that there are two types of wartime photographs that produce significant emotional toil in the viewer. The first is the visceral response attained from looking at pictures of violence between a powerful aggressor against a seemingly powerless victim, also known as unequal displays of violence. The second is witnessing an identifiable victim of wartime death or injury, in other words, someone whose death or injury is traceable to some type of lineage. The lineage referred to by Sontag (2003:10) is implied to be violence against someone personally known to you or violence against an individual who plays a part in a larger national narrative.

Photographing violence which shows an armed aggressor harming identifiable victims serve as minute accounts of oppression that do not need much explanation (Sontag 2003:12). In other words, seeing a picture of a policeman with a club in the act of beating a defenceless young child would arguably create feelings of shock, anger and empathy in most adult viewers.

In situations where power-relations are less obvious, Sontag (2003:11) implies that the affect experienced from a photograph is more so based on the background of the individual viewer. Sontag (2003:12) uses the example of an Israeli-Jew seeing a

photograph of a Jewish person dead on the streets in Jerusalem. Fuelled by the narrative of the Palestine-Israeli conflict and without extraneous explanatory information, that person might assume that the act of violence was inflicted by an anti-Zionist Palestinian. Without explanatory information and with just the affective material of a photograph such as the one described above, such types of displays are used to divide groups or to create emotionally charged pictorial arguments (Sontag 2003:11-12).

In the South Africa context, an example of an identifiable victim might be a masculine-looking woman who might be identified as a black lesbian in a township. The reason for the brutality against her might be assumed to be corrective rape.<sup>51</sup> The assumptions made by a viewer do not necessarily have to be correct, rather what is pertinent, according to Sontag (2003:12) is that the violence is made personal through the viewer's assumptions.

Aside from war photography, the documentary-type photographs of brutalities from armed assailants are common to visual activism worldwide (Bookchin *et al* 2017:1804; Bosch & Mutsvairo 2017:78; Lodge 2012:265; Thörn 2006:905). The protest movements which occurred directly post World-War-Two through to the Cold War era, according to Håkan Thörn (2006:905), became increasingly set on swaying international public opinion through the media.

Focussing specifically on the anti-apartheid movement, Thörn (2006:905) implies that it was the strategised release of media by the ANC which elevated the anti-apartheid movements to a global platform. In his words, it was the impactful "visualisation" of the horrific actions of armed oppressors against seemingly peaceful protesters that motivated the world to pay attention to the injustices South Africa (Thörn 2006:906).

Using Thörn's (2006) arguments on the tendency of the anti-apartheid movement to create visual arguments for international recognition, as well as David L. Krantz's (2008:290) assertion that resistance photography succeeded in attracting global attention to the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, I argue that the tendency to visualise the plights of protesters has continued since the anti-apartheid era in the RMF and FMF movements due to the legacy of resistance photography.

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<sup>51</sup> According to a study in 2015, there have been 10 corrective rapes per week and 31 murders of lesbians since 2000 (Geduld & Koraan 2015:1931).

In a similar vein, I maintain that the sharing of photographs of brutal injustices and unequal displays of force were used by student activists to affectively motivate individuals to empathise with the RMF and FMF movements. In contrast to the government releasing oppositional media against the narrative of the activists as it occurred during the apartheid era, I hold that during the RMF and FMF protests, the traditional media, such as news programmes and news run SNS profiles, showcased instances of hooliganism and violence that formed a counter-narrative to the students' visual accounts. Lastly, I put forward that, to some extent, RMF and FMF visual activism relies on the collective visual memory of anti-apartheid protest imagery to affectively fuel and motivate both the movements.

#### 4.1 Anti-apartheid movement protest imagery

The term *apartheid* describes the period in South Africa following the election of the Nationalist Party (NP) to power in 1948 (Krantz 2008:290). The NP government facilitated laws which legalised the separation, displacement and forced relocation of South Africans according to their skin colour (Krantz 2008:291). Apartheid relied on the stringent regulation of the movements of black South Africans who make up the majority of the working-class in the country (Krantz 2008:291). Laws such as the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages in 1949 and the Pass Laws Act of 1952 ensured that black people were denied the freedom to live without restrictions, especially within the urban areas largely occupied by white South Africans.

The oppressive apartheid laws were met with considerable dissent locally and worldwide. In South Africa, especially in the years spanning 1960 to 1980, opposition to apartheid was met with force from the South African Police Service (SAPS) and the South African Defence Force (SADF) (Krantz 2008:292). Internationally, the oppressive rule in South Africa gained considerable attention largely due to the concerted efforts of anti-apartheid social movements and political exiles who spread word to news agencies via radio broadcasting, the distribution of letters to journalists signed by leading activists and through the circulation of visuals which showed evidence of the oppressive rule (Krantz 2008:292; Thörn 2007:906).<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Internal anti-apartheid resistance groups include (but are not limited to): (continued on next page)



As mentioned above, social movements in the post-war era focussed on developing global audiences via new media technologies, such as television, and those technologies increased the sphere of communication for activists (Thörn 2007:905). The upsurge in sensationalist motivated tabloid journalism as well as the expansion of television-broadcasted news created a new type of politicking, leading to the world focussing on visually comprehensible and dramatic activism (Thörn 2007:900). Thörn (2007:901) refers to this post-war type of activism as the “new social movements”, in other words, protest movements which appeal to an international audience rather than just a local one.

The appeal to an international audience was used by anti-apartheid activists to supersede the rampant censorship by the apartheid government (Thörn 2007:905). Krantz (2008:290) posits that the rise of “resistance” or “struggle” photography in South Africa, describing the use of cameras to capture clashes between those in control and the subjugated. Resistance photography worked as a counter-narrative to the highly censored information coming from the apartheid government and served to educate sympathetic international organisations about the unjust situation in South Africa (Krantz 2009:290; Thörn 2007:902).

During the apartheid era, two events, namely the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre and the 1976 Soweto Riots, produced some of the more shocking displays of unequal force on unarmed citizens (Krantz 2009:292). As both events produced highly affective imagery which inspired national and global outrage, it is necessary first to discuss how the distribution of photographs from the tragedies are instances of visual activism.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of March 1960, the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) organised a peaceful protest against the oppressive pass laws which saw PAC members marching to the Orlando police station (Bell 2016:[sp]; Lodge 2012:147). Notably, PAC leader, and organiser of the march Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe (1924-1978) had written to the

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- The ANC, which began as a group dedicated to increasing black representation in government structures in 1912 and progressed to a more militant group in the 1960's.
  - The PAC (founded in 1952) that rejected white leadership and denounced communist or Marxist approaches to apartheid reform.
  - SASO (founded in the late 1960's), a student organisation who based their principles on the black consciousness movement.

police station prior to the march to inform them that the PAC were planning a non-violent protest (Lodge 2012:74-75). PAC members and volunteers, led by Sobukwe, marched a circular route through Soweto, gathering supporters until they presented themselves to the police station for arrest. The members stated to the police that their crime was entering a restricted area without their passbooks and they should be arrested for it (Lodge 2012:75).

The crowd, a small group of about 100, were met with another 100 volunteers already gathered at the police station (Lodge 2012:75). When the group had reached the police station, there were already heavily armed police officers waiting outside of the building, some of them reportedly standing on top of armoured vehicles (Sibeko 1976:7). Around midday, enough protesters and bystanders joined the crowd which had amassed to an amount between 10,000 to 20,000 people, although only 300 were officially part of the march (Lodge 2012:90; Sibeko 1976:6; TRC report 1998:533).<sup>53</sup>

Several accounts at the Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC) state that the crowd was largely jovial and unarmed (TRC report 1998:533-555). At around 13:00, the protest became violent when a confrontation led to a policeman falling over, causing the crowd to push forward to witness the conflict (Sharpeville massacre: 21 March 1960 2011:[sp]). Panicked at the sudden throng of people rushing forward, the police began to fire at the crowd and random killing 69 people and wounding 180 (Bell 2016:[sp]).

Numerous interesting facts emerge in accounts of how the event was documented. *Drum* magazine, a monthly publication aimed at a primarily black African readership base, sent out two reporters to capture the march, journalist Humphrey Tyler and photographer Ian Berry.<sup>54</sup>

Although there were other journalists present throughout the day, Tyler and Berry were the only reporters at the police station when the massacre began (Bell 2016:[sp];

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<sup>53</sup> Accounts of the day differ on how many people were gathered at the police station before the police began shooting. Tom Lodge (2012:90) states that the police estimated about 20,000 people whereas David M. Sibeko (1976:7) mentions 10,000 people present at the protest.

<sup>54</sup> *Drum* magazine, founded in 1951, is a monthly editorial that has historically covered issues subversive to the narrative of the apartheid government.

Barron 2016:[sp]). Tyler had captured an exclusive first-hand experience with the march, and Berry had taken several pictures of the protesters running away from the gunfire (Figure 20). South African photographer Peter Magubane, also a photographer for *Drum*, had reportedly taken pictures deemed too “impersonal” for the event (Lodge 2012:265). On being presented Magubane’s photographs, *Drum*’s editor Tom Hopkinson had the following to say about them:

You have pictures [sic] but you don’t have pictures that will sell the paper. I would have loved to see a picture going through one’s bone. I would have loved to see a picture cracking someone’s skull. I would have loved to see a picture of spectacles lying there, and in the background [sic] you have some of the dead people (Lodge 2012:265).

Instead of Magubane’s photographs, Berry’s more graphic images were selected for the editorial and Tyler’s article along with Berry’s photographs were sent to publications such as the *Rand Daily Mail* and *Contact* for further publicity (Bell 2016:[sp]).

Hopkinson’s (cited in Lodge 2012:265) seemingly innocuous comments about what “sells” a paper is an indicator of the shift in, what Thörn (2007:900) refers to as, the “visualised” media space. Although *Drum*, *The Rand Daily Mail*, and *Contact* are local publications, as mentioned earlier, the apartheid government severely censored the media. The censoring of material lead to anti-apartheid activists’ using underground and non-mainstream sources to release images and information to international media agencies (Thörn 2007:902).

Thörn (2007:901) goes on to stipulate that the newly visualised media space had the added dimension of competing for audience attention because of the influx of images coming from multiple sources. Looking at Hopkinson’s desire for visceral images of suffering bodies in order to sell magazines together with Thörn’s musings on the visually-centred media space, one gets the impression that the type of symbolism which came to characterise the anti-apartheid movement *needed* to portray an extremely graphic type of injustice to gain attention on a global scale. Although Hopkinson might not be an explicit anti-apartheid activist, his willingness to publish information and pictures contrary to the SAPS’ accounts of the day paints him as an individual at least somewhat at ends with the regime (Bell 2016:[sp]).

The photographs which came out of the 1976 Soweto Riots are equally or perhaps more upsetting than those from the Sharpeville massacre as they show dead children. On 16 June 1976, 10,000 to 15,000 students marched from Naledi High School to Orlando Stadium in Soweto singing songs and holding up placards saying “Away with Afrikaans” or “To hell with Afrikaans” (Figure 12) (Simbao 2007:52). The children were responding to an amendment made to the 1953 Bantu Education Act which stated that geography, mathematics, biology and the physical sciences were to be taught in Afrikaans (Simbao 2007:52).<sup>55</sup> Notably, a student protester from the march leaked news of the event to the press to guarantee there would be media exposure at the event (Baker 2016:[sp]).<sup>56</sup>

Then 13-year-old Hector Pieteron (1963-1976), a student from Thesele Primary School was one of the first children to be shot (Simbao 2007:52).<sup>57</sup> Recognising her brother in Makhubu’s arms, Antoinette Pieteron ran alongside Makhubu frantically asking what happened to her brother (Baker 2016:[sp]). It was at this moment *The World* photographer Sam Nzima (1934—2018) raised his camera and snapped the iconic picture which came to represent the Soweto Riots (Figure 21) (Simbao 2007:53).

Nzima’s photo was featured on the front pages of newspapers ranging from the United States to Russia, according to Simbao (2007:53). TIME heralds Nzima’s photograph as the picture which “galvanized the world against Apartheid” (Baker 2016:[sp]). Nzima’s workplace, *The World*, had international media connections, explaining how the image spread as quickly as it did globally.

With Nzima’s photograph, an empathetic viewer is stirred by the children’s pained expressions, as well as the disturbing image of a lifeless child in the arms of a helpless young man. It may seem intuitive that people are more likely to look at graphic images

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<sup>55</sup> The Bantu Education Act further iterated that black students were to be taught that they were not equal to white people and that the language division between English and Afrikaans should be 50/50 (The June 16 Soweto Uprising 2013:[sp]).

<sup>56</sup> The students began marching at 07:30 and the march was relatively peaceful until 09:00 (The June 16 Soweto Riots 2013:[sp]). At 09:00, it is reported that a policeman threw a tear gas canister into the crowd of students, who were singing N’kosi Sikelel’iAfrika (God bless Africa) and another fuming policeman opened fire on the children with a revolver soon after (Simbao 2007:52; The June 16 Soweto Riots 2013:[sp]).

<sup>57</sup> Hit by a stray bullet while running between Moema and Vilakazi streets, Pieteron’s limp body was scooped up by a distraught 18-year-old Mbusiya Makhubu (1957—present) (Simbao 2007:53).

as opposed to photographs which do not show gore, but as Thörn (2007:905) implies, the images needed to be emotionally charged enough to change international viewpoints on the issue.

Here, a delineation between sympathy and empathy needs to be made to avoid confusion, as the words are often used interchangeably in colloquial situations, however, related to affect theory, they have specific definitions. Kate Beamer *et al* (2017:437) state that sympathy is associated with feelings of pity on witnessing or hearing about a negative situation happening to someone else, whereas empathy, and more specifically, affective empathy refers to “feeling with” another individual. Significant to Beamer *et al*'s definition of affective empathy is their inference that certain sensations transfer a sensation in another without that person necessarily having experienced the event.

I speculate that the types of images which produced significant amounts of affective empathy are those images which fall into Sontag's (2003:10) categories of unequal violence and identifiable victims. Although there are likely other types of moving images, such as pictures of signage with “Whites only” or “No blacks allowed”, I venture that those types of images do not create the same type of visceral reaction that pictures of pain and suffering instil in viewers.<sup>58</sup>

As Sontag (2003:30) implies, pain and suffering are universal affects which create strong resonance with those who are receptive to being stirred by images showing them. These presumptions are based on Thörn's (2007:906)'s positing that it was, indeed, the prominent visualisation of the anti-apartheid movement that gained international recognition of the activists' plights. He argues that it was the apartheid government releasing a report in 1978 expressing concern about the sudden rise in

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<sup>58</sup> Especially those images with narratives attached to the pain and violence shown.

global anti-apartheid sentiment that indicated the vast spread of the activist media (Thörn 2007:906).

The images of unjust violence (Figure 20) and identifiable suffering (Figure 21) were spread as far as England and New Zealand, plastered on the front-pages of newspapers or hung as posters on street-corners. The question which arises is how does one capture a 'global feeling', or a mutual response on an international scale in images? I argue that the visuals need to be instantly identifiable as wrong or unjust in a way that stirs people's affective empathy (Sontag 2003:11; Jasper & Poulsen 1995:93).

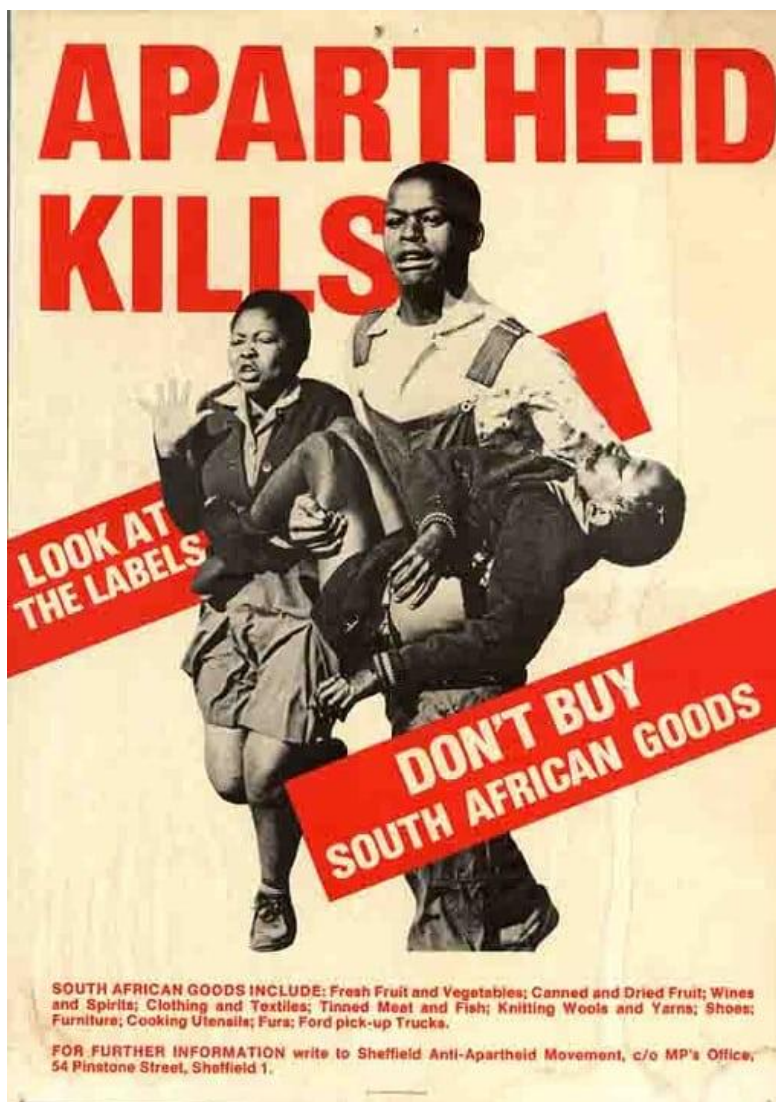


Figure 20: Apartheid kills poster from England, [sa], Oxford. Anti-apartheid Movement Archives. (Pinterest).



Figure 21: Anti-Springbok rugby poster shown in England and New Zealand, [sa], Oxford. Anti-apartheid Movement Archives. (Pinterest).

Although Thorn (2007:906) refers to the political strategy of spreading shocking imagery to motivate individuals to change their opinions or stances as “media activism”, I argue that his definition falls very close to definitions of visual activism delineated by Bryan-Wilson, González and Willsdon (2016:20) and Mirzoeff (2017:17). In both accounts, media is used to make individuals aware of social issues; however, in Thörn’s (2007:906) definition, he accounts for the dominance that international media houses had over the control of information in the post-war era.

The anti-apartheid activist strategy of using substitutive channels for spreading news about the injustice in South Africa was successful because many international media were successfully swayed to empathise with the movement, and therefore, broadcast the plight of the oppressed South Africans (Thörn 2007:906). Morally shocking imagery, as termed by James M. Jasper and Jane D. Poulson (1995:93), aimed toward producing affective empathy in the viewer, has continued to the RMF and FMF

protests. However, as activism imagery has moved primarily to web platforms the representative symbolism of the movement has to compete with traditional media houses as well as the visuals coming from the protesters themselves (Castells 2010:405-406). Tanja Bosch and Bruce Mutsvairo (2017:73), in their study of the FMF campaign, refer to the tendency of modern protests to set their own terms for their representation as “sub-activism”.

#### 4.2 Bodies under siege: capturing injuries, violence and resistance in the RMF and FMF movements

As discussed in the previous chapter, the RMF and FMF campaigns saw scenes captured from various viewpoints through smartphones, digital cameras and eyewitness narratives of events (Bosch & Mutsvairo 2017:72; Loader *et al* 2017:231). Largely because of the widespread coverage of SNS, the events gained testimonials from the activists themselves, traditional media as well as bystanders who were witnessing the event from the crowd or the side-lines (Bosch & Mutsvairo 77-80).



Figure 22: White students form a human shield around black protesting students, 2015, Cape Town. (OTL Media).



Speaking about the FMF movement, Bosch and Mutsvairo (2017:80) posit a fascinating point about the most re-tweeted image which shows white students forming a human shield around protesting black students (Figure 22).<sup>59</sup>

An eyewitness account by white protester Timothy Wolff-Piggott (2015:[sp]) at the gathering at the South African parliament, pictured above, states the following:



Figure 23: Girl struck by rubber bullet, 2016, Johannesburg. Photographed by Daylin Paul. (Youth Village).

I should acknowledge my place within the crowd simply for what it reveals. As a white male, I stood towards the front of the group as it moved through the gates, my phone held above my head, recording the events of the protest as they unfolded. Even as I saw advancing protesters tackled to the ground and being choked by the neck while walking with their hands raised, I was barely aware of how differently my presence in that space was perceived. No police officer made any move to hinder my progress; I could break from the body of students and move among the officers unimpeded, in stark contrast to the black students around me.

As Bosch and Mutsvairo (2017:80) concur, the actions of the white students spoke of a legacy of racial relations in South Africa where being white guarantees a certain amount of protection from police brutality. Noble (2005:133-134) implies that images

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<sup>59</sup> Bosch and Mutsvairo's (2017:76) analysis of the FMF campaign utilised the Mecodify application, which is an open-source tool which analyses visual data from tweets. Their study focussed on the top tweeted Twitter images from FMF.

of black bodies in contexts with past oppression mark tension between their status as legal inhabitants yet are still representative of disposable or objectified bodies, devoid of subjectivity.



Figure 24: Screenshot from the #FeesMustFall #NationalRally Facebook, 2016, Johannesburg.

In the case of FMF, instances of police brutality against white students were captured (Figure 6); however, on SNS such as Twitter and Facebook, there are a prevalence of images of excessive use of force against black female students either by security guards or by the SAPS (Figure 23) (Bosch & Mutsvairo 2017:82).<sup>60</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Bosch and Mutsvairo's (2017) study focussed on the images in Twitter which showed quantitative evidence of a prevalence of images of violence on black female bodies; however, even a less stringent search of images from FMF shows that the images were prevalent on SNS such as Facebook, as well.

By continuously sharing the images of violence, in combination with insightful captions, these graphic photographs serve to disturb the complacency of those who are looking at them from safer spaces (Sontag 2003:13). Sub-activism, as explained by Bosch and Mutsvairo (2017:72-73) involves the rigorous involvement of individual activists in shaping the representation of the movement according to their own values. Here, the rampant sharing of the undue abuse toward black female activists might represent a type of sub-activism *from* the black female student activists who are adding to the larger narrative about their treatment in society.

Alternatively, the tweets could be shared by those who empathise with their plight or they could even be shared by individuals who are responding positively to the acts of violence. However, it is difficult to say what the dominant reactions to the images without exact information on the sources of those re-tweets which is not provided in Bosch and Mutsvairo's study.

Following the assumption that the main reason the photographs were shared was in support of the activists, there is a question of how these types images succeeded in motivating individuals to share the images with their followers, friends and family. Felicity Colman's (2011:84) definition of the "affection image" is useful in describing how these types of images are affectively motivating to individuals.<sup>61</sup>

Colman's (2011:84) description of the affection-image refers to a moving scene experienced in at a movie in a cinema, but her definition also lines up with a general approach to emotionally charged imagery. To Colman (2011:84), the experience of the affection image is not just an act of interpretation, but rather the transmission of intensive sensation in movement. Colman's (2011:84; Massumi 2003:2) approach implies that the affect transmitted through these types of imagery is not just fleeting but is capable of moving individuals into different modes of being or feeling.

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<sup>61</sup> Although I refer to those individuals who are motivated by the images here, that is not to imply that every individual who looks at these images will be affected by them. However, pertinent to this argument is the number of re-tweets which followed the images of violence against black females during the FMF protests which implies that the images, in some way, resonated with a group of people.

Those sensations are not permanently attached to the individual who experiences the image, but rather, according to Ahmed (2004:119) become attached to the icons which are shared in communities. Interestingly, Ahmed (2004:131) argues that the symbolism and their attached intensities can transgress time and space and “stick” to bodies time and time, again. An effect which she refers to as “sticky intensity”, or the accumulation of the affect in images which are re-hashed displays of visually similar images.

In other words, those images of pain, or undue violence, especially toward black female students who historically represent a lack of subjectivity regarding their gender and their race in South Africa, are also recollective of those images during the apartheid era which stirred the world against the NP government (Bosch & Mutsvairo 2017:82). The reason that the images may have circulated in the way that they did is because the way they are able to garner the same sensations that the resistance photography did during the apartheid era (Ahmed 2004: 117). Therefore, the images of unjust violence on black female bodies are not just affection-images, though they are arguably stirring on their own, they are also examples of recollection-images or an implicit, sensate-based argument that things have not changed as much as people would like to believe (Cho 2015:50).

Recollection-images, according to Alexander Cho (2015:50) are images that are, in a sensate manner, like pictures from a time in the past but are not explicitly said to be iterations of such. These types of imagery are not just there to cause a reaction in the viewer, but also to assert certainty of identity or status in their different manifestations (Cho 2015:51). The images may therefore be part of the black female activists’ assertion of their status as oppressed beings who are subject to violence from oppressors.

When images of the 1976 Soweto Riots, and the images of the FMF activists, are placed in comparison (Figure 24), the force of the recollection-image come into full affect. The students are asserting their right to protest by creating a powerful emotional argument based on the public’s knowledge as well as their sentiments pertaining to the Soweto Riots (Bosch & Mutsvairo 2017:82). The affect of the images relates to Ahmed’s (2004:131) proposition that the representations of the events, evoked by the

*de facto* similarities in their juxtaposition, allows for a continuation or even an intensification of their affect in their original context.

Both instances of visual activism in the movement, in some way, relies on the construction of, what Thörn (2006:906-908) refers to as “political drama” or the “dramaturgical approach”. That is not to imply that the photographs are staged or purposefully dramatic to create the intended affect, although, when the images are intentionally placed next to one another the comparison is inevitable. Rather, what is more pertinent is that the motivative or affective power of the photographs relies on a continual narrative which extends as far back as the anti-apartheid movement, and perhaps further in history depending on the individual.

Although Thörn (2006:908) refers to the spread of images as the creation of “protest simulacra”, that would imply a constant referral of signifier to signifier in the sharing of the images of violence. Rather, I argue that affect theory is more relevant to the experience of these type of images on the web because affect theory accounts for the assertion of identity which occurs in the *attachment* of signifiers to certain bodies (Ahmed 2004:127).

In the case of the FMF images, the status of the black female activists as victims of oppression from subjugators is evident in the infliction of violence on their bodies; however, through the act of visualisation of those acts, or Thörn’s (2006:908) dramaturgical approach, the agency of the subject is regained. The power of the images is not determined by what is shown in the picture, but rather in the repetition of the image to garner affective empathy where the subject becomes a marker for something bigger than themselves (Ahmed 2004:123).

In the absence of graphic depictions of violence, there is a difficulty in expressing notions of subjectivity or objectivity without framing an image to show unequal relations (Noble 2005:149; Thörn 2006:906). In the case of RMF, there are less instances of direct police brutality and more symbolic gestures of engagement with history which will be discussed in full in the next chapter. The manifesto driving RMF activism from its inception in 2015 included calls for removal of colonial markers on the UCT campus, the increased visibility of black academia on campus and the recognition by the

establishment of perceived racial inequality on campus (UCT Rhodes Must Fall 2015:[sp]).

In Chapter 1, I described RMF as a series of moments, namely the felling of the Cecil Rhodes statue (Figure 3), the erecting of Shackville (Figure 25) and the burning of the campus portraiture. In describing these events as “moments”, I do not want to imply that the captured images from those events are static symbols which are then representative of the ideology of the movement. Rather as Anye Nyamnjoh (2017:260) implies, the online images are evidence of underlying narratives, both from the past and from the present, that RMF and FMF activists, bystanders and traditional media are engaging with and responding to concurrently. The erection of a structure such as Shackville (Figure 25), for example, is also to some extent an engagement with present and past narratives.

The presence of a sign of poverty in the South African context (a shack) is placed directly across a structure of a structure associated with historical white colonial privilege (a university building). The name of the structure itself, Shackville, is a direct throwback to the Sharpeville massacre which, again, implicitly evokes the narrative of the apartheid era event without directly explaining how or why it relates to the symbol.

The engagement with a shameful symbol of poverty in the South African context is association with a past event that evokes feelings of gratuitous violence by name



Figure 25: “Shackville” erected on the UCT campus, 2016, Cape Town. Photographed by Wandile Kasibe. (eNCA).

thereby increasing the affective status of the object (Ahmed 2004:122). In other words, pictures of the shack itself might not create affective intensity because the object itself does not have enough situational context to give the entity meaning. But with the attachment of the word “Shackville”, as it relates to the “Sharpeville” massacre, a more powerful affective connotation is made (Ahmed 2004:122-123).

Again, similar to the sharing images of violence on black female bodies online, the subsequent circulation of the Shackville leads to the affect which Ahmed (2004:120-122) refers to as stickiness. The affect of associating the lack of accommodation for black students on the UCT campus with the more morbid Sharpeville massacre



Figure 26: Fees Must Fall protesters destroying public property, 2016, Johannesburg. Photographer unknown. (Business Tech).

attempts to elevate the brevity of one issue to the other through identification by name (Ahmed 2004:131).

#### 4.3 The affective impetus of online images of the FMF movement and the RMF movement

The actions of the RMF activists and the FMF activists are by no means interchangeable, though there are some similarities in the way that they campaigned, as explained in the previous section. RMF seemed more focussed on the removal of colonial symbolism on the UCT campus, whereas although FMF did focus on decolonisation, their activism had the added dimensions of demand for free education

and grievances against language policies (UCT Rhodes Must Fall 2015:[sp]; Loader *et al* 2017:235).

What does seem apparent in either movement though is the sharing of affection-imagery by the students that seems to assert their sub-activism. The sub-activism also appears to be a response to imagery coming from traditional media sources, especially with the visual activism apparent in 2016 (Bosch & Mutsvairo 2017:72).

Although traditional media sources seemed to be more sympathetic to the movement in 2015, several images of FMF protesters engaging in violence (Figure 26) emerged with more negative headlines such as one by *Business Tech* (2016) which asks how much the FMF protests are costing South African universities, revealing amounts from R82,000,000 at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (UKZN) to R120,295,000 at the University of Johannesburg (UJ).



Figure 27: Destruction of art at University of Cape Town, 2016, Cape Town. Photograph by Ashleigh Furlong. (Ground Up).



During the Shackville protest, the burning of portraiture (Figure 27), buildings and public vehicles on the campus resulting in an outcry from the students and the public alike (Furlong 2016:[sp]). In both cases, the students seemed to be engaging in destructive behaviour while affecting individuals who were seemingly uninvolved in the movements (Mkhatshwa & Sehume 2016:[sp]). The circulation of these images, which seemed to be mainly shared by mainstream media, alongside information delineating the monetary amounts lost to the FMF or RMF protests, would no doubt lead to a decreased public opinion of the movements. The support for the movements would likely take a negative turn especially with those individuals who were on the fence as to whether to side with the protesters in the first place (Bosch & Mutsvairo 2017:81).

In response to this type of imagery which potentially detracts from the movements, the FMF and RMF use the affection images to respond with their own versions of the events (Bosch & Mutsvairo 2017:78). In using imagery coded implicitly with recollection-images from the anti-apartheid movement, the activists are relying on a collective visual memory to firstly, propagate their movement through sub-activism and to protect their movement from harmful narratives from outside sources (Bosch & Mutsvairo 2017:73; Sontag 2003:67-68).

In using the tactics of the anti-apartheid activism movement of showing unequal displays of violence and brutality against black bodies, there is the intended affect of constructing new narratives out of parts of South African history which had already accumulated moral outrage to enact a change (Sontag 2003:43; Cho 2005:51).

What emerges is the ability to construct an identity based on extrapolated feelings of another event; the activists can evoke the affective empathy, gained by the anti-apartheid activists through resistance photography to contribute to their own versions of visual activism. In answering the question of how those images of brutality and suffering lead to sub-activism, Sontag (2003:69) offers the following: "Photographs of the suffering and martyrdom of a people are more than reminders of death, of failure, of victimization. They invoke the miracle of survival". In other words, the pain witnessed is not *just* a testimony of victimisation, but rather a way to assert agency by the activist to show that body endures even through the infliction of pain.

In conclusion, by sharing imagery closely coded to that from the anti-apartheid protest era, as Bosch and Mutsvairo (2017:78) imply, the repeated iterations of acts against black bodies to create alternative ways of perceiving and feeling versus those narratives which oppose the values of the movements. If, as Ahmed (2004:121) suggests, the affective stickiness of those repeated images increases with their sharing, then the format of the SNS allows for those types of pictures to garner the most attention, thus, potentially motivating individuals to side with the activists. However, if those images which are coded lean more toward anti-RMF and anti-FMF sentiments, the affective empathy for the student movements would presumably lessen with their circulation (Ahmed 2004:121).

The result of the negative flow of affect, or the attribution of negative feeling to the pictures results in a loss of assertion of identity for the activist which, as Mirzoeff (2017:18) and Sontag (2003:11) imply, detract from the activists' political efforts. In other words, the activists' attempts at garnering affective empathy are unsuccessful when the intended affect is either not transmitted or not well received by the individual who encounters the visual activism. However, I argue that through the performative action of channelling the anti-apartheid movement through visual activism, the students were able to circumvent the more negative press by affectively aligning themselves with the powerful collective memory of the anti-apartheid movement.

Unlike the images of violence and brutality which aim to connote a sense of realism to what is depicted, transformative photography does not shy away from directly engaging the viewer or attempting to elevate the message of the image either through the actions of the subject or through the visual's framing. Transformative photography either aims to expose unjust power relations or attempts to perform an empowered identity despite unequal relations. The images, subtly or directly, direct attention to seemingly disparate elements in the picture.

In the next chapter, I discuss how images can speak to the past and connote self-determination on the side of the activists without visualisations of pain and suffering, but rather using movement art and performative art.

## CHAPTER FIVE:

### VISUAL ACTIVISM IN SOUTH AFRICA: TRANSFORMING UNIVERSITY SPACES

Social media, as already established, allows users to broadcast messages to a diverse audience, build communal relationships and communicate their messages in ways unique to the medium (Ekdale & Tully 2014:78). In doing so, SNS define the parameters of their own virtual spaces, altering way users traverse the sites to get their messages across. For example, some aspects of SNS remove the barriers of geographical boundaries; however, in other instances, the sites encourage users to exchange messages with individuals in their local network. To bridge geographical barriers, Facebook users can for instance create a group and add members who share the same hobby or fandom.<sup>62</sup> The members are then able to discuss mutual interests even if they do not reside in the same country, and through the same platform, they are able to debate and re-ignite topics even if they are a year or older.

In contrast to bridging geographical boundaries, SNS such as Twitter allows access to an international audience, however it also actively encourages its members to interact with local users. When making a profile on Twitter, the SNS tracks a user's geographical setting. The site then lists the top trending topics for that member's country. Ekdale and Tully (2014:78) explain that the hashtag function allows for a lively exchange of ideas and current events pertinent to a nation.

Trending topics might have a serious undertone, such as the RMF, FMF and BLM political causes, but those topics can still be engaged with in humorous ways. The concept of the trending topic directs certain issues to the forefront of national importance. Traditional news stations will sometimes list the top trending hashtags that have featured on SNS such as Twitter. Often, users will communicate about those subjects with jokes, or by exchanging memes or through parody videos.<sup>63</sup> Humour

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<sup>62</sup> An example of this type of group would be a Facebook group dedicated to the roleplaying game *Dungeons & Dragons*, for example, or fans of the *Star Wars* films.

<sup>63</sup> Meme is a term coined by Richard Dawkins (1941— present). The term has come to stand for the rapid spread of cultural symbols online.

contributes to the accessibility of trending issues— no matter is unreachable if ordinary people can joke about its content (Ekdale & Tully 2014:69).

Although humour is not novel to political debate, humorous interaction on SNS allows for the accumulation of attention around current issues (Ekdale & Tully 2014:69). Alongside the free-to-use aspect of SNS, there is a suggestion of an easing of communication barriers in using these applications. On Twitter especially, users can directly communicate with influential individuals simply by tagging their handle.

Ekdale and Tully (2014:74) mention the prominent hashtag #OccupyParliament in Kenya which saw angry Kenyans criticise parliamentarians on their excessive expenditure and perceived ineptitude. In the virtual realm, Kenyan nationals poked fun at the issue while providing poignant commentary on the serious topic. Spurred by the intensive hashtag-based dialogue, the group staged a physical protest at the Kenyan parliament in June 2013.<sup>64</sup> In 2017, among the backdrop of a spring of sexual harassment scandals in Hollywood, the #MeToo hashtag spread on social media, aimed at alerting the public on the prevalence of sexual violence in various countries in the world.

In these instances, SNS provided a means for its users to transcend their real physical spaces and engage with other users on matters pertinent to themselves, to matters of national, as well as international importance. SNS provides a ground for users to discuss topics with a diverse audience. However, although these social digital platforms are sometimes touted as democratic or free from confining structures, there are still systems on the sites that actively direct information to certain individuals for the purposes of increasing their activity online (Pătruț & Pătruț; Breuer 2012:13; Koskela 2004:201).

The following chapter interrogates the ways notions of space are expanded and constrained by SNS. As individuals' actions are watched by various agents on web platforms, I further investigate how increased visibility on SNS affected the visual activism from the FMF and RMF movement.

The chapter is divided into three sections. In the first part, I interrogate the various ways that space is transformed on SNS, specifically. I refer to Hannah Arendt's (1958)

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<sup>64</sup> The #OccupyParliament protesters released pigs and piglets covered in calves' blood at the Kenyan parliament during their protest.

notion of the space of appearance and explain how the term is used by Butler (2011) and Mirzoeff (2017) with reference to the recent hashtag revolutions. I concur with Mirzoeff (2017:20) who states that SNS have expanded the space of appearances and share his assertion that there are less transparent qualities of social media which need to be interrogated. As Susan McManus (2011:9-10) suggests, SNS are part of an increase in surveillance technologies magnifying the actions of civilians. The increased visibility of subjects on SNS alongside intensive emotion in turbulent times can lead to the attribution of qualities on certain bodies that affected the FMF activists in both negative and positive ways (Ahmed 2004:119-120)

In the second section, I further discuss aspects of visibility on SNS. I argue that the atmosphere of surveillance culture influences protestor's activities during the South African hashtag movements. Visual activism on these sites are influenced by an awareness that protesters' images are watched by numerous people. Here, I refer to Xavier Marquez (2012:11) and Patricia Pisters (2013:23) who suggest that surveillance allows a person to manoeuvre their subject position. I argue that on SNS, a person can upload empowering images of themselves that often anticipate a changed future, but I also posit that the activists are also subject to the fixating gazes of those individuals watching them (Marquez 2012:11; Mirzoeff 2017:23).

And finally, in the third section, my focus is on Mirzoeff's (2015:[sp]) concept of rupturing the past through visual thinking. Mirzoeff (2015:[sp]), speaking about the North African uprising in 2011, states the following:

[...] the chance to depict yourself and others in public, let alone to express political opinions, was a rupture with decades of past experience. The resulting visual thought created hope, made the revolutions possible and helped drive them forward [...].

Referring to Mirzoeff, (2015:316) I use specific visual examples from RMF and FMF to illustrate how the activist photographs from the movements address past narratives to visually inspire change. Instead of focussing on the showcasing of brutality on bodies, as I did in Chapter 4, my focus in Chapter 5 is on images that connote empowerment by alluding to notions of transformation. The photographs that I deal with in Chapter 5 are rendered as artistic representations that are similar to those images placed in Paul's (2016:7) grouping of movement art.

In transformative photography, the power of movement is evoked through the affective framing of bodies next to other elements in the image that speak to various perspectives unconfined by time and space.

### 5.1 The space of appearance in the virtual realm

SNS spaces have been heralded as realms where individuals can freely voice their political opinions, as well as circumvent the need to physically participate in activist causes.<sup>65</sup> However, according to Arendt (1958:220-221), appearing and acting in public spaces has long been a momentous source of power for political activists no matter what the location. Arendt (1958:222) points to the standing of slaves and women in Ancient Greece to illustrate her notion. In Ancient Greece, women and slaves were forced to stay at home while male citizens could freely walk around and debate in forums. Their invisibility from the public sphere, as well their inability to take part in public life, such as in democratic meetings, asserted their status as non-citizens.

Arendt (1958:199-200) refers to places outside of the private realm, where individuals can coalesce and act, as spaces of appearance. In spaces of appearance, a protest group's visibility as an equal, solidified mass contributes to its power. For Arendt (1958:201), when a mass of people is seen actively and passionately resisting societal order, leaders are robbed of their influence. Arendt (1958:200-202) implies that it is the *visible* ire of the protesting mob, unafraid to engage with the subjugating forces, that leads to the subversion of power.

To Arendt (1958:200), as well as Judith Butler (2011:1) and Mirzoeff (2017:20), the visibility of marginalised individuals in spaces of appearance is of utmost importance in political activism. Arendt's (1958:202) focus on the power of populous to appear and act to oppose tyranny resounds with Butler (2011:1). Butler (2011:1-2) implies that when bodies appear in support of one another, especially during times of protest, they are asserting a group's fundamental liberty to be recognised.

To rethink the space of appearance in order to understand the power and effect of public demonstrations for our time, we will need to understand the bodily dimensions of action, what the body requires, and what the body can do,

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<sup>65</sup> As mentioned above, see Bogdan Pătruț and Monica Pătruț (2014:vi), Breur (2012:8) and Hille Koskela (2004:201) for more information on conceptions of Internet platforms as democratic spaces.

especially when we must think about bodies together, what holds them there, their conditions of persistence and of power.

Butler's (2011:2) conception of the space of appearance firstly, addresses the importance of body legitimacy and secondly, considers what appearing together as visibly homogenous means for that group's status beyond the protest gathering. Body legitimacy, for Butler (2011:2-3), focusses on the interplay of private relations versus public relations. Butler (2011:3) is concerned with the insertion of protesting bodies in places where they are not typically allowed to act, such as in the private or corporate realm. In her discussion of the performative aspects of protest with Athena Athanasiou (2013:140), she describes lively protest as a tool employed against structures that aim to categorise and limit bodies.

Related to FMF, the disruption of the university campus or government structures by students creates a momentous upset in power relations specifically because they are young adults who wield little influence in those spaces.<sup>66</sup> The actions and visibility of the students doing what they are not expected to do in the environment adds to the impact of the event because there is a sense of subversion of the decorum that is expected by those who wield influence.

The significance of the group's status as a unit is important for visibly performing a changed future (Butler 2011:6). Such as in the case of FMF activists who use the crossed-fist gesture (Figure 20) to showcase their own brand of activism and group identity. For Butler (2011:6-7), the importance of the activist gathering is not based on the wills of individual members, but on the mass power of the seemingly heterogeneous social group, doubly asserted through their choices of visual activism. Arendt (1958:201) accounts for the power of the group in her concept of plurality, where she emphasises the aspect of individuals appearing to one another to suggest a powerful relationship of lateral equality.

In pointing to the performative aspect of the group's acts, Butler's (2011:7) stresses how the group *chooses* to portray themselves in contrast to how they are seen by the public. In a description of group activism, she emphasises that the "persistence [of humans] as living organisms depends on that matrix of sustaining interdependent

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<sup>66</sup> Here, I am specifically referring to those students who are not yet functioning, employed members of South African society.

relations” (Butler 2011:7). In other words, aside from protesting bodies appearing in solidarity with one another, the power of the group’s visual activism is also reliant on the movement’s relationship with other actors outside of the political event. However, a consequence of the interdependence of the political act is that various individuals can weigh in on the activism. Through the tool of performance, the activists must simultaneously appear legitimate to one another, while still attempting to gain empathetic followers.

With her suggestion of activists as interconnected organisms, Butler seems to adopt an affectual approach to addressing modern day activism in a way which has been previously unpacked by Patricia Clough (2008:1). Clough (2008:2-3), in her article on the affective turn in politics, speaks of the “body as organism”. The body as organism describes the body as a dynamic entity; Clough (2008:3) here is inferring that the parameters which contain the body, such as nationality, political standing, race or gender are becoming increasingly volatile due to the intensive exchanges facilitated by online platforms.

As argued in the previous chapter, those narratives which have been previously attributed to certain bodies can be re-used and re-purposed for political needs (Clough 2008:4). According to Ahmed (2004:117), the result of this detachment from solid subject positions (such as those mentioned above) leads to an unstable sense of the body in question. Bodies are then susceptible to extreme versions of subject positions which are prone to narratives fuelled by affect.<sup>67</sup>

As Arendt (1958:199) postulates, the affect is created by the visible indignation as well as the vindication of protesting bodies in action. Related to visual activism on SNS, the creation of the subject position is not limited to how the subject chooses to portray themselves but is also dependent on how they are framed, captured and lastly, how they are viewed by others (Butler 2011:7; Mirzoeff 2017:70-71).

An example of Clough’s concept of the body as organism would be Andreas Georghiou’s *I voted* photograph (Figure 28). In the image, Mandla Mbuyisa holds his ID (Identity Document) booklet up to a police officer while he is simultaneously

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<sup>67</sup> Ahmed’s (2004:117)’s proposition is not specific to social media, however, as Anderson (2016:738, 747) argues, the very structure of SNS lead to the profiling of extreme subject positions which attach themselves to certain icons.



maintaining eye-contact with the camera. This image, uploaded by the photographer onto Facebook amid the 2015 stretch of the FMF protests, demonstrates an interesting mix of accounts all that seem resistant to a single interpretation. I posit three different ways of reading or interpreting Figure 28 as a result of the photograph being uploaded onto Facebook, however, there are various interpretations depending on who is looking at the picture.

Firstly, the attribution of the title *I voted* by the photographer points to a narrative that fits what Mbuyisa himself seems to be indicating: the protestor is showing the policeman the page with his voting details listed, silently asserting his right to affordable education as he has participated in a democratic election. There is an interesting use of the subject “I” by Georghiou here that suggests that he has the right to speak for Mbuyisa, who features in the photograph as the subject. By using “I”, there is an impression that Mbuyisa’s gesture is, to some extent, appropriated for Georghiou’s own visual activism as the photographer and distributor of the moment.

Second, to an interpreter with knowledge of South African history, the man’s ID book above the policeman’s shield may be reminiscent of the passbooks required by black Africans 16-years and older during the apartheid era (Figure 29). Alongside the looming presence of the policeman in the image, and the blurring of other elements aside from Mbuyisa and his ID book, there is an implied throwback to a scene which could have been taken during apartheid.

To such an interpreter, the photograph then creates a powerful affective argument which extends and responds to a suggestion of unequal status of black Africans in the past and the present (Ahmed 2004:126). The visual activism here is not dependent on Georghiou’s intention in posting the photograph but is rather reliant on how the viewer interprets the image themselves.

Lastly, with the added dimension of the eye-contact in Georghiou’s photograph, the subject creates a powerful engagement with the person viewing the image. Mbuyisa’s direct stare with the camera lens creates an impression that his actions are deliberate, and secondly, that he is consciously engaging with his subject position or attempting to create a narrative with his gesture.

Mbuyisa’s eye-contact could be accidental and the photograph could have just been well-timed on Georghiou’s part, however if Mbuyisa’s actions are deliberate, then

Arendt (1958:199)'s suggestion of appearance, as well as Butler (2011:6) and Mirzoeff's (2017:20) assertion of performance, are shown then as vital aspects of visual protest. These possible meanings in combination with the image's distribution online makes for powerful performative movement art. The photograph might gain the artistic status in the attribution of a title to the work by Georghiou.

Related to the second point of performance in activism, Mirzoeff (2017:20) concurs with Butler (2011:1-2) when he implies that in BLM, to unapologetically appear as black is instrumental to enacting change. The insertion of black bodies in areas which have been historically colonised realms, responds against previously iterated 'whiter' ways of appearing (Mirzoeff 2017:22, 72).

Speaking about the United States, Mirzoeff (2017:40) expands the space of appearance to any realm which represents potentiality of freedom. Specifically, he is referring to those areas where individuals often gather, but do not always consider their history-laden backgrounds such as the sports' ground or travelling on a bus (Mirzoeff 2017:18).<sup>68</sup>

There is a suggestion here that certain places contain sentiments of inequality that are not always spoken about in public forums. Mirzoeff (2017:20-21) implies that the mere suggestion of a change of previous or current standards of social ordering can inspire change. In fact, Mirzoeff (2017:27) suggests that the power of BLM visual activism on SNS relies on its re-iterations of Civil Rights era activism strategies which were powerful because African-Americans resisted segregation by placing their bodies in places which caused interruption of everyday functioning of society. Mirzoeff's (2017:29) argument that SNS extend spaces of appearances considers the extension and subversion of inequality through insertions of the body, which is further explained in the last section of this chapter.

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<sup>68</sup> Jamal L. Ratchford (2012:51) suggests that sportsgrounds have been historically representative of American achievement, strength and equality. To many poor black Americans, sports scholarships are considered an escape from poverty (Ratchford 2012:55). Protest in these spaces, especially by African-Americans, is seen as an affront to American values because the sportsground is meant to represent opportunity and democracy.

In the case of *I voted*, the image's distribution in the virtual realm seemingly suspends time to create Brian Massumi's (2003:4) concept of the "...felt perception of continuing movement", to recall the same fight for recognition that black South Africans have grappled with since apartheid.



Figure 28: *I voted*,  
Pretoria, 2015.  
Photographed by Andreas  
Georghiou. (Facebook).



Figure 29: *Apartheid: a crime against humanity*, 1985. Photographer unknown. (UN Photos).

## 5.2 Seeing and being seen: surveillance culture and activism

Several authors, Pisters (2013:198), Mirzoeff (2017:200), Xavier Marquez (2012:9) and Sebastian Sevignani (2017:78) seem to concur that modern technology expands the surveillance of citizens in seemingly democratic countries. Alongside the increased presence of Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) cameras on public streets, there is also an amplified amount of digital surveillance technology propagated by the presence of webcams and citizens themselves. Surveillance on SNS can serve as a means of empowerment in politicised situations or it can alternatively limit citizens' ability to escape historical subject positions (Pisters 2013:202; Marquez 2012:10).

According to Marquez (2012:10) and Mirzoeff (2017:20), SNS have expanded citizens' visibility and thus, the ability to be recognised. The visibility is especially enhanced with the function to instantly upload photographs and videos to users' profiles. Whereas Mirzoeff (2017:22-23) asserts that the instantaneous ability to upload media allows for a momentary simulation of an existence away from a colonial or segregated past, Marquez (2012:10) points out that online spaces are encouraging constant

surveillance from multiple parties such as other users, advertisers and the sites themselves.

Related to surveillance from SNS, Sevignani (2017:78) echoes Marquez (2012:10) when he suggests that commercialisation is a crucial aspect to the running of Internet corporations. Sevignani (2017:78) states that the increase of cultural activity on social media is necessary for companies to make profit. The surveillance of the corporations allows them to direct users to certain information and products and then information is generated that user's activity on the site (Sevignani 2017:78; Couldry & van Dijk 2015:3). Sevignani (2017:84) posits that a user's increased use of SNS allows for the corporations to generate more money because the site can continuously tailor the user's experience so that they increase their online activity.

SNS, through the willing participation of their users, create environments that fixate people to the sites through attributing social value to those individuals who can hold attention (Paasonen 2015:28). Social value is attained when users are 'rewarded' with numerical values that, in a *de facto* manner, come to represent their social status. The person's viewpoint is either strengthened or weakened according to the responses from those who either strongly agree with them, oppose them, or are simply there to flame them (Paasonen 2015:28). Paasonen (2015:28) suggests that in a politically charged situation, viewpoints are more reliant on the outcomes of affective arguments rather than logical debate. SNS profit from individuals increasing their activity online because they can direct tailored advertising to their users.<sup>69</sup>

Ben Anderson (2016:736) states that the environments created by SNS become turbulent because everyone is perceived to be on an equal level. The lateral atmosphere of SNS leads to the suggestion of a democratic realm where people can achieve social value and gain a platform if they traverse the space in ways that garner the most rewards (Anderson 2016:738).<sup>70</sup> But, as Ahmed (2004:117) posits, interacting with users with seemingly opposing viewpoints, especially with the backdrop of actual political turbulence leads to perceptions of vaguely situated yet extreme subject positions.<sup>71</sup> In other words, SNS mediated political discussion leads

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<sup>69</sup> Zuckerberg has claimed that Facebook does not sell user data, but rather directs profile information to advertisers (Rogers 2018:[sp])

<sup>70</sup> Social rewards equating to accumulated Facebook likes or Twitter retweets, for example, which lead to some social issues being more visible than others.

<sup>71</sup> I say vague in this instance as per my previous argument, in Chapter 3. that political standing is no

to inevitable profiling of users because they firstly, create spaces where individuals can ostensibly say whatever they want to say, and secondly, the sites themselves rely on value systems that reward or 'punish' the user by stirring viewers into stances that incite users into agree or disagreement.

Therefore, the representation of FMF users and the FMF community are not just created by the activists themselves, but also through the depictions that are most profitable to the SNS. The surveillance of the activists is guided by the creation of revenue, as well as by outsiders critiquing and framing their actions (Anderson 2016:737; Sevignani 2017:78). The result of the combination of corporate surveillance and peer surveillance are the activists being aware, or even hyper-aware, of their own visibility and their image in the eyes of others (Marquez 2012:7).

For Marquez (2012:10), Mirzoeff (2017:20) as well as Pisters (2012:202), the increase in surveillance is not just limited to profit-making purposes. As Marquez (2012:19) and Pisters (2013:205-208) infer, many users on SNS are cognisant to the fact that they are being monitored by corporations. Further, all users are aware that they are being watched by other members of the sites. Marquez (2012:27-30) suggests that whereas the aspect of surveillance dictates that individuals act in certain ways deemed as socially acceptable. The visibility characteristic of SNS allows for users to play with how they are seen by others.

Pisters' (2012:210) discusses how being able to watch, as well as the ability to be watched, disrupts the regulatory atmosphere of distrust associated with surveillance. She suggests new technology allows an individual to inhabit both positions of possessing the controlling gaze and being able to avoid fixation of their identities, so instead of SNS users acting as Peeping Toms (although perverse, extreme voyeurism is possible), she suggests that users should rather be referred to as Sensing Alices (Pisters 2012:208).

Pisters' concept of the Sensing Alice asserts that in instances where the person under surveillance is aware that they are being surveyed they can manipulate the eyeball attention for their own personal (or political) gain, such as for the purposes of visual activism, for example.

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longer substantiated with concrete membership

Therefore, Marquez's (2012:30) notion of the web as a place of empowerment despite corporate surveillance, as well as Pisters' (2012:210) optimism in subverting the controlling gaze of surveillance, are comparable to Mirzoeff's (2017:31-33) assertion that through SNS individuals can suggest a changed future for themselves. A changed future is possible by actively challenging the controlling structures, even if merely through suggestion, through using images of themselves and others.

Referring to Figure 28, the FMF activist engages with the viewer through defiant eye-contact, asserting his power even despite the controlling presence of the policeman. Along with his hand placed flat against the shield, the gaze of the activist suggests a knowledge that his body is representative of a narrative beyond himself.

Larissa Hjorth (2009:30-31), in her discussion of the result of increased imaging of the Asian Pacific via mobile phones, asserts that with the increase of online circulated photography, there is also the engagement with "...regional tropes" that emerge, especially in situations where content producers engage visually with historicity in empowering ways.

Mbuyisa's gaze connotes a sense of authority despite the stifling proximity of the policeman. However, it is also important to consider that Mbuyisa is not in total control of his image. His likeness is being circulated by Georghiou, who has a separate subjective standpoint from Mbuyisa. Although Georghiou's photographing and sharing of the image is incidentally a form of visual activism, the photographer is asserting a position on behalf of Mbuyisa, relying on the regional trope to fuel his own visual argument.

Visual activism on SNS is thus incredibly multifaceted. SNS create a space of appearance, by allowing individuals to assert their right to be recognised and seen in various contexts. However, they also generate an atmosphere of surveillance through the gazes of corporations and other users. The surveillance seemingly allows for the escaping of fixed subject positions; however, there are also elements that simultaneously grip individuals to their regional tropes.

Even if those subject positions are just temporarily perceived, there is still a moment where the subject 'owns' their likeness as a historical metaphor. Therefore, although through visual activism on social web platforms, individuals can create self-determined subject positions, thus taking advantage of the fact that they are not always in control

of how their own likeness is used, the activists are also subject to the emplacing structures of SNS and other viewers.

### 5.3 Creating a “rupture”: decolonising through visual iterations

During FMF and RMF, the visual activism aimed to expose current power inequality and the remnants of colonialism present on the university campuses. Mirzoeff’s (2017:34) concept of the space of appearance extends to include various forms of media:

The space of appearance has, then, two forms: the kinetic, live space in which real people interact, and its potential, latent form in mediated documentation. This documentation can be called photography in the expanded field generated by computed imagery...Not all photographs in this extended array contain the potential of the space of appearance

The space of appearance is the conscious assertion of a right to exist by visualising the existence of discrimination and the creation of a momentary escape away from unequal structures. Mirzoeff (2017:35) asserts that the presence of the smartphone camera, or the will to photograph situations of inequality allows for the recognition of suffering or plight. For Mirzoeff (2017:45), as previously mentioned, visibility is inextricably linked to recognition. Thus, without capturing evidence of acts of prejudice or assertions of racialised presence in unequal spaces, the plights of the oppressed are potentially nullified.



Figure 30: Sthembile Msezane, *Chupungu*, Cape Town, 2015. Taken from the artist’s website.



For a photograph to qualify as a space of appearance, the visual should show a disjunct in power relations. Mirzoeff (2017:33) refers to both the visualisation of unequal social difference and the 'creation' of a graphic that anticipates a changed future for the subjects of the photograph as a *rupture*. The concept of a rupture, therefore, either involves making unequal situations more visible or asserting a right to be recognised and empowered despite those unequal circumstances (Mirzoeff 2017:39; Dhillon, Saab, Husain & Mirzoeff 2016:43).

Mirzoeff's rupture links with Roland Bleiker and Martin Leet's (2006:717) reading of sublime experiences and their subsequent artistic interpretations. Bleiker and Leet (2006:715) specifically mention representations that shock viewers into being conscious of change in politically charged situations. Referring to the extremely televised nature of the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre, they mention how the American public watched the terrifying footage from all angles, most from the safe distance of their homes (Bleiker & Leet 2006:713).

The abruptness of the event, as well as the absolute scale of death and destruction caused a near instantaneous reaction from the American government. Citizens and non-citizens were classified as either terrorists or non-terrorists and terms such as Weapons of Mass Destruction or the "Axis Of Evil" were thrown around, largely attributed to hostile-labelled countries such as Iraq, Iran and North Korea (Bleiker & Leet 2006:719).

In climates of fear, uncertainty and tension, Bleiker and Leet (2006: 713-714) imply that artistic renditions aim to make sense of the incomprehensible. They stipulate that the art often attempts to evoke the intense stimulation of the initial event, leading viewers to question what has changed and what remains the same (Bleiker & Leet 2006:723).

The need to represent rupture or transformation in spaces of appearance is contingent to the narratives that colour areas where trauma or upset has occurred (Mirzoeff 2017:18). Athanasiou (2013:140) states that protest performativity necessitates an engagement with past structures that have served or currently aim to oppress or subjugate. According to Mirzoeff (2017:17-18) and Noble (2005:136), for some African

Americans in the United States, there is a necessity in performing a black identity away from objectified ways of being previously associated with the colonial context.<sup>72</sup>

In FMF and RMF, the movement art engages with the past and present invisibility of black Africans from public life. The movement art does not seem differentiate between past and present but rather points to a persistent need to emphasise black bodies as empowered despite so-called democratic progress (Boehm 2012:15). As Bleiker and Leet (2006:723) assert, the need to trigger representations of rupture is stirred by the ambiguity and pressure caused by the societal disruptions.

During FMF and RMF, the students used their bodies to interrupt spaces with tangible unequal power relations, such as Mbuyisa's presence in front of the police officer (Figure 28), as well as in spaces with icons of colonial inequality, such as with Sethembile Msezane's performance art-piece *Chupungu* (Figure 30). In both cases of visual activism, through the space of appearance, the black body acted as a counter to the perceived icon of inequality.

Mirzoeff (2015:[sp]) uses *Chupungu* to demonstrate how the body creates a momentary rupture in a space that portrays an unbalanced colonial narrative. Msezane's holds two large sticks with tufts of cow's tail (amaShoba) attached to them, giving her the appearance of a bird ready to take flight.<sup>73</sup> Her face seems to also be covered with the amaShoba, and she stands on a platform with heels, facing the camera.

Her body in performance, alongside the removal of the Rhodes statue in the background, surrounded by smartphone cameras ready to capture and presumably share the moment, cumulatively create a powerful image. However, the interpretation of the image as powerful and implicitly separate from colonial narratives is possible only through Msezane's framing of her own image, or her likeness shared by a web user with similar views on her performance.

According to Msezane (2016:[sp]), her work is informed by the lack of black female bodies in South African spaces of remembrance. Further, she states:

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<sup>72</sup> The colonial context here includes segregation in the United States and apartheid in South Africa.

<sup>73</sup> amaShoba are used in various items of Zulu culture, particularly to show a person's status in the tribe (Traditional Zulu dress [sa]).

Performing that day, I realised that this work was more than my initial idea, it was an instrument of unconsciously beginning to re-imagine the black body in a city that prides itself in Eurocentric ideals that historically for me are a celebration of the pillaging of Africa. The question I am left with now, is how can we re-imagine these structures and spaces?

Msezane's subjective position as a black African female is reinforced by the traditional items from Zulu culture. To someone viewing her performance online, Msezane's body next to the statue of Rhodes creates an intuitive sense of difference between black identity and the colonial figure (Ahmed 2004:120). If shared on SNS platform, the photograph manifests an experience which unites narratives of past, present and future, akin to Hochman's (2014:1) notion of the social media image. Hochman (2014:1) states that the social media image involves the structuring of visuals that surpass the traditional notion of linear time and space.

In other words, instead of Msezane's body representing a single narrative, her subject position is multi-faceted because of the various objects in the photograph that possess intuitive narratives according to the person viewing the photograph and the context in which the photograph is viewed. As with Figure 28, there are incidental interpretations of Msezane's action that may be intentional or unintentional on her part.

To some viewers, her pose may allude to a re-imagined Nike, the Greek mythological Goddess of Victory (Figure 31), whose name and likeness has persisted as a symbol of success since 250 BC.<sup>74</sup> To spectators in the crowd, although there are many smartphones present, Msezane's performance may be lost to the bigger spectacle of the felling of the Rhodes statue.

Rhodes is undoubtedly a controversial and exploitative figure from South African history, having looted, invaded and pillaged the land in the name of British empowerment (Newsinger 2016:73). In Msezane's (2016:[sp]) own words, Cape Town is seen as a city which "...prides itself in Eurocentric ideals...". With these ideas linked to the elements in the photograph, Figure 30, as well as Figure 28, display a mix of narratives which accumulate to communicate messages of complex power relations and the possibility of empowerment through self-assertion.

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<sup>74</sup> Nike's name features in the popular sportswear brand *Nike*, and her image has featured on Olympics medals since 1928.

Hochman's (2014:1-2) conception of the social media image is comparable to Mirzoeff's (2017:33) idea of the social media space that includes performative figurations which address past, present and future, aimed at creating a momentary rupture in narrative. However, instead of placing the political power in the image of the body itself, I argue that the strength of these kinds of photographs are rather spurred by the volatile atmosphere of the FMF and RMF movements and the affective arguments created by the photographs.

Figure 30 is representative of the presence of colonial structures in modern South Africa, but it also shows notions of black female African strength and endurance. Notably, Msezane (2016:[sp]) refers to herself as an "instrument", displaying an awareness that her performance extended the parameters of the female black body in that moment, and represented the possibility of a changed future. As Maria Angel (2009:134) posits, in capturing the body (in a photograph, or on video, for example), the possibility of meaning making occurs.

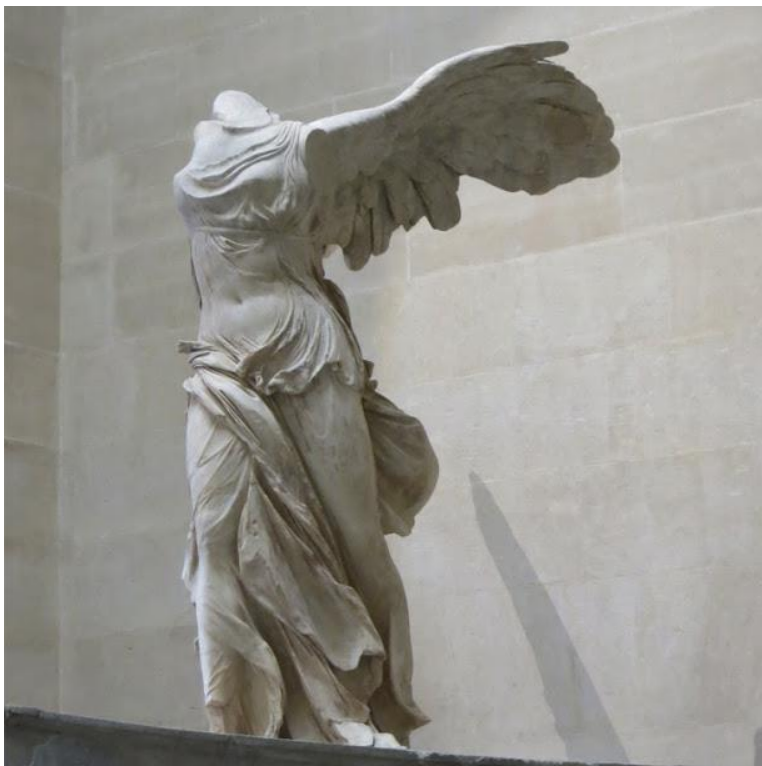


Figure 31: Pythokritos, Winged victory of Samothrace, 190 BC. Parian-marble. Louvre, Paris. (Wikipedia).

She also implies that the meaning of the event is reliant on the sentiments evoked through the encounter with other elements in the frame (Angel 2009:134). Her proposition echoes McManus (2011:7), who points out that the political significance of

the affect is in the tone, which “...elicits the proximity and encounter of object, world or artwork and feeling subject.”

The significance of the artwork, then, is not just in Msezane’s insertion of her body among the backdrop of the removal of Rhodes, but also in the presence of the statue, the city of Cape Town in the background, and the crowd of students in western clothes who are gathered in the space of appearance.

The presence of her body in the space manifests a powerful combination of narratives which are only possible through her act of appearing in the captured visual, as well as with the elucidation of difference between herself and the other aspects in the image (McManus 2011:7). Msezane places herself at an elevated level among the other students, she is draped with amaShoba, and she also chooses to cover her face creating sense of anonymity.

Thus, Msezane’s body represents a rupture with the past specifically because she is engaging with a certain subject position that seems to be at odds with the other elements in the image (Ahmed 2004:120; Mirzoeff 2015:[sp]). In doing so, Msezane seems to be performing an identity that is not fixated by any particular cultural trope especially because her use of the amaShoba is not tied to traditional renditions.

Rather, her performance merely implies an empowered subject position due to way she chose to photograph herself. Non-empathetic observers online, or disinterested viewers may, however, may choose to ignore Msezane’s performance or she may be subject to the phenomenon of being overly visible, potentially causing her act to lose impact.

Therefore, I argue that the power of these visual activism images from FMF and RMF are not just limited to the act of protest in the space of appearance but are also fuelled by the affect created by the proximity of elements in the movement art. In Figure 28 and 30, the subject is interacting with an implied disjunction of power relations. In Figure 28, the policeman in ordinary situations represents a figure with power; however, Mbuyisa’s gaze and assertion of his rights through his ID book suggests a subversion of authority.

In Figure 30, the statue of Rhodes stands for a past structure of inequality. Through her elevated winged pose, Msezane attempts to showcase her triumph over Rhodes.

However, because of the images' subsequent distribution online the imagery further detaches from any specific narrative. In other words, although Msezane's intention is to create an empowered subjective standpoint, her image simultaneously relies on latent and past signifiers to communicate her message properly and to generate the 'correct' emotional response.

Although the images attempt to create certain empowered interpretations either through the actions of the subjects themselves or through the framing of the image, the ability for the viewer to understand and side with the photographs depends on how the images are interpreted by those who encounter them.

Whether that be through an empathetic, a scornful or disinterested eye, the affect of the image of the viewer is as dependent on the audience's historical knowledge, as well as their personal interpretation of the elements in the photograph. Thus, to some extent, the force of the image is as dependent on those who view the image positively and choose to share the photograph as indicative of a larger narrative that stands for their values. I argue that this mode of interpretation is a direct result of the online environment that allows for differed meanings to attach to icons, as argued in full in Chapter 3.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION

#### 6.1 Summary of chapters

Hence, it is not the particular gestures of photographed persons or of photographers that stand for visual activism. It is only when their combined actions – including those of spectators – form reiterable statements resonating beyond their authors and resisting appropriation that we can speak of visual activism or, better yet, visual inter-activism (Azoulay 2016:27).

In exploring the role of visual activism in motivating FMF, the impact of the networked online environment warrants consideration because the Internet connects real tangible bodies. If, as Han (2001:67-68) asserts, close-knit communities are phasing out and are being replaced by virtual communities, the ways that humans are creating connections, attempting to influence one another and expressing themselves needs renewed consideration.

In my dissertation, I have investigated some of the visual statements that formed the activism of FMF, RMF and BLM. I have shown that the iconography from the movements attempted to create powerful, affective arguments that spoke to past and current discrepancies in power relations. In FMF, the students' visual activism is based on a South African activist legacy of tangibly representing the struggle for recognition and equality.

In Chapter 3, I began by explaining how FMF, RMF and BLM form virtual communities rather than fully traditional political communities. In early conceptions of communities, such as those by Durkheim (1985:30) and Tönnies (2001:17), the founding principles grounding members of a community to one another were based on the bonds formed through face-to-face relationships. Members of a group, through the formation of the conscience collective, were easily able to coalesce around their shared belief systems because most of the engagements were primarily in person.

Castells' (2010:403) states that all communication is rooted in symbolic exchange and I agreed with his assertion that cultural meaning-making is increasingly entrenched in the virtual. As cultural communication has progressively moved to web-based systems, past icons have been appropriated into the new systems because they have

the proven ability to bond people together. The power of the visual argument is empowered through the Internet's ability to create an environment where different texts can speak to one another, channelled through the users who purpose the arguments for their own needs.

BLM and FMF have both adopted the clenched fist as part of the iconography that characterises both movements. As argued, the gesture has been previously used by the Black Panther movement in the US and the Black Consciousness movement in South Africa. Without the Internet, the formation of political groups such as the Black Panthers and Black Consciousness movement would have relied more on regular committee meetings and stringently planned protest.

The gesture emerged as a symbol of unification for both groups: an icon wordlessly indicating membership to the political communities and an indicator of an understanding of their principles. Not only has the clenched fist persisted as a protest icon, but it has seemingly retained its striking meaning as proven by its frequent appearance in both BLM and FMF.

The gesture is commanding for two reasons: firstly, the clenched fist, in both countries, was the representative icon for political groups who radically rejected white supremacy, and the icon was dramatically wielded in environments of unequal racial power relations (Figures 10 & 11).

Secondly, the gesture has proven innate meaning, as according to the studies by Koole and Schubert (2009:829), as well as by Fisher *et al* (2011:1147), who state that its use transmits authority to the wielder, consequentially making arguments seem more powerful. Therefore, because of the gestures' innate affect and the powerful memories associated with the icon, the gesture has intuitive meaning that is easily transferred to protest movements

Members of the protest movements can show their affiliation to the virtual community in three ways. First, by sharing images of themselves doing the gesture. Secondly, they can share images of others using the gesture. Or thirdly, they can share historical images of the iconic gesture. In all instances, there is an implication that the gesture has substantial meaning to the members of the community.



The impactful past uses of the clenched fist add credence to BLM and FMF, and perhaps inadvertently re-associates the values of the past political community with the new one. Further, BLM and FMF attempted to create their own gestures that repurposed existing icons and served to create their own type of symbolism. I argued that all the gestures are powered through their theatricality and their repeated sharing on SNS.

As Ariella Azoulay (2016:27) suggests, visual activism gains meaning through interaction. Whether that be from people inside the movement, or mere spectators to the event, the political needs a personal dimension for individuals to be stirred by what they see (Sontag 2003:10). For the visuals to resound with viewers, they need to be emotionally moving to the viewer in a meaningful manner.

In Chapter 4, I looked at Sontag's (2003:10) two categories of photographs that instil an understanding of pain and suffering in a viewer, namely images of unequal brutality and images of identifiable victims. For Sontag (2003:10-12), unequal brutality describes violence where one person is clearly heavily armed or in a clear position of power and their victim is either unarmed. Whereas identifiable victims are individuals who have historically been oppressed, according to the narratives of the area, or are assumed to be victims of undue violence such as brutality toward children or women.

Using these two categories, I argued that the FMF protesters protestors relied on the visualisation of plights and injuries to fuel the movement. Visualising suffering as a form of activism has continued since the anti-apartheid era, and to some extent, relies on the legacy of the anti-apartheid era resistance photography (Thörn 2006:905; Krantz 2008:290).

Anti-apartheid activists and sympathisers looked to the post-war trend of creating sensationalist news material with an emphasis on distributing and creating visuals that could be instantly and internationally recognised as wrong. The activists focussed on the visualisation of the brutalities and violent injustices faced by the anti-apartheid activists, particularly from the 1976 Soweto Riots and the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre.

Like the anti-apartheid activists, the FMF activists attempted to draw attention and affective empathy to their movement through sharing photographs of the brutal injuries and the unequal displays of force they were subjected to by the police (Figures 23 & 24).

The sub-activism of the FMF activists aimed to recollect the resistance era photography, by again, showing images of unequal violence and identifiable victims. In RMF, the sub-activism depicted less graphic depictions of violence, but still relied on the traumatic memory of the Sharpeville Massacre. The name of the RMF protest icon Shackville (Figure 25), as well as the shack itself, acts as mnemonic symbols, drawing on the memory of the massacre to add to the impact of the visual statement. In both instances, the activists shared imagery that was closely coded to the anti-apartheid imagery because the resistance era visual activism has already successfully garnered affective empathy.

Using recollection-images in the online environment, the visual activism from FMF and RMF suspended notions of time and space by directly and indirectly recalling the feelings associated with the apartheid era tragedies. Channelling the resistance photography through their visual activism, the students were able to circumvent the more negative press touted by the media by affectively aligning themselves with the powerful collective memory of the anti-apartheid movement.

Lastly, in Chapter 5, I maintained that the FMF and RMF online visual activism, to some extent, relied on the performance of empowering images or movement art to envisage a changed future for the activists. Using Arendt's (1958:200-202) concept of the space of appearance, and Butler (2011:[sp]) and Mirzoeff's (2017:20) modern calibration of the term, I argued that SNS have both expanded and constrained the space of appearance because of they allow for an increase in visibility for the activists.

Appearing in public serves as a source of power for activists because the protesters appearing to one another as equals, as well as simultaneously showcasing their strength in numbers for viewers outside of the protest event (Arendt 1958:201-202). Homogeneity is the strength of the mass and is especially powerful when deployed in spaces such as universities and government structures with clear rules of decorum. With the addition of SNS, the activists are provided with a means transcend the real physical spaces and engage with pertinent micro and macro issues in a widespread manner.

A side effect of cultural exchanges taking place increasingly on SNS is an increasing dependence on the visibility of internet-born activism to sustain relevance. In other words, there is an amplified necessity for the performed visibility of the activism and

the dramatic visualisation of the movement. The performative aspects are not only there to empower the protestors but are also needed so that the visual activism competes with the influx of other types of imagery appearing on SNS feeds. The ability to perform empowered subject positions is heightened by SNS. The environments of SNS allow for the visual activism to be seen by multiple parties, but there is also a risk of subjective fixation at the same time. As argued by Marquez (2012:9) and Sevignani (2017:78), online corporations, such as Facebook and Twitter, are profit-driven, and aim to generate data on SNS users to target them with advertising.

SNS rewards users who are highly visible with social rewards such as likes and re-tweets (Couldry & van Dijk 2015:1). Individuals, or activist groups who remain highly visual as well as thought-provoking or interesting naturally garner more attention from other users. The monitoring of corporations alongside the spectatorship from other individuals on the sites creates the risk of fixing subject positions because the activists must constantly consider how their protest looks to others. As a result, the protesters' visual activism is at risk of conforming to regional tropes in order to communicate messages that are understandable to a large group of people.

However, as Pisters (2013:23) and Marquez (2012:11) suggest, the awareness that the FMF activists are being watched is not necessarily a negative aspect of hashtag activism. The heightened visibility simultaneously serves as a valuable tool for self-determination, as the activists appear to have an awareness and play with those regional tropes. To sway viewers into believing in the power of the activists, and by extension, the FMF cause, movement art serves as evidence of ruptured power relations.

The need to photograph a rupture emerges from tense politicised situations whereas the capturing of the rupture through movement art is an attempt to make sense of change (Bleiker & Leet 2006:715; Mirzoeff 2017:39). The activists, through the movement art, aim at asserting a self-determined subject position, not just for themselves but on behalf of the group they represent.

The affect of the photographs is evoked through the interplay of proximity with other elements in the photographs – the suggestion of a shift in power is induced by the performance of the visual activism in the image (Bleiker & Leet 2006:715). The result of the interaction is that the empowered subject attempts to transcend the other

subjugating objects in the photographs (Figures 29 & 31). However, it is also important to note that the implied transcendence is only possible through a certain intentional capturing and framing of the photograph.

Although the space of appearance is expanded by online visual activism, that does not mean that everyone who views the movement art will interpret it as intended by the distributor. The meaning, and thus, the affect of the photograph is completely dependent on if the viewer is cognisant of and sensitive to being swayed by the message of the visual activism.

## 6.2 Contribution of study

In my study, I have extensively applied existing studies on visual activism, such as those by Mirzoeff (2017) and Bryan-Wilson *et al* (2016), to the FMF movement. In doing so, I have broadened the current research by interrogating hashtag movement case-studies from the South African context. Aside from contributing to current research on South African visual activism, I have also examined how activism online has potentially affected the overall representation of FMF, RMF and BLM.

Using affect theory and hermeneutics, I have speculated that online communication is changing political activism in South Africa. Through focussing on the distribution of the clenched fist gesture online, my research has shown how political representation has become entrenched in symbolic online exchanges.

Castells (2010) and Rheingold's (1999) conceptions of virtual communities have guided my conclusion that online mediums are absorbing almost every other means of communication. Virtual communities are encouraging individuals to discuss and share powerful icons online. By extension, I have shown that activism groups, such as FMF, RMF and BLM are, to some extent, relying on the iconography of past movements to create group identities.

In a similar vein, I have looked at the role of depictions of violence in protest imagery and, informed by the works of Thörn (2006) and Krantz (2008), I have shown that there is a continuation in the way South African activists motivate affective empathy for their causes. Further, I have offered an affective approach to understanding the images from both the apartheid era, as well as the FMF and RMF movements.

I have ventured that, due to the connectivity of the web, there appears to be a sustained engagement with the past that instils an intuitive understanding of FMF and RMF visual activism. The continued trend of visualising the activism works to both define the movements and attempts to gain the empathy of outsiders.

Lastly, I have offered an interpretation of how movement art attempts to make sense of political turmoil. I looked at two examples of visual activism from the FMF and RMF protests that frame the main subject from an empowered perspective. Again, I have considered how the online dimension of uploading and sharing the images on SNS potentially augments the experience of activism visuals. I have concluded that the online presence of the movement art allows for a multiplicity of perspectives, some potentially empowering and others disempowering. Nonetheless, I have surmised that SNS has the potential to expand the space of appearance so that political causes are widely engaged with and more visible.

### 6.3 Limitations of study

There are several limitations of the study that can be solved with an expansion of the field of research. The study lacks an inclusion of unique quantitative research from SNS sites regarding photo data from FMF, RMF and BLM directly related to my points of research. Such quantitative research would use image trawling programmes, such as Keyhole and TalkWalker, to stringently search Facebook and Twitter for trends related to my research interests in FMF, RMF and BLM visual activism.

An example of data that could be collected for further research are statistics on the frequency of the clenched fist gesture to affirm whether its use the icon is as frequent in the FMF and BLM movements as I speculate. Further, the study could benefit from research on protest gestures from all over the world to see if there is a trend in the reliance on past gestures in other virtual political communities.

Another limitation to the study is a lack of inclusion of current information on the extent individuals are moved by online imagery. My dissertation includes one quantitative study by Jasper and Poulsen (1995) who looked at the affect of images displaying morally shocking visuals. They found that after being exposed to visuals of animal cruelty, activists were more likely to recruited to animal rights causes. The evidence

of Jasper and Poulsen's (1995) study is compelling as it shows that visuals can shock or motivate individuals to side with a cause, but my particular research would have gained from an understanding of how the online dimension changes the experience of those visuals.

Lastly, the study could have benefitted from human contribution in understanding the motivations and political values of the FMF, RMF and BLM protestors. Gaining perspective on the motivations behind the activists sharing specific imagery of themselves and others would contribute to an understanding of how political virtual communities are formed. Further, surveying what types of online images tend to stick in the minds of spectators to the protests would amplify Sontag's suggestion of unequal brutality and identifiable victims instil an understanding of pain in viewers.

#### 6.4 Suggestions for further research

As mentioned above, further research could include other international examples of protest gestures. Comprehensive research on the iconography of gestures in activism is beneficial to understanding how certain icons are being absorbed and re-purposed to serve as visual statements for different protest groups. Further research into the visual activism of other countries investigating if they have engaged with iconography from the past in continuum, as is the case with BLM, FMF and RMF, would offer valuable insight into how protestors are engaging with national and international audiences.

Understanding the true depth of the visual dimension of modern-day hashtag activism also warrants extensive research. Breuer (2012:8) states that most of the information that was spread on social media from the activists in the Tunisian Revolution focussed on informing the public about planned protest events. If there were any visual elements in the material, it would certainly be compelling to see what type of images were used to motivate people to attend the political events in Tunisia, as well as how those images compared to the visuals spread in South Africa during the student protests.

Additionally, FMF-specified and RMF-specified exploration into my research categories of protest gestures, images of pain and suffering, as well as movement art

could provide enriching perspectives into the representative visuals of both communities. Although I have included some images from the movements, the addition of the image trawling software, mentioned above, would provide a rich archive of each movement's iconography, giving adequate attention to each movement as separate entities. As mentioned earlier, the technology could allow for specifically categories of visual activism images to be created, which could be useful in a comparison with say, the Brown *et al* (2016) research.

Though the FMF protests have unofficially ended, the volatile nature of hashtag protests suggests that they can essentially be rekindled at any time. My dissertation has extensively explored the role of gestural, violent and artistic visuals in the FMF, RMF and BLM movements. The work can be strengthened with a more focussed approach to analysing the various types of images that fuel modern day protests, but has nonetheless, lengthily explored the role visual activism played in characterising and, potentially, rousing the FMF protests.

My research has, in many ways, re-inserted reflections of the role of the body in the online networked environment, especially related to acts of protest and resistance. The work has, optimistically, succeeded in aspiring further investigations into how South African activism images are shifting with the advent of the information age, yet are still engaging with the past. With the addition of considering the impact of Internet technology (especially within the realm of social media applications and digital media) on the spread of activism images, this work will hopefully inspire additional explorations into the role of visual activism in other modern hashtag movements both in the South African context and globally.

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