South Africa's Fees Must Fall: The Case of #UPrising in 2015

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Abstract

Writing from a participant observation point of view with supplement of in-depth interviews, this article presents UPrising, a student-led movement that emerged at the University of Pretoria's Hatfield campus during the 2015 Fees Must Fall tuition fees protest. We examine its activities within UP's politically contested student space, in terms of recruitment, mobilisation and organisation of students. The article also traces how UPrising led protests on campus-specific issues and proposed tuition fees increase that had been proposed in 2014 for the 2016 academic year in conversation with broader student protests of 2015. We argue that UPrising led a successful student struggle through a non-partisan approach, effective use of social media and strategic leadership in a space with intense surveillance and fraught with partisan student politics that intersected with gender.

Keywords: Student Movements, #Uprising, Fees Must Fall, Solidarity, Mobilisation

Introduction

In 2015, the higher education and training sector experienced the highest magnitude of student-led protests in post-apartheid South Africa. Starting with protests on shortages of National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) by universities of technology (i.e. Tshwane University of Technology), #RhodesMustFall at the University of Cape Town, #RUshutdown at Rhodes University and the #OpenStellies at Stellenbosch University in the first half of 2015 (John 2015; Bosch 2017; Luescher, Loader, and Mugume 2017), the protests soon covered the entire country. In late 2015, another wave of these protests erupted at the University of Witswatersrand, and soon spread across most public universities and colleges under the #FeesMustFall. The climax of the protests was reached when students marched to the Union Buildings, which is the official sitting of the South African Presidency, thereby prompting the then President Jacob Zuma to announce a zero fee increase for the 2016 academic year (Nkosi 2015). Students then went back to their campuses where, however, they continued to collectively bargain for campus-specific demands before returning to classes. Nonetheless, the protests spilled over into 2016 under #OutsourcingMustFall and other "fallisms" due to unresolved issues across different campuses.

In this paper, we present UPrising—a University of Pretoria's (UP) student-led social movement—that recruited, mobilised and organised students and led protests against

the university's institutional and residence cultures, language policy, curriculum, residence and food prices and the tuition fees increase that had been proposed in 2015. We examine the formation, recruitment, mobilisation and programme of action of UPrising UP in conversation with broader student protests of 2015 using Tarrow's (2011) contentious politics. We argue that UPrising led a successful student struggle through a non-partisan approach, effective use of social media and strategic leadership in a space with intense surveillance. We write from a participant point of view, as we were senior postgraduate students in 2015. The article also benefits from in-depth individual interviews we conducted in 2016 with six UPrising leaders: two University of Pretoria Student Representative Council (UP SRC) and three central command. This served as a reflective exercise as these participants looked back to the 2015 student protests. We also draw from UPrising's official social media accounts, news articles and academic sources. We are aware of our subjectivity and lived experiences as students who participated in UPrising's activities. In the same spirit, we write to demonstrate that the #FMF movement was campus-specific, but united through proposed tuition fees increases and general financial exclusion of black African students in the South African higher education sector. In doing so, we seek contribute to the body of literature on student protests in South Africa, particularly from institutions whose events tend to remain on the margins.

Student protests and social movements

Historically, student protests have acted as vehicles for social, political and economic change in post-colonial independent African states such as Cameroon, Tanzania, Nigeria, Senegal, Zimbabwe and South Africa (Badat 1999; Zeilig and Ansell 2008). Zeilig (2009) observes that the role of student intelligentsia can be seen during the liberation period, independence, post-independence, neoliberal, globalisation and economic global recession periods (for more structured periodization, see Hewlett et al. 2016). Students across sub-Saharan Africa protested against corruption, dwindling state student funding subsidies, unemployment, poverty, inequality and the slow pace of transformation (Badat 1999; Zeilig and Ansell 2008; Zeilig 2009). Consequently, the state has responded with various levels of violence against students, including the militarisation of universities (Hodgkinson 2013; Ndelu 2017; Gukurume 2019). In South Africa, students protested through various social movements for various causes which included an end of apartheid, social justice, higher education funding, and transformation of higher education sector spaces as well as curriculum reform, etc. South African students have always played an active role in the reconfiguration of the country's political landscape, such as the South African Student Organisation and the South African National Students Congress from the early 1960s through to the Soweto UPrising of 1976 (Badat 1999; H e ffernan and Nieftagodien 2016). Student-led protests since the mid-1990s to the 2000s and culminating in 2015/2016 invoke youth resistance culture and a continuation of the student struggle in the democratic era (Koen, Cele, and Libhaber 2006). Prior to the 2015 wave of #FMF, students at historically black universities had been protesting against slow and inadequate NSFAS, shortage of accommodation and poor and dilapidated infrastructure (Ndelu 2017).

A consideration of the nature of student movements

A question is how to conceptualise student action under #UPrising at the UP during 2015. Tarrow (2011, 9) defines a social movement as a "collective challenge, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents and authorities". It is argued that this collective action is not just abstract and outside history or from history, but is part and parcel of the everyday realities of people. Using contentious politics, Tarrow (2011) shows how social movements embark on contentious politics as they articulate demands. Contentious politics is "what happens when collective actors join forces in confrontation with authorities and opponents around their claims or those they claim to represent" (Tarrow 2011: 4). In other words, those who feel deprived or want to make claims when they sense a vacuum take advantage and utilise the moment and space. Tarrow (2011: 6) argues that:

> People contend through known repertoires of contention and expand them by creating innovations at their margins. When backed by well-structured social networks and galvanised by culturally resonant, action-oriented symbols, contentious politics leads to sustained interaction with opponents to social actors.

Central to Tarrow's framework are interrelated concepts: collective action, political opportunity and resource mobilisation, which we explore below.

Collective action lies at the heart of social movements and is central to protests, rebellions, strike waves, riots and even revolutions (Tarrow 2011). The aim is to interrupt, obstruct or make daily activities ungovernable. Tarrow (2011: 6–7) cogently states that,

> contentious collective action serves as the basis of social movements, not because movements are always violent or extreme, but because it is the main and often the only recourse that most ordinary people possess to demonstrate their claims against better-equipped opponents or powerful states.

Consequently, common purpose, social solidarity and sustaining contention enable social movements to continue waging claims (Tarrow 2011).

An understanding and grasp of political opportunities and threats

Tarrow (2011: 32) describes political opportunity as "consistent but not necessarily formal or permanent or national, sets of clues that encourage people to engage in contentious politics". The possibility of actors to engage in any action or political struggle against powerful actors like the state or institutions is dependent upon their perceived weakness or vulnerability or lack of such (Meyer 2004) and possible threats like repression. Such conditions encourage social actors to form social movements and utilise the opportunity to recruit members, mobilise and wage contentious politics. In the case of UPrising, the failures of the Student Representative Council to convince UP management to lower registration fees for 2016 coupled with the existent broader students concerns country-wide galvanised the founders to form the movement, recruit, and mobilise students to engage in collective action. The vacuum created by the failure of the SRC was a blessing in disguise for UPrising leadership and exploited the lull moment.

For social movements to succeed, they require adequate and efficient resources. These resources can be social networks (media), members, and cultural frames as well as food

and solidarity among other things (Snow and Benford 1988). The availability of resources shapes the activities of social movements. For instance, the way a cultural frame, i.e. ideology, is packaged and communicated through, for instance, social networks like Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp, among other things, is a vehicle for recruitment and mobilisation of members (Tarrow 2011). It is therefore through Tarrow's lenses that we explore how #UPrising emerged and made its claims at UP and how its actions fed into the broader 2015 #FeesMustFall movement.

The genesis of #UPrising and its activities

The SRC activities at UP in September 2015 and its subsequent failure in having the proposed tuition fees increase reduced, coupled with a general cycle of protest action at other university campuses, provided political opportunity for the emergence of an alternative movement. The lull period enabled some student activists to disengage from UP SRC structures, reflect, regroup and form a new student movement given the structural limits encountered by the SRC. The outcome was the formation of UPrising—an amalgamation of Tuks 11 and Grassroots movement. It was followed by the subsequent recruitment and mobilisation of students and the roll-out of collective action on campus and on the streets of Hatfield (a suburb where UP is located), ultimately leading to a march to the Union Buildings on 23 October 2015 (Nkosi 2015). It is imperative to mention that the broader indirect influence of #FeesMustFall-related protests played a significant role in providing conditions for the operation of UPrising. Below we discuss the sequence of events.

Late in 2014, UP announced a proposal to increase tuition fees with effect from the 2016 academic year, much to the annoyance of students who refused to bargain on the basis that they had not been consulted and that the fees regime would divide students in terms of citizenship and region. Students from outside the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region were to be affected the most, followed by those from SADC and to a lesser extent South Africans. In short, all students were going to be affected by the increase in tuition. The proposed registration fees for the year 2016 had been set as follows:

> SA students: from R5000–R7500, SADC students: from R5000–R20,000 and Non-SADC students: R5000–R40,000. (University of Pretoria internal student communication, 2014; UPrising Facebook page)

The above fee structure showed a significant increase, shifting away from the previously established rates of increase, much to the unhappiness of students. The UP SRC rejected the proposed increases and sent out a notice on 9 September 2015 for a mass meeting on 15 September 2015 at the University of Pretoria's Amphitheatre in which it would clarify its official position to students. The agenda read:

> Tuition Fees. The SRC will make it public that it does not support the vast increase in tuition fees for international students and South African students and will demand a way forward and a reconsideration of the increase. A petition will be circulated to make students aware of the problem and it will be handed to management. A memorandum will be handed to the Vice-Chancellor stating concerns with the increase.

Few students attended the mass meeting because classes were underway. The low student turnout mirrored students' political apathy and an outright apolitical culture at

the university. In addition, the inability of the SRC to lure different student political formations and encourage their constituencies to attend the non-partisan meeting was evident. Subsequently, the SRC wrote a letter to UP's management listing several demands. On 28 September 2015, the Deputy VC responded acknowledging the SRC's concerns, but maintaining that the proposed fee structure for 2016 would remain unchanged and that the university was willing to reduce the initial registration payments subject to progressive increment. The SRC rejected these concessions and moved ahead with protest action against fees increases for the first time on 30 September 2015 under the banner of #downwithfinancialxenophobia. The hashtag was symbolic given the renewed verbal and physical attacks on foreign nationals in South Africa which had been witnessed in 2015; and that the fees hike would mostly hurt students from outside South Africa (see Ukwandu 2017). This protest did not gain much momentum as only around 100 students, both local and non-South African, were in attendance. This was evidence of either a lack of political awareness by students or weak mobilisation strategies (social media, door-to-door visits and poor timing) as observed by UPrising SRC student leader 2:

> [w]e then realised that this was political, we don't have buy-in from the students, but everyone who was politically conscious, or student activists were there but we didn't conscientise students enough hence poor attendance …

Although unsuccessful, the meeting offered a signal in terms of the plan of action. The SRC could not actively spearhead the campaign as they were constrained by university regulations. However, UP's South African Student Congress (SASCO), the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL), and the UP Economic Freedom Fighters Student Congress (EFF SC) branch structures actively rendered support to the SRC during the march. Coincidentally, protests on fees erupted at the University of South Africa and Tshwane University of Technology on the same day.

In retrospective, UP SRC had reached its institutional-driven limits. It was also inexperienced in organising, mobilising and sustaining protests given the short student activism history after deracialisation of UP as well as class, race, gender and political dynamics. We thus argue that the student body at UP sensed some "political opportunity" in the form of the looming fee increase and the university's failure to consult with students. The potential negative impact of the fees hike leading to financial exclusion and commodification of higher tertiary education created contention between the SRC on behalf of students and the university. This battle for legitimacy provided what Tarrow (1998, 2011) calls "political opportunity" for the student body to wage contentious collective action through protest marches after other avenues of expressing disgruntlement had been exhausted. The SRC exploited the university's vulnerability due to its failure to consult on the proposed tuition fees increase. This confirms Tarrow's (1998) argument that individuals and groups capitalise on opportunities created by a powerful opponent's perceived weakness. The UP SRC waged a less successful protest as it faced both internal and external challenges. Leading up to the protest march, the university galvanised its internal security and employed surveillance tactics that included security personnel in casual wear wearing earpieces and observing from a distance. Such tactics sought to instil fear and discourage students from joining the march. Gukurume (2019) observed a similar but more sophisticated trend at the University of Zimbabwe, where secret

services agents enrolled at the institution, attended classes, but never graduated as they continued to spy on student leaders. In addition, institutional limitations constrained the SRC's ability to transcend procedures. In terms of its own internal dynamics, although it was able to mobilise political student organisations (Democratic Alliance Student Organisation, Progressive Youth Alliance (PYA) and EFF SC) on campus, it was unable to bring ordinary students together and build solidarity. Therefore, political opportunities and constraints played a paradoxical role that led to the SRC-led protest march, the handing over of a memorandum of demands and the subsequent university response rejected by the student body (Tarrow 2011).

Demobilisation, critical reflections and venting out sessions

The failure of the UP SRC-led protest to attract big student numbers and get a positive response from the UP management marked a turning point in the university's student politics. It had served its purpose: embryonic seeds of student activism had been sown. The spring break which took place in the first week of October 2015 provided a period of a seeming lull, yet behind the scenes small groups were mobilising. Social media platforms were used for anger ventilation by students. An UPrising's student leader 1 highlighted the following:

> [t]here are people who generally talk you know; and it's across partisanships and also those who know each other by various leadership positions that they hold within the institution. So, it comes to a point of they are talking and then, I think it was *Katlego & Charity or KB, Katlego and Xolani who were just tweeting about the issues and challenges at the University of Pretoria and how something needs to be done about it. That's where now they decided we are going to meet to discuss these things.

Drawing from the methods of communication used during the Arab spring, the above quote shows the role of social media in providing platforms for venting, communicating and the mobilisation of individuals to discuss common issues (Bosch 2013). The SRC-led protest march and its subsequent demise due to factors outlined earlier created a political opportunity for some students to act. This led to the meeting of 11 students on Hatfield campus. The 11 were undergraduate students undertaking various degree programmes such as Engineering, Town and Regional Planning, Computer Science, Education, Law and Political Sciences, and they ranged from 21 to 27 in age. Some attended the meeting by chance and did not know who had called the meeting. The meeting was secret, as students were worried about their security and future given incidents that had happened during the SRC-led protest march. Twitter played an important role in raising awareness of the frustration among students while word of mouth was used to invite the 11 to a meeting. The participants pointed out that they knew each other and were from different political student organisations and societies on campus, and at some point, their different political orientations created challenges. However, none of these participants wanted to organise around party political lines as shown by UPrising SRC student leader 2:

> Now we were just talking but it was made clear from the word go that individuals were not there in the capacity of their organisations, they were there as individuals who are concerned and believe that something needs to be done but there is an understanding that this something that needs to be done has to be done in a collaborative way …

From the meeting, the 11 students (seven females and four males) agreed that many issues, ranging from campus and residence culture and language policy to the treatment of black African students, needed urgent intervention. Therefore, the fees increase was just part of the bigger problem within the university. Importantly, during this meeting, brainstorming about the group's name and general principles were decided. This included an agreement to a non-partisan programme of action. Ultimately, they discussed the plan of action arrived at the the name UPrising. UPrising central command leader 1 stated that:

> The name UPrising is convenient with 1976 Soweto uprising … the essence of the thing was the 1976 uprising. It just so happened that UP was very convenient for us …

UPrising was deliberately formed as a non-partisan movement that sought to appeal and unify students and articulate demands. Its formation was catalysed mainly by the political opportunities that availed themselves after the less-successful SRC-led fees protest march, the historical grievances students had and the political activism vacuum on campus.

> [t]hey kind of thought a way to form a society that would deal with student issues but is not political. Theirs was supposed to be a non-partisan organisation but it would tackle the issues that we have on campus and it would also be used as a protest organization … (UPrising student leader 3)

UPrising members also realised that their success lay in collaborative work through a non-partisan approach, forming solidarities with different groupings and mobilising students through social networks and then waging contentious collective action through known repertoires.

Social movement innovation: social media and mobilisation

UPrising leaders were able to foster collective interest through a similar purpose, which was the question of the tuition fees hike and other campus-specific grievances. Tarrow (2011) opines that leaders of social movements know that their opponents are better equipped and resourced to counter them, and hence make use of social networks and cultural repertoires. UPrising used mainly Twitter to introduce itself. Each of the 11 UPrising student leaders tweeted intensively, raising different issues that affected students at UP. However, to avoid random uncoordinated Tweeting, they decided to use the hashtag UPrising to trend and gain visibility. It was a venting out session, at the same time announcing themselves as a group as explained by UPrising student leader 1:

> So, we knew already that the moment we went out on social media and announced that here is the thing called UPrising … it was on a weekend and we were now tweeting (11 October 2015) with picture of all us 11 holding placards with different messages the group was fighting against. In these tweets with pictures we were basically venting out and so forth at the things affecting us … the venting out session was pretty much an announcement of this who we are …

The #UPrising started trending on a weekend and got thousands of re-Tweets from past and present students as they enquired about UPrising. The group got calls from UP alumni, media houses and fellow students asking what their plan of action was and how they could be involved, as captured below:

> [w]e didn't know who UPrising was and who had formed it. It became a Twitter trend one Sunday and it was huge. Former students and progressive student activists were impressed by this initiative given the history of lack of student political activism at UP … (UPrising central command leader 2)

Just like the effect that Twitter and Facebook had on the Arab spring and other protests in 2015 and globally (Wolfsfeld, Segev, and Sheafer 2013), UPrising managed to reach out to current students and black African alumni, venting issues affecting students. Moreover, it was an alternative route to ventilate frustrations caused by UP's management in their failure to heed to UP SRC demands and muzzle dissenting voices. Social networks were used to mobilise social actors, convincing them to support the cause and, at the same time, to mobilise students to attend a mass meeting the following Wednesday. This reinforces the importance of information and communication technology as a mobilisation resource for social movement (Eltantawy and Wiest 2011; Oxlund 2016). UPrising's official Facebook account provided a detailed programme of action.

Like other student movements, UPrising used social media to reach out to students and society by defining enemies of the cause, pointing out struggles and evils that students encountered (Bosch 2017; Fullam 2016). It was an effective platform that enabled UPrising to communicate with other social actors, although it encountered challenges from UP. Just like at other universities where "silencing" tactics were deployed (University of Witwatersrand and later University of Johannesburg just to mention a few), UP shut down Wi-Fi to handicap UPrising's ability to communicate, but did not succeed. Besides the use of social networks, student leaders also moved across residences using a "motho motho" approach (person to person), informing students about UPrising, framing the struggles of black African students on campus, which culminated in massive mass student gatherings. The mobilisation was effective, as a couple of thousands of students attended the first mass meeting and numbers increased as days went on. UPrising succeeded in uniting thousands of UP students who marched to the union buildings, joining other students from various universities where President Zuma later announced a zero-percent fees increase.

The formation of UPrising and its subsequent activities was based on the coming together of student leaders from different political and social orientations, waging claims using a collaborative approach. The founding student leaders came from, UP SRC, SASCO, EFF UP SC, Pan Africanist Student Movement of Azania and Grassroots. Divided along partisan lines with different ideologies, mandates and goals, they managed to establish a unified non-partisan movement. However, despite its coherence, challenges were inevitable as cracks began to show, thereby threatening unity. For the past eight years or so, the PYA, through its SASCO UP branch, had dominated UP students' political space (see also Ndlovu 2017b; Habib 2019). It was seen as the voice of disfranchised black African and white progressive students. The emergence of UPrising and its ability to draw large numbers of students became a direct threat to the PYA leadership hegemony. Earlier in the year, SASCO had undertaken it's less successful "Right to Learn Campaign" and not received similar student support in comparison to that of UPrising. There was a possibility of UPrising's plans being hijacked by other movements launching similar programmes and dividing students, as noted by UPrising student leader 4:

> [w]e were planning a mass meeting next Wednesday and we didn't want to waste time as we were well aware that because this thing is contested and desire by certain people to try have a parallel program around the same issues that we were raising just to say that they raised the issues first … we heard there is a group having the same conversations that we are having and wants to do the same work we are doing … and had leap frogged ahead of us … we decided to sit down with the group and avoid dividing students …

The meeting to resolve inter-student political organisations' differences was prolonged due to contestations for space and demands to be included; for instance, insourcing of support staff by UP. UPrising leadership did not want to encroach into trade union matters at UP due to the complexities that inform the tripartite alliance politics (African National Congress, South African Communist Party and the Congress of South African Trade Unions), given the fact that some of them were affiliated with SASCO and ANCYL UP branches. Antithetically, the UP EFF SC insisted on the inclusion of in-sourcing of UP security, landscaping and cleaning staff by UP on the list of demands given the fact that it had been working the National, Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union prior to the formation of UPrising. UPrising members argued that they controlled the space as they were a top trending topic on social networks, while others claimed to own the university's student political space. A compromised agreement culminated in the rectification of the proposed memorandum of demands with 17 points to be handed over to the university's management. This shows that where there are opportunities, threats also exist and not just from the state or its representatives, but within a movement itself (Tarrow 2011).

Furthermore, UPrising invited student political organisations and societies on campus to form a unified coalition as part of its mobilisation strategy. The EFF SC UP was the only student political organisation that immediately endorsed UPrising. However, they vigorously contested methods of protest and wanted to control the direction of marches. For example, after UPrising had agreed with all parties that they were going to march around Hatfield, EFF SC and other former SASCO UP members agitated to change the route and march to the Union buildings. They argued that a march to the Union buildings would get immediate attention from the Presidency. UPrising argued that marching to the Union buildings was not in the initial agreement with South African Police Services (SAPS) Brooklyn and would make students vulnerable to confrontation with other law enforcements. At a more subtle level, this was about the battle for control of the movement. Throughout UPrising's programme of action, leaders of different student political organisations wanted to have some of their representatives in front during mass meetings or marches on the street for media visibility and "political currency". This would send a message that they were leading the protests and get credit from their regional and national office bearers. We observed serious contestations for the microphone to address students during mass meetings between UPrising leadership and regional leaders of other student political organisations. Considering these various struggles, UPrising leadership managed to resolve these challenges and remained focused on the desired outcomes.

Equally important, the role of female student leaders cannot be ignored. There were more females than males in the initial 11 students who formed the UPrising. Their resolute organisational abilities were under strain during the interface of UPrising with other student political organisations. The role of gender during the student protest led by

UPrising was undermined and led to discrimination and harassment of female student leaders. For instance, UPrising central command leader 1 noted:

> [p]olitics is inherently very violent to female bodies more so when they are black. It's a hyper masculine space, how you speak, how they sing, dance … it is very hyper masculine and at most times the only role females play is to be sexual objects of these political figures … We had a lot of conflict because of gender. People felt entitled to platforms of addressing just because they are males. Because he thinks as a male, black male in a political space, it is his platform, like they assume a position of leadership automatically without us having reached a consensus.

We witnessed moments of power struggles including the wrenching of microphones by male leaders from female leaders in during public addresses. It can be argued that student political activism space is fraught with violence, harassment, domination and subordination of female bodies. This is also raised by Ndlovu (2017a: 69) who contends that the "picket line in protests is a contested space that privileges masculinity and objectifies women's bodies rendering them visible or invisible". UPrising female student leaders felt undermined and violated physically and emotionally when they encountered other male student political activists from campus-based political organisations like UP PYA and UP EFF SC, which exhibit a masculine culture. The behaviour of some male student leaders threatened the solidarity of the movement in that it made female students feel compromised. This reveals how sexism and harassment are rife in the student activist political landscape and demonstrates the symptomatic domination of patriarchy in the society (Tshoaedi 2017). Dlakavu (2017) makes similar observations in Wits #FMF, where female students were discriminated, thereby eventually leading to the formation of #Mbokodo-Lead—a hashtag formed on Twitter by black female student leadership as a reaction to patriarchal tendencies in the 2015 FMF (see Kandawire 2016). Furthermore, Ndlovu (2017b) critiques tokenism and violence of women in #RMF and #FMF movements and the University of Cape Town in 2015/16 and how its attempts were made to counter it through #PatriarchyMustFall (a hashtag started on Twitter as a response to patriarchy in the movement). In as much as social media can be empowering, it can also be used as a conduit to divide social actors in a movement and promote publicity-seeking behaviour. To counter political and social differences, UPrising leadership created another layer of leadership called the "central command", comprising of 12 student leaders from UP's SASCO, ANCYL and EFF SC. Although it helped satisfy patriarchally inspired political egos, it became a gendered political battlefield as they executed agreed-upon mandates within the movement. This is because female student leaders still needed to account to the organisations that they were affiliated with, whose leadership was male-dominated.

As a student movement, UPrising mounted collective challenges such as ensuring that classes got suspended, disrupting normal administrative activities on campus and mobilising students to attend collective action for seven consecutive days. The participants undertook known repertoires like singing songs such as "Solomon (Mahlangu)", "Tiyo Tiyo" and other apartheid-inspired struggle songs to reincarnate the spirit of the past and inspire the present. They also marched on campus and along Hatfield's streets with placards carrying different messages, and ultimately to the Union buildings. During marches, student protesters blocked roads in view of SAPS Brooklyn seeking society's moral support (SAPS Brooklyn is a police station that serves Hatfield and other suburbs

within its jurisdiction). Surprisingly, there was no violence or animosity between students and SAPS Brooklyn contrary to cases reported at other campuses across the country (see Chinguno et al. 2017; Ndelu 2017). In some instances, students would clap hands while kneeling, seated and ululating in a coordinated fashion. Tarrow (2011) refers this as performative repertoires and contentious form of action that seeks to draw the attention of the enemy or target party and demonstrate a claim. Every day, the amphitheatre on campus was the meeting place where song and dance crystallised collective solidarity.

UPrising was able to sustain collective action for seven days due to its organisational set-up and the solidarity networks they had established. The frame alignment process (Snow et al. 1986) during the Twitter venting out session was effective in that it resonated with various student identities. In the same vein, the movement's leadership was able to align its interests (tuition and residence fees and transformation of UP culture) with those of students and successfully mounted claims through collective contentious action. The movement appealed across racial divide and the participation of some white students against discriminatory institutional and residence cultures that were more aligned to Afrikaner culture. Also, the fact that many students came in response to the protest action underscored UPrising's ability to combine various cultural frames that resonated with students. UPrising leadership was able to sustain collective contentious action due to several factors, including a shared common purpose, solidarity, shared repertoires of contention and organisational capabilities. Also, the campus protest wave across most South African universities had a domino effect, which also motivated UP students to attend protest action. Tarrow (2011: 11) observes that besides "common purpose and overlapping interests, spirit of play, carnival, and desire to flaunt authority may encourage social actors to participate and mount claims against an authority". There was excitement and it was the duty of movement leaders to sustain it, which they did as evidenced by massive turnout during the period of protest. The movement's leadership was innovative and delegated roles and strengthened unity in the movement. This was important given the political contestations that existed and the fact that they were the founders of the movement.

Given the challenges that the movement encountered, i.e. the risk of political organisations subtly running similar activities in parallel, causing division and confusion, UPrising made concessions and incorporated these political groupings. On several occasions, we witnessed creative elements within the leadership; for instance, funny slogans to lift students' spirits when tired or anxious, for example, "Voetsek De La Rey Voetsek". Cheryl De La Rey was the Vice Chancellor at the time. The movement's leadership understood the kind of student culture at the university as opposed to other campuses with vibrant student political activism. Shared understandings of struggles (see above) that students encounter ensured that contention was sustained. During speeches, the movement's leadership reiterated that fees were not the sole reason for protest action, but institutional and residence cultures that alienated students had to change and foster campus citizenship.

The movement received support from various actors such as progressive teaching staff who marched with students and acted as an interface during negotiations between student leadership and university's management. However, it must also be noted that UPrising and the #FMF movement encountered opposition from AfriForum (an Afrikaner civil society group that claims to represent interests of the minority in South Africa) and

other teaching staff members (see Wesi 2015). We recall skirmishes that took place at UP's Hatfield campus between some white students supported by AfriForum who demanded protests to end and resumption of classes and UPrising. This shows that higher education is not a homogeneous space, but a landscape characterised by competing and sometimes contradictory interests. Also, the movement received moral support from the university's alumni and business community. In this regard, the movement enjoyed support through donations (water, food and toiletries) from the alumni and the business community. Further, the supposedly uniform #FeesMustFall (FMF) movement's cycles of contention as evidenced by a series of continuous protests at other universities popularised by the media which provided awareness for the general public on the issues affecting students, and hence gained public sympathy.

UPrising's leadership resisted a rushed march to the Union buildings because their powerful opponent was the university management and there was belief that the State would address the question of fees at a national level. For UPrising, it was also about institutional and residential cultures that alienated historically disadvantaged South Africans and international students. Therefore, they maintained that contentious collective action had to be inside and around the university until management yielded to the demands on the memorandum. A march to the Union buildings was perceived as a third force political project that sought to create confusion and, therefore, UPrising resisted such a change in course (Ngoepe 2015). However, the power of social media and the desire for solidarity with other #FeesMustFall protesting students across other campuses resulted in the movements' leadership agreeing to march to the Union buildings. On that Friday, thousands of UP students marched to the Union buildings where they met fellow protesters from other universities. It must be reiterated that we did not encounter any forms of violence during the entire protests on campus or in Hatfield.

Occupying the student services centre (formerly client services centre)

The student protests that South African universities encountered in 2015 came to an end with a declaration by President Zuma's zero percent fee increment for the 2016 academic year. For some students, it was a victory from a national perspective, and it demonstrated the power in unity of purpose. However, the #FeesMustFall movement, in some ways, was not a national centralised movement as some sections of the media put it. Each campus had its own set of challenges, although the proposed fee increases acted as a common unifier. The UPrising was no exception. After the announcement of a zero-percent tuition fees increase, student protesters and managements at different campuses came up with concessions and agreements on different issues that were at stake. UPrising and other fallist movements succeeded on halting tuition fees increase through sustained collective contentious action as evidenced by the President's moratorium.

On the Monday (26 October 2015) following the Union buildings' march and the 0% increase announcement, UPrising occupied the Student Services Centre (SSC, formerly the Client Service Centre) and demanded that the university's Vice Chancellor meet with them and make concessions on the demands that were within the university's jurisdiction. The occupation of the SSC was a strategic move that culminated in the signing of a memorandum of agreement with the Vice Chancellor, who then responded to the initial 13 demands in the memorandum (University of Pretoria 2014). UPrising was able to

undertake a successful collective action which culminated in the above cited agreements and put an end to protest action and resumption of classes. Resumption of classes was part of the success because it was a symbolic gesture of concessions made as demonstrated by the memorandum of agreement. To this day, the movement no longer exists and most of the members have gone back to their political constituencies while others were dismissed from their political leadership structures for refusing to play partisan politics in UPrising. This shows that social movements have a life span; once they achieve their objectives, they cease to exist because they are social movements and not organisations. UPrising sowed the seeds of protest action at the University of Pretoria as was evidenced by #EndOutsourcing, #AfrikaansMustFall and #FeesMustFall 2016 movements and campaigns.

Reflections and conclusion

In telling the local story of the broader student fees protests of 2015, we have shown how UPrising was able to pick up from where UP's SRC had left off and reinvented the claim-making process by waging contentious politics in a way that appealed to a broad constituency. Through the lens of contentious politics, an attempt has been made here to demonstrate how the UPrising movement successfully conscientised, mobilised and united students to participate in collective action through contentious politics. The case of UPrising and other campus-specific student movements shows that organisers of social movements do not only contend but also mobilise their constituencies, form alliances and carry out political education to those fighting the cause in order to sustain the contention. Importantly, "organisers exploit political opportunities, respond to threats, create collective identities, and bring people together to mobilise them against more powerful opponents" (Tarrow 2011: 8). UPrising and the protesters demanded institutional transformation as well as changes in terms of campus and residence cultures, language policy, tuition fees and meal prices among other things. The movement united students, pushed the university to suspend business for one week and agreed on all the students' demands that were within the university management's jurisdiction. The shutdown of UP was not just an isolated incident, but also happened at other university campuses. Contentious forms of collective action line up ordinary people into direct confrontation against opponents holding power because they too have power, produce solidarities, and appeal to specific constituencies because of shared experiences, cultures and identities (Tarrow 2011). Student protesters encountered the university management as it tried through private security known as "bouncers" to militarise, control and frustrate the protesters. Campus shutdown by UPrising and UP management demonstrated power struggles through indirect disruption of university activities and as a counterstrategy to control the protests and weaken the movement through restricted access into campus and access to Wi-Fi. UPrising was able to counter such moves by the "powerful" and urged students to remain focused through effective use of social media, posters, a "motho motho" approach and the momentum from country-wide protests on other campuses.

Importantly, the case of UPrising reveals that the 2015 protests were not just about fees falling, but about broader issues affecting higher learning institutions in South Africa. These issues were and are still university-specific, although fees and higher education

funding united all the students for a common cause. A close look at UPrising shows that the movement had its own internal dynamics that threatened to weaken its collective solidarity. Nonetheless, UPrising's leadership was innovative on how it solved challenges, maintained and sustained solidarity within the movement. The capture of the SSC on the Monday following President Zuma's announcement of the zero-percent fees increase was strategic use of power. It forced the university management to respond and make concessions on student demands around issues affecting students on campus as stated in the memorandum submitted by UPrising. Above all, these student protests are unlikely to come to an end as long as higher education is viewed as for the privileged few that can afford the costs. Universities need to transform and so does the South African higher education funding model.

In light of the 2015 FMF fees protests, the then President of Republic of South Africa, Jacob Zuma announced free higher education for first-year students from families that earn less than R350,000 per annum from 2018 (Muller 2018). This was seen as political opportunism due to the lack of widespread consultation on the recommendations of the Heher Commission of Enquiry Report and that the ANC's national elective congress was imminent and fraught with factional battles for top leadership positions. However, for students, it was a victory that was bittersweet in that it was a paradox of victory, as some students from families that earn less than R350,000 received a reprieve while those whose families earned more, but could still not afford university fees, were excluded. Furthermore, the then Minister of Finance, Malusi Gigaba, announced an increase on Value Added Tax from 14% to 15% to raise extra funding for higher education, hitting hard on the income of South Africans (National Treasury 2018). Given all these events, new challenges have emerged in terms of increased enrolments creating pressure on higher education institutions' capacity on learning facilities and residential accommodation across higher learning public institutions in South Africa.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors. We declare that the paper is written from a participant point of view and therefore there may be biases given our positionality (as students who participated in the student protests) and thus take full responsibility of the views expressed in the article.

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