

# **Entrenching Privilege: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Afriforum Jeug During the #Mustfall Protests at the University of Pretoria: A Case Study**

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## **Abstract**

The #FMF protests at the University of Pretoria (UP) and universities across South Africa reflected a confrontation with power and an exhibition of distrust in democratic institutions. #Fallists consciously chose to challenge pre-determined notions of 'the right to education' and the pervasiveness of gatekeeping and access. These were questions intricately linked with their past. On all campuses, including UP, the #Fallists encountered many challenges. At UP, students who had affiliated themselves with the AfriForum Jeug student society contested very specifically the 'rights' that the #Fallists were demanding. This paper involves a modest attempt at formulating the possibilities that have been opened up by considering the #MustFall events in light of the responses by white Afrikaans speaking students. In this case study, one of the challenges faced by the #Fallists at UP was the opposition they encountered from AfriForum Jeug. How was this tug-o-war to be read and understood? The AfriForum case study is particularly relevant since it has been significantly argued that a dominant motivation and rationale for participation in the #MustFall protests included a pushback against persistent inequality and racism.

## **Introduction**

The #FMF protests at UP and universities across South Africa reflected a confrontation with power and an exhibition of distrust in democratic institutions. #Fallists consciously chose to challenge pre-determined notions of 'the right to education', the pervasiveness of gatekeeping and access that was 'about who should go to university, what it should look like, and who should pay for it' (Spaull 2017). These were questions intricately linked with their past, to memories and experiences of oppression, repression and impoverishment. For those in positions of power, a questioning of history and the asserting of knowledge that begins to dismantle established paradigms of control is significantly unsettling. This awakening of the disenfranchised manifests as a threat which is expressed as an ongoing fear, as evidenced from as early as the 1930s by critical academics such as Jan H. Hofmeyr (1930, 9–10) first Vice-Chancellor of the University of the Witwatersrand, who stated that,

A generation ago men gave little thought to the problems of the relations between white man and black ... [but now] the future relationship between the races is never for long absent from his mind ... For the most part he thinks of that relationship, as he considers the advancement of the black man, his thoughts are thoughts of fear, fear

not of being over-whelmed physically, *but fear lest his position be undermined in far more subtle ways* (my emphasis).

The #FMF protests represented such a threat, both to power and to white privilege and position. When I speak of white privilege, I am specifically referring to those inherent advantages enjoyed by white people in South Africa on the basis of their race. These advantages became sedimented in all sectors of society, private and public through policies and legislation implemented from the time of colonialism and through the apartheid era. South Africa has been and still is a society characterised by racial inequality and injustice.

Such racial inequality and injustice have filtered into the activism of the youth and student activists introduced these realities into their activism, but on all campuses, including UP, the #Fallists encountered many challenges. Most specifically when it came to responding to and managing the 'rights' of non-protestors. In this paper, students in positions of privilege are the white Afrikaans speaking students who had affiliated themselves with the AfriForum Jeug student society on the UP campus. How was this tug-o-war to be read and understood? Was it a question of the privileged demanding their privilege, whilst the deprived were struggling to claim their rights and hence access the privilege? Or was it a question of infringing on the rights of the privileged which had greater merit for an institution built to benefit the privileged, despite the fact that the activists had yet to realise the rights the privileged were already enjoying? Unbeknown to the #Fallists, any attempt at unseating privilege and established power structures would result in a violent response, as it impacted on the self-preservation of the privileged. At UP, this was evident from the manner and pace at which UP securitised the campuses and from the management and security's different responses and treatment of black activists (where activists are those who campaign to bring about political or social change) and white protestors (where protestors are those who publicly demonstrate an opposition to something).<sup>1</sup> These questions are considered through a critical discourse analysis, where a critical discourse analysis is a methodology that allows for an intensive assessment of what is meant when language is used in particular contexts to describe and explain a phenomenon or event. In this regard, the language that led to affirmations of who and what is a threat, of the rights of groups who have benefitted from privilege and of a language that entrenched domination and racial privilege are examined by considering the official, written language of AfriForum Jeug. These comments and social media posts were collected during the protests as I constantly monitored their social media sites. I should mention here that this paper is written from a participant point of view and hence, may include biases, given my positionality (as a student and academic who participated in the student protests) considering that I witnessed AfriForum Jeug's actions on the UP campus during the protests.

The general themes of violence, populism, colonialism, coloniality, race, racism, dehumanisation and political opportunism are matters well-traversed in in-numerous opinion pieces and studies such as *Free Fall: Why South African Universities are in a Race against Time* (Ray 2016), *#RhodesMustFall: Nibbling at Resilient Colonialism in South Africa* (Nyamnjoh 2016) and *Fees Must Fall: Student Revolt, Decolonisation and Governance in South Africa* (Booyesen 2017) and will not be elaborated on here. Furthermore, Nomvete and Mashayamombe's (2019 and 2021) articles on the protest movement at the UP have offered significant insights into the dynamics of the activists, their leadership, the intersectionality of issues and the nature of the student movement at UP. Nomvete and Mashayamombe's analysis which uses a 'contentious politics' framework (2019) underpins key arguments in this paper which argues that the activist movement at UP had support across the board as

students were united in their outrage at the exorbitant costs of accessing higher education. The papers highlight the structural issues and historical contexts but they do not address the organised role of white protestors on campus – specifically AfriForum Jeug.

This paper thus involves a modest attempt at formulating the possibilities that have been opened up by considering the #MustFall events in light of the responses by white students and by comparing motives and rationales which then speak to very specific ideologies and affiliations. In this case study, the focus is on AfriForum Jeug at UP. I hope that further research will be done for campuses like Stellenbosch, Potchefstroom University and the University of the Free State. These universities are all previously white-only universities where the primary language of instruction was Afrikaans. Much has already been written about the #Fallists (black activists) but there is a dearth of case studies on prominent white formations, their motives and mobilisation on the campuses. Such research will help educators and management to establish the extent of the conflict and the different perceptions that still exist between the racial groups and can be invaluable in informing policy decisions that will help rebuild the relations between these groups, foster harmony and social cohesion in a dynamic space such as the university.

The AfriForum case study is particularly relevant since it has been argued that a dominant motivation and rationale for participation in the #MustFall protests included a pushback against persistent inequality and racism (see Boersema 2017; Cini 2019; Albertus 2019; Andestad 2018) so it is interesting that AfriForum chose to oppose the #Fallists on many instances. Is it to be understood that AfriForum Jeug were thus opposing the challenge to the status quo? AfriForum was established in 2006. It is closely linked to the Solidarity trade union and has been described more as an Afrikaner nationalist group advancing the interest of white Afrikaners rather than as a civil rights group. Of relevance, in terms of its global agenda, is the fact that AfriForum has been touted as one of the groups advancing the idea of a ‘white genocide’ in South Africa (Chothia 2018). AfriForum Jeug (2021) operates as a student society in about six South African universities directing its lobbying to educational issues such as mother-tongue education and they argue for youth to be exempted from specific policy actions such as affirmative action (<https://www.afriforumjeug.co.za/wie-is-ons/>).

Considering their objectives as stated on their website, this case study contributes to and enhances the nuances in the narratives on the #MustFall protests in light of the protestors who protested against the #Fallists or on occasion countered and opposed the demands of the #Fallists. The #Fallists demands supported the ideas of re-racing and the contestation of post-1994 South Africa’s ‘nonracialism’ ideology initiated by the #RhodesMustFall movement which centred on decentring power-evasive ideologies and perceptions by calling for a decolonisation of the university’s institutional structure, its curriculum and pedagogy and for a re-examination of the racial history of the country. This is in contrast to AfriForum Jeug’s glorifying of a racist past to justify gatekeeping, control and access. This analysis exposes a reality for two groups of students, of those who always had access as opposed to those who were ‘allowed in’ and their respective interpretations of the university space as a public good.

## **Background and Context**

The #FMF protests in South Africa began in the middle of October 2015, after the #RhodesMustFall protests which began in March 2015. #RhodesMustFall was not an isolated South African event, but closely linked to and tied in with, global antiracism movements such

as #BlackLivesMatter which began in 2013, gaining traction by 2014. #FMM targeted the proposed increase in tuition fees at institutions of higher education. These protests have been considered the most disruptive protests in South Africa since the student protests of 1976. The demands for social justice, equity and equality have been echoing periodically in South Africa's education system since the oppressive days of apartheid. In 1976, black students revolted against the apartheid government. Many students lost their lives during that protest. Forty years later, on 15 October 2015, a majority of black students mobilised to launch a protest under the theme #FeesMustFall; revolting against institutional racism which they argued, had persisted despite South Africa's transition from apartheid-era policies to a democratic dispensation. For the most part, the essence of the #MustFall movements is symptomatic of deep social and economic injustices rooted in South Africa's apartheid history.

Many institutions were forced to shut down their campuses as students marched to voice their anger, toy-toying and causing disruptions in the university spaces. The protests initiated a multitude of responses and triggered vigorous debate in the public sphere. The facts of these events and the diverse responses, especially with regards to the #RhodesMustFall protests points to the complexity of truth and meaning making where activists had initiated a new antiracist discourse around the concepts of black pain, institutional racism, whiteness, decoloniality and decolonisation. From within and through the activism of this movement, students made racism in many higher education institutions in South Africa visible; institutions which had chosen to pretend that this 'problem' did not exist. Though student protests have been part of the life of 'black', historically disadvantaged universities since South Africa's transition to a democratic system, the March–April 2015 national protests reignited and resurfaced the issue of institutional racism at previously 'white' universities which had largely been obfuscated. Through symbolic action and discursive invention, students did what many had denied – they made racism visible and reframed the meaning and prevalence of race-related confrontations in democratic South Africa. The #Fallists questioned the country's dominant racial ideology of nonracialism by drawing on global antiracism discourses and older discourses of black consciousness.

### **AfriForum Jeug: Student Society of Privilege?**

Antiracism discourses, in my opinion, are a sore point for AfriForum and its youth wing, AfriForum Jeug because it requires responding to and acknowledging the need for policies such as Affirmative Action and corresponding quota measures, to correct the injustices of the past, perpetuated by racist policies. In this paper, I seek to raise a neglected aspect of analysis in the protests at UP by focusing on the white students represented by AfriForum Jeug. Although the protests on most campuses, and specifically on UP were mainly peaceful, productive and unsettling, there were manifestations of violence that included violence by stakeholders of and on behalf of the university and not only by students. There was damage to property, political opportunism, intimidation and bullying by students and university management/security across a wide spectrum. Sempijja and Letlhogile's (2020) analysis of the security-development nexus and the securitisation of university spaces is an invaluable contribution to understanding the university management's and AfriForum Jeug's role in the violence that manifested. This is when one considers that in securitisation theory.

security is treated not as an objective condition but as the outcome of a specific social process: the social construction of security issues (who or what is being secured, and from what) is analysed by examining the securitizing speech acts through which

threats become represented and recognized. Issues become securitized, treated as security issues, through these speech acts which do not simply describe an existing security situation, but bring it into being as a security situation by successfully representing it as such. (Williams 2003, 513 in Sempijja and Letlhogile 2020)

I would recommend that the paper is read in conjunction with this article so that there is a comprehensive understanding of the depth of the issues at play when contextualising violence. It is not in the scope of this paper to cover these dynamics, rather, my focus is to contribute to the body of literature by focusing on the different experiences and expressions of violence which is racially defined. These issues are considered through the context of AfriForum Jeug's social media activity its tweets and Facebook posts. This approach will highlight how power and privilege create a forced consensus about 'threats' where 'securitizing speech acts [serve as a vehicle] through which threats become represented and recognized'. These words and phrases are contextualised through an explanatory historical interpretation and contemporary reality. AfriForum Jeug is a legitimate case study as it has been a registered student society on campus. By shifting the focus to AfriForum Jeug who, in my opinion, represent a particular white middle-class identity, this paper considers the *protests of white students* as opposed to the activism of the black students in light of the #Fallists claims that the university still constitutes a landscape where racism and white privilege is dominant. To clarify, I refer to AfriForum Jeug as white middle-class because I am of the opinion that the concept of middle-class as a category for analysis should refer to the non-activists, despite the reference in everyday conversations to black middle- and working-classes and their role in the protests. Additionally, the dynamics of class in this analysis are located solely from my experience at UP. This dynamic contextualises the #MustFall movements because all black lives, irrespective of class, were considered disposable life. A conversation about middle-class, or working-class black student participation or non-participation could be futile, as it failed to comprehend the essence of what was identified by the protestors themselves as an issue of racism (Zwane, 2015). In the context of race and racism, the contact with the white person is precisely the negation of the possibility of individuality by blacks. According to Ndumiso Dladla (2017),

a black, whether he is a millionaire or a hobo, is precisely, that – a black. The prefix black serves as a negation of everything else that comes after it. This is an experience shared by all blacks, despite their supposed variations of individual location, gender and class. The very statistical right to life as it expresses itself in the life expectancy in the behaviour of the police, the private security hired by the universities and the white campus security personnel, progenitors of and from apartheid, against particular bodies shows that they do not adhere to the logic of varying individual subjects. The black millionaire or model C student in a situation of contestation experiences the same brutality at the hands of the police as the black hobo or the poor black student. Though we may wish for individuality, it simply does not exist, and the totalising logic of race is the representation and actuality of blackness as a negation of the real human being, whatever the individual status may be.

From a critical discourse perspective, the actual speaking, thought and voices of black students and individuals are necessary to capture the reality of the lived context and it demonstrates how societal power relations are established and reinforced through language usage.

Thus, what had been happening on the different campuses highlights the reality that in South Africa discussions on class are intricately embedded in racial determinants and would thus be ‘directly connected to bread and butter issues’ (Khan 2015). It included a recognition of the rights of workers and the hardship faced by ordinary black people to provide items such as bread for their families (Khan 2015, 4). In her article, *Connecting struggles, bread, milk and money*, Leila Khan (2015, 4) reflects on an ongoing race-class struggle highlighting the issue of basic necessities where ‘black protesters took the decolonisation process to its next step – the Shoprite in Khayelitsha Mall was occupied and a call was made for “the price of bread to fall”’. Accordingly, ‘when class analysis is used to explain social developments and political transformation, it should always take into account its historical context’ (Hellsten 2016, 101). Significantly, students from all walks of life participated in the #MustFall protests, often led by individuals who were considered more resource endowed than many of their contemporaries.<sup>2</sup> For instance, at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) protest leaders Shaera Kalla, Fasiha Hasan, Mcebo Dlamini and Busisiwe Seabe were certainly not from those students facing exclusion or overwhelmed by historic debt. What must be noted is the self-identification criteria of the #Fallists. Their participation was about the struggle and alienation of *black* students. It was about a racially defined (and not class-subject) identity. It was about everything related to being black. The #MustFall protests showed that the struggle of black people had become muted in a post-1994 South Africa and that structurally, little has changed. At UP, a considerable portion of white students identified with AfriForum Jeug attributing to it a ‘legitimate’ voice. Based on its social media posts, it is evident that AfriForum’s responses to the various student protests reflect a mindset that has altered little from what Hofmeyr described in his 1930 essay. Participation, or objection to the protests was about the ‘rights’ enjoyed historically, by ‘them’ (white students) and which they believed should continue unchallenged and uninterrupted. This will become evident from an analysis of the tweets and posts in the analysis that follows.

For this cohort of white students, the protests were a disruption from the distractions they engaged in, such as ‘Bokke Friday and #ProteaFire’ which allowed them to ignore the reality of the poor (Linden 2017, 38). What is significant about the media attention given to the #MustFall protests is that the mainstream western media only really bothered to give it coverage when it disrupted *white middle-class* spaces. Notably, there had been little media attention where protests in historically black universities had been ongoing; protests at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) began a minimum of three weeks before Wits. It is thus plausible to argue that in a country like South Africa, class relations have always been shaped and determined by racial determinants.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis: AfriForum and Its Social Media Protest Responses**

Of the issues named in the foregoing with regards to the extensive research done and output of publications, the existence and occurrence of coloniality in the university (micro-context) represented a sticking point for many #Fallists. It was evident that there is a significant amount of ambiguity and hypocrisy in the conceptualisation of human rights and social justice when applicable to black people. This is evident in both the micro-context of the black student’s existence and the macro-context of the state and again when referenced against the global community, of marginalised citizens or the other as had become evident through the #BlackLivesMatter movement. What many black students and academic activists at UP quickly realised is that human rights are not about social cohesion, academic freedom, intellectual integrity and social justice. According to Madlingozi (2007, 29) the law, many academics in the Faculty of Law and the gatekeepers of the law in the university structure

sought to preserve white privilege. This could also be identified as a possible agenda of AfriForum Jeug in the #FMF protests, which will become apparent from the discourse analysis of AfriForum's social media posts, later in this paper.

Access in this context points to the power of control – of an ‘allowing in’. The gatekeeping process allows for specific voices to be projected, best explained by analysing the language of the student body AfriForum Jeug, during its campaigning for the SRC elections on the UP campus in 2016. AfriForum Jeug used cartoon images to intentionally send a specific message of a ‘threat’ that existed in the form of violent behaviour by black students. Certainly, such images limit the understanding of violence instantaneously to subjective violence. A concern when discussing violence is the ability to name and detect violence beyond physical violence, and to [re] consider hounding *only* on what is deemed the root causes of nihilistic violence. This requires decentring the focus on subjective violence. Subjective violence is violence that is not anonymous; it incorporates the physical, physiological experience of ‘violence performed by a clearly identifiable agent’ (Ismail Sooliman 2018, 130), in this instance EFF students. There is an action being done and an identifiable doer of that action. This is the most prevalent form of violence in different discourses, analysis and media sound bites and is usually, the only type of violence referred to in relation to issues of violence involving black people generally, and in this instance, to the #Fallists. Such a strategy diverts from the existence of different forms of violence that exist such as institutional and symbolic violence in the westernised, neoliberal South African university.

### **AfriForum Twitter Feeds and Language in the #MustFall Protests**

The AfriForum advertising campaign cartoon showed an image of the Economic Freedom Fighters Student Command at UP (EFFSCUP) throwing bricks, whilst the saviour figure of the AfriForum Jeug leader repelled the violence (Twitter AfriForum September 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/yxw44zsj>). This image reaffirms the savage-saviour stereotype that is typical of colonial/apartheid justifications and the rhetoric embedded in the ‘native problem’ mentality. Another poster read ‘Ons betaal maar waar’s ons taal’ translated as ‘we are paying but where is our language?’ (Twitter AfriForum February 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/yy7gmyga>), which diverted from the fact that black students were also paying, yet had never had a language of their own to study in, in institutions of higher education. This tweet reflects the mindset of a constituency inside the university asserting its position and power and the belief that despite the racist context, their ‘rights’ should be prioritised. It excluded the explicit notion of language (Afrikaans) as a tool of exclusion as had been used during apartheid. Another tweet said, ‘Afrikaans Sal Bly: Modertaalonderrig is jou grondwetlike reg’ translated as ‘Afrikaans will stay: Schooling in your mother tongue is your constitutional right’ (Twitter AfriForum April 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/y3a3vn2y>), surfacing the ambiguities and hypocrisies in the language of rights. Another poster read, ‘Stem Nee Vir Kwotas’- ‘vote ‘no’ to quotas’ (Twitter AfriForum July 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/y29wxx4q>). It was about championing a position of privilege considered as a ‘right’ irrespective of the fact that this same constituency had considered it appropriate to impose quotas on black students who sought entry into historically white universities. These are all instances of institutional violence where control is manifested on different levels by a specific category of people protecting specific interests. At UP, a historically white-Afrikaans university, the link and embeddedness between the university management and AfriForum Jeug ideology cannot be discounted nor overlooked. Many of UP’s management’s actions mirrored AfriForum’s responses.

Here, I refer to UP's questionable sanctioning of black student leaders during the various protests such as during #AfrikaansMustFall which support the understanding that the university management's actions corroborated AfriForum's ideological stance of ownership with regards specific spaces and the right to have Afrikaans, which was of specific benefit to a very specific and small cohort of white students, as a medium of instruction. The tactic of having students arrested, charged, then dropping the charges persisted since the #AfrikaansMustFall protests. In February of 2016, during #AfrikaansMustFall at UP, protesting black students (#UP24) were arrested and after seven postponements and eight months of psychological harassment and intimidation, in October 2016, all charges were dropped (Johnston 2016).

Additional forms of violence and surveillance included subtle emails marked 'confidential' relating to a document entitled, 'Academic continuity in cases of disruptions' specifically about 'security protocols' in response to or in anticipation of the outcome from the #FMF commission report. These different forms of surveillance and threats served as reminders to academics that the programmes of surveillance and security control were being expanded on and incorporated into the systems of governance in the university (Praeg 2017, keynote). The UP's silence to the questions and demands by the protestors and its incoherence in action and response resonated of a complicity with power and the political, of collaborating with the elite rather than individuals who would shape a cohesive and coherent future for a better South Africa (Ismail Sooliman 2016, 1). The white men's fear of losing their position (as per Hofmeyer's quote above) contributes to the alienation of black people (students). These manifest as examples of symbolic and subjective violence. Consider that 'policy documents at UP often typecast protesting students as "enemy combatants" instead of "intellectual activists"' (Praeg 2017, keynote). UP's approach was force, fear and containment – not transparency, dialogue, justice and integrity. Academic freedom and the right to protest had been regulated by threat and surveillance. According to Professor Jane Duncan (Mail & Guardian, 2015)

In the case of "private spaces" used for public purposes, such as universities, the responsibility to enable fundamental rights becomes even greater. Universities are also duty bound to enable protests at places that are most meaningful to the protestors, which is most likely to be on campus. The "publicness" of university campuses makes it particularly inappropriate for them to invoke trespass laws, as these laws typically apply to private property.

Such measures, as instituted by UP, are reminiscent of W.E.B. Du Bois's explanation of the 'psychological wage' where, in the neo-apartheid university, racism is 'ideologically reproduced' through the narrative of 'security' (Kumar 2016, 78). All of the above affirms the racist institutional culture at UP where AfriForum Jeug did not hesitate to claim their privilege under the guise of 'rights'.

The behaviour of AfriForum Jeug at UP cannot be analysed in isolation of their behaviour and the context of their actions on other campuses as it goes directly to the power structures established on white-only campuses during the period of apartheid and colonialism; which, as per the #Fallists had not been dismantled. In response to the vandalising of the colonial/apartheid statutes during the #RhodesMustFall protests, AfriForum Jeug students pasted posters and carried banners saying, 'ons gaan nerens' translated as 'we are not going anywhere' (Twitter AfriForum April 2015a, <https://tinyurl.com/y4beru8b>). By stating that 'we are not going anywhere', AfriForum Jeug admits to many things. Firstly, they identified



themselves with colonialists such as Rhodes, though Rhodes was British. Secondly, they believed that despite being settlers, they had a right to these spaces despite the oppressive nature of the ownership of these spaces. Thirdly, AfriForum was effectively saying (from my understanding and from a contextualising of the moment and the history) that they did not want to discuss nor admit to the racist history, exploitation and impoverishment that gave them these spaces. They ‘got this land’, so it’s theirs and they were staying. They claimed ownership and control over these spaces. To support my interpretation, I refer to the AfriForum Jeug tweet that said, ‘Ek is ... Jy is ... Ons almal is Jan’ (I am ... You are ... We all are Jan) referring to Jan Van Riebeeck (Twitter AfriForum January 2015, <https://tinyurl.com/yhxxozd>).

This association and identification with a figure such as Van Riebeeck, much like the Rhodes statue, espouses a recognition of the Eurocentric heritage and a glorification of whiteness. It is a manifestation of a sense of superiority embedded in white supremacist ideology and a history of exploitation with no remorse for the harm done to the indigenous people. This tweet celebrates a history of exploitation and land theft; where to celebrate conquest in a settler colony like South Africa is to deny the humanity of the black people of South Africa. This is what the #Fallists were raising through their re-racing arguments and these issues were clearly articulated during #RhodesMustFall.

### **My History vs. Your History**

What one extrapolates from the various social media posts by AfriForum Jeug is that there is a Manichaeic pitting of us (the white saviour) vs. them (the black savage). To support this analysis, I will now consider AfriForum’s tweets during the #MustFall protests that followed #RhodesMustFall. There is a stark contrast in what I consider the rationale and motivation of the #Fallists during these protests compared to the rationale and motivation of AfriForum Jeug that raises some serious questions. In light of the rise of right-wing formations and an assertive arrogance displayed by white supremacists specifically in Europe and the US – the global context – and let us not forget AfriForum’s ‘white genocide claims’, such actions, attitudes and characterisations by AfriForum Jeug are unsurprising. As black students protested against the statue of Rhodes occupying prominent space on their campuses, despite the history of exploitation it embodied, AfriForum Jeug ‘launched a campaign against the unthinkable shift and removal of statues in public areas’ and rallied for support around these figures. They argued that the ‘protests in favour of the removal of statues are an easy way to get publicity for an ideological point of view, to sweep up minds and to polarise communities in South Africa’ (Prinsloo 2015).

The question that one needs to ask is this, ‘Is it only about an ideological view or is it about social justice and the further dehumanisation of a people traumatised over centuries through a logic that spoke of them as inferior when compared to the “valorised” persons represented in the statues?’ The AfriForum Jeug tweet reflected the Manichaeic dichotomy mentioned in the foregoing discussion and the tweet ‘Steun SA se Standbeelde’ which translates as ‘support SA’s statues’ (Twitter AfriForum April 2015b, <https://tinyurl.com/yxtr3upn>), depicted an insensitivity to what the statues represented, frankly because it was not what affected them (white students). In fact, it could be argued that they were defending these ‘standbeelde’ because they owe their privilege, position and benefits to what the ‘statues’ symbolise in their history. In a rational explanation, this can be explained as privilege. Thus, the symbolic and ontological valuation of black people as not human in contrast to the celebration of an unjust history and historical figures has remained in spaces of critical

thought where academic freedom and liberal values are artificially echoed. In the space of power politics, these interactions, exchanges and responses are all drawn from a predefined range or code, where human interaction is essentially manipulated to fit into the self-preservation strategy of those who have power. As a result, the protection of white privilege and the interests of the white middle-class has always been prioritised as is evident from the sudden media attention when the protests erupted on the Wits campus.

## **Conclusion**

#FMF interrogated the essence of concepts such as middle-class identity and belonging. It was not about inclusion into an already exploitative and racist structure, highlighting the reality of securitisation as a tool of racism enabling the safeguarding of white privilege. It presented a challenge to the single-story interpretation that described black youth activists as violent and leaderless and the movement as one of the black middle-class students feeling entitled. Such descriptions were used across the board to perpetuate an embedded stereotype in South Africa's racist history. The AfriForum case study is particularly relevant since it has been significantly argued that a dominant motivation and rationale for participation in the #MustFall protests included a pushback against persistent inequality and racism, so it is interesting that AfriForum chose to oppose the #Fallists on many instances. The language used by #Afriforum Jeug as taken from the social media sites indicates the creation of a 'security threat' phenomenon, where the black protesting student activists are the threat. Furthermore, from the critical discourse analysis of the social media posts, it was plausible to argue that the mindset and attitude as represented by AfriForum Jeug at UP reveal that they claimed ownership and control over spaces that have been predominantly white and dominated by white power. Thus, when white spaces and white privilege are threatened, violence will be the norm. This is understood through their endorsement of and identification with Rhodes and Van Riebeeck. In this situation, only the mobilisation of the masses and social protests can affect the process to start the change. The student protests of 2015 and 2016 certainly started that process but can the momentum created sustain a process of change that is much needed to overhaul a largely unequal South African society? Only time will tell.

## **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## **Notes**

1 I make these distinctions because at UP, from my observation, there was a distinct difference in the manner and way in which black students were treated compared to the university's response to disruptions and violence from Afriforum Jeug students.

2 This was my observation from participating in the protests at UP working behind the scenes and assisting with the political schools, fundraising and food hampers.

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