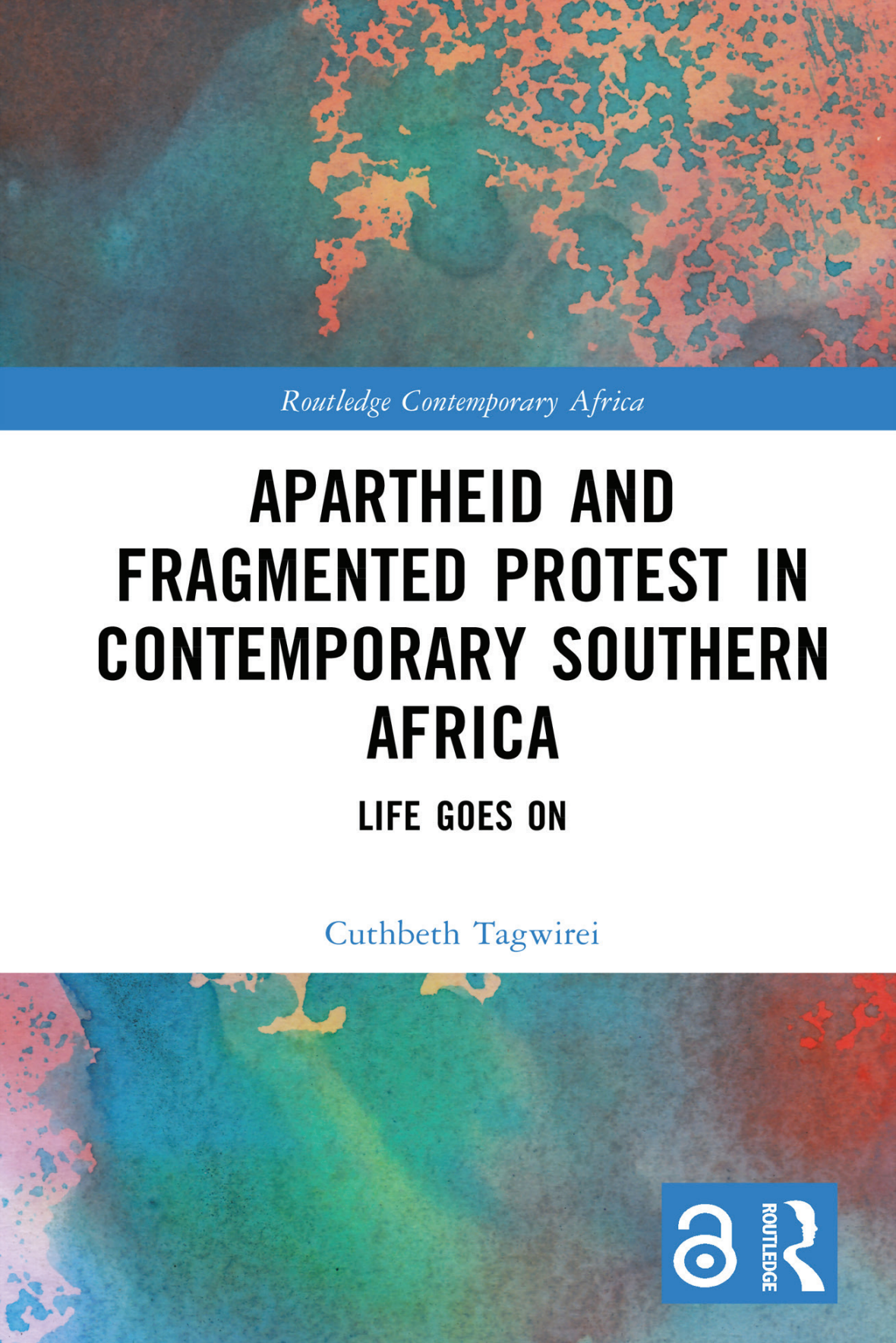




Routledge Contemporary Africa

APARTHEID AND FRAGMENTED PROTEST IN CONTEMPORARY SOUTHERN AFRICA

LIFE GOES ON

Cuthbeth Tagwirei



Apartheid and Fragmented Protest in Contemporary Southern Africa

Apartheid and Fragmented Protest in Contemporary Southern Africa examines protest movements through the lens of Apartheid Studies, the first general theory of apartheid which explores how oppression, harm, injustice, poverty, loss and inequality persist.

The book argues that apartheid, which breaks the world of the oppressed into fragments, fomenting diverse experiences of oppression among its victims, frames the nature and course of protests by making them subject to its fragmentation. Protest is thus redefined as good neighbourly and demoted on account of its symbiotic relationship to apartheid. It is observed that the proliferation of protests does not preclude the persistence of apartheid. Rather, protest and apartheid are seen to be compatible. By examining protest hashtags on X from South Africa and Zimbabwe, the book explores and identifies the forms, relations, meanings, trajectories and effects protests take, evoke and embody as fragments subsisting in a fractured apartheid universe. It demonstrates how and why life goes on amidst protest; sheds light on the contradictions, paradoxes and complexities that characterise protest movements; and invites conversations around protest as a paradigm in the context of apartheid.

The book will be of interest to researchers across the fields of social movements, protests, sociology, African studies, communication and media studies.

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Life Goes On

Cuthbeth Tagwirei

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To the ones upon whom life goes on without moving an inch.



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Introduction

Protest Is Broken

Introduction

This book is first and foremost about apartheid. Apartheid is spectacular harm which produces a special kind of victim that we call *hata*.¹ It operates on whole society and the individual in the pursuit of a divided but stable, crisis-free world. Its outcome presents as beautiful: poverty and wealth, sickness and health, education and illiteracy, freedom and slavery, war and peace, justice and injustice live side by side, like good neighbours, greeting each other every morning, smiling and positively appreciating the boundaries separating their disparate lives. That is a beautiful world. Apartheid, then, is beautiful *Action* (a set of consistent *schismatic acts* really) of the adverse kind.

The book is also about public protest. Protest is *Reaction*, by *hata*, towards apartheid's divisive acts, which separate the human being from others – from their wants, needs and desires. Protest is only for those who absorb the burden of apartheid, not for those who, in bearing apartheid, are also hoisted up. Perpetrators of apartheid do not protest. They are insulated from their own apartheid actions. In fact, they are on holiday. The repertoire of *hata*'s responses to harm is broad and includes actions aimed at survival, adaptation and healing without confronting power directly. These include migration, education, compliance, spiritual practice, cultural preservation, community building and self-isolation. Protest, however, is the valorised reaction, considered “heroic” and framed as an inalienable, primary duty which all citizens must undertake to address injustice.² In moments of euphoria, when it seems the protest everyone has been waiting for has arrived, protest is even conferred “superpower” status alongside countries such as the United States.³ We cannot talk of apartheid, then, without talking about the prized protest. Specifically, the forms, meanings and trajectories it assumes in a world full of apartheid.

Finally, the book is about *Life Going On* (LGO). Life going on or Life Goes On is an outcome. It is what results from the encounter between apartheid and protest. To determine this, we just need to ask one question: where do *hata* go when the protest ends? In fact, where do we find them before the protest? Where are they during the protest? Finally, to return to the beginning, where do *hata* go when the protest ends? *Hata* often cheer protests and those

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who dare to protest, because occasionally protest excites the possibility of dismantling the system and changing their conditions. This is what is described as “change is in the air,” which essentially deflates to “changes in the people themselves.”⁴ Meanwhile, apartheid remains. Harm persists. *Life goes on*. So, the book is about action, reaction and outcome. The study of this equation is called *Apartheid Studies*. Apartheid Studies invites us to rethink the persistence of harm from the point of view of *bata*; those who carry the burden of apartheid. The site of this equation is *Southern Africa*. However, the book is as much about anywhere in the world as it is about Southern Africa. To get everything in perspective, we must nevertheless set our initial sights on South Africa, that country which gave us apartheid as we now know it.

The (Concomitant) Action – (Good Neighbourly) Reaction Principle

On August 16, 2012, South African police massacred 34 miners of London Minerals (Lonmin) at an outlying kopje in Marikana, South Africa. This gruesome event, now generally known as the Marikana Massacre, was prefigured, in the words of a prominent politician, as some sort of necessary and inevitable *concomitant action*.⁵ The online dictionaries define concomitant as “naturally accompanying or associated,”⁶ which in this case would mean that the police action of August 16, 2012, was inevitable. Nevertheless, on the morning of August 17, 2012, as had happened on the 16th of August and before, *life went on*: “Shops opened. Things were bought and sold. I saw a family buy a washing machine – Defy or Samsung. There was a van waiting to load it on.”⁷ The world did not grind to a halt the way it was engineered to in 2020 when Covid-19 freely spread across the globe, leaving a toll of infections and deaths in its wake. Then, it became customary to close institutions, empty the streets and declare war on the coronavirus. In 2012, in Marikana, at some point, barely a month after the massacre, survivors “cheered” and vowed “they would return to work.”⁸ What instrument or force was lacking in 2012 and only discovered in 2020?

It is considered axiomatic that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. On the surface, the saying seems to suggest that “for every massacre of thirty-four miners there is an equal and opposite massacre of thirty-four perpetrators.” Isaac Newton, the English physicist and mathematician, proposed the action–reaction principle as the third of his three laws of motion thus:

To any action there is always an *opposite and equal* reaction; in other words, *the actions of two bodies upon each other are always equal and always opposite in direction. Whatever presses or draws something else is pressed or drawn just as much by it*. If anyone presses a stone with a finger, the finger is also pressed by the stone. If a horse draws a stone tied to a rope, the horse will (so to speak) also be drawn back equally toward the stone, for the rope, stretched out at both ends, will urge the horse toward the

stone and the stone toward the horse by one and the same endeavor to go slack and will impede the forward motion of the one as much as it promotes the forward motion of the other [emphases added].⁹

The third law of motion teaches us that action begets reaction. It assures us that, in nature, no force goes unrequited. Nature is a double entry where every debit has a corresponding credit of equal value elsewhere. *Whatever presses something else is pressed just as much by it.* When a bird flies, it pushes the air downwards and the air, concurrently, pushes the bird upwards. The force applied by the wings corresponds to the force exerted by the air. What subsists, in this case, is the inverse interaction of two objects: flapping/open wings and air. The bird's open wings and the air pushing against the wings produce what is called an action–reaction pair, that is, “forces of equal magnitude and opposite direction that act on different object.”¹⁰ Motion is therefore the product of force pairs, action and reaction, bearing on two objects coming into interaction. In Newton's world, the interaction of objects must fulfil a two-part requirement in order for there to be motion. Firstly, the magnitude of force on the first object must *equal* the magnitude of force on the second object. In other words, motion partly relies on the two forces of action and reaction matching in size, quantity or degree. We will call this requirement *equalisation*. Now, the direction of the force on the first object is *opposite* to the direction of the force on the second object. The force of action and the force of reaction contradict. We shall call this second requirement *oppositonality*.

Newton's third law is unambiguously a law of physics. As the theoretical physicist nerd of the *Big Bang Theory* series, Sheldon Cooper suggests, “physics encompasses the entire universe.”¹¹ Why then cannot concomitant action beget an equal and opposite reaction? Let us begin with a tautology: concomitant action *is* action. It is one part of an equation. Now, according to Newton, action does not have an independent existence. Debit has credit. Whatever draws is equally drawn. Hence, there is a reaction somehow. We shall now proceed with the obvious: protest, the subject of our discussion, is a form of reaction. It is the second component of our equation. The interaction of action and reaction must come down to 1:1. They are meant to be proportional. Protest movements do not arise *ex nihilo*. The protest reaction is naturally preceded by an action or a stimulus. That is, protest would not exist, or would not have reason to, if there were no action conjuring it to life. Action is therefore a prerequisite for reaction. It is the condition for the existence of protest. There is consensus that grievances incite protest movements. Grievance, defined as a form of relative deprivation,¹² signifies the existence of adversity. Adversity can be anything from misfortune, trouble, hardship and disaster to suffering, pain, trauma, distress and heartache. Economic distress, poor governance, inequality, corruption, insufficient state services and abuse of rights are all forms of adversity.¹³ Protest movements are ostensibly triggered by these and other adverse conditions.

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Adversity, it must be said, is a natural fact of life. Human beings cannot entirely escape adversity from their environments. However, certain forms of adverse acts become *eternal*, *frequent* and *go on as planned*. For instance, people may permanently live in slums, or platinum miners may spend their entire working lives going to the dangerous underbelly of the earth. In Marikana, concomitant action requested four hearses and four thousand extra rounds of ammunition in preparation of massacre.¹⁴ That is, the hearses preceded the fatal shooting. There were hearses in the vicinity of the kopje before anyone died! Should it surprise us then that miners were shot in Marikana? What then would have been the point of the funeral coaches and extra rounds of ammunition? This form of adversity, which is planned in detail and proceeds as planned, is what we call apartheid. Apartheid, in terms of the received definition, was planned segregation legislated and carried out to the letter.¹⁵ Apartheid harm is not accidental. It is backed by policies, personnel, institutions, agencies and budgets. These manifest through states of emergency, the use of death squads, the expansion of the police force, the use of the judiciary and so on. This harm also occurs at scale, is frequent and affects whole societies.

Apartheid, in the conventional sense, is a set of deliberate, planned acts designed to recruit and reproduce victims. Examples of this can be found in the policies and implementations of forced migrancy, pass laws and homelands, all meant to keep the African marginalised.¹⁶ Apartheid is an adverse *operation* on human beings. It *severs*, *dissects* and *separates*. It wields a knife and cuts the human being, on the operating table, from the things he needs, wants and desires. This is in all senses of the term. For instance, in the Congo, human beings were amputated and their limbs discarded,¹⁷ Patrice Lumumba's tooth was pulled out and taken to Belgium¹⁸ and in Zimbabwe Mbuya Nehanda was decapitated and her head taken to Britain.¹⁹ If one were to ask, what is apartheid? The accepted response would be that it is "a system of segregation." What is segregation if not the separation of someone or something from others? But apartheid is much more than that. It is also *experimentation* on human beings. The world is apartheid's testing ground. Here it accumulates data and generates knowledge about "the capacities and limits of human beings."²⁰ Apartheid is Calhoun, the American scientist who carried out an experiment on rats in the 1960s, hurting and permanently altering the lives of rats until the rats became "beautiful."²¹

Of course, Newton's law is not politics, sociology or economics. It is just "pure physics." But can it be just a matter of physics? Is man not nature? Why would survivors of a massacre cheer and go back to the very scene of the massacre except for the fact that for every action there is neither equal nor opposite reaction? What law, then, can help us understand the entanglement of human beings with adverse forces arising from their complex environments? I suggest that we go back to the very beginning for answers. Man, says Fanon, is a yes, a "yes to life."²² The mere existence of human beings is an affirmation and not a negation. The human being is naturally a positive force. What the human

being wants is life. This is the fundamental issue. It is what leads human beings to the mines or to foreign lands and so on. The yes-ness of man is in the natural desire for comfort, food, shelter, happiness and so on. Apartheid is what severs the human being from this yes-ness. Yes is resultantly a force pitted against an apartheid environment already rigged against the human being. Human beings come into the world which is already adversarial. This world is a no-force against which the newborn's yes is oppositional. The environment's no-force interacts with the child's yes-force in the form of crying. This birth-cry, as reaction, is the human being's affirmative force. It is a yes to life. The adverse environment acting upon the newborn does not go unrequited. When we go back to the beginning, to birth and the immediate period thereafter, we get the unadulterated yes-ness of the human being. Hunger must be satiated. Cold must be prevented. Pain must be avoided. Otherwise, the newborn will cry. Newborns do not participate in their own oppression. However, as time moves on and adversity becomes frequent, they learn that some adverse conditions can be lived with. It is when this sort of knowledge becomes part of the human being that reaction no longer needs to be equal and opposite.

The environment adversely acting on the newborn and the newborn protesting constitute an *action-reaction force pair*. We may not be able to accurately measure the extent of equalisation and oppositionality available in this interaction, but we can say with confidence that reaction goes in the opposite direction. Whatever happened at the bare soccer pitch in Marikana where surviving miners "cheered" and committed to go back to work following a pay rise? What of the 34 killed? Under Newton's ideal law, action and reaction forces are of equal magnitude and go in opposite directions. When apartheid acts on its victims, do they react with equal force and in the opposite direction? Is protest an equal and opposite reaction to apartheid? In the second instalment of *The Equalizer* franchise, Robert McCall, an ex-Defence Intelligence agent, comes face to face with erstwhile colleagues who have gone rogue and killed, among others, his friend and addresses them:

The world is full of so-called men like you. And in a perfect world, *everything we do comes with a price*. But this ain't a perfect world. People do bad things. If you're lucky you get the chance to set it right. But most of the time, it goes unpunished. This ain't one of them times. The mistake you made was you killed my friend. So I'm going to kill each and every one of you and the only disappointment in it for me is that I only get to do it once (emphasis added).²³

You see, the protagonist is "an equaliser" whose reaction opposes that of the perpetrator. To him, it is life for life. His *modus operandi* is equalisation and oppositionality (already built into equalisation). The equaliser is nevertheless conscious of the futility of his operation. The *apartheid present* is not a

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“perfect” world. Action often and frequently goes unrequited. We can thus recast McCall’s speech as follows:

The world is full of [apartheid] action. And in a perfect world, for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. But this ain’t a perfect world. Action takes place. If you’re lucky reaction follows. But most of the time, action goes unrequited. This ain’t one of them times. The mistake you made was your action killed my friend. So I’m going to react by killing each and every one of you and the only disappointment in it for me is that I only get to do it once.

Newton’s world of objects is the perfect world. In this world, “Whatever presses or draws something else is pressed or drawn just as much by it.” Every debit is credited. We arrive at 1:1. The problem that confronts us then in our study of apartheid action and victim reaction is that of equalisation and oppositionality. Here, action and reaction are neither predictable nor replicable. The interaction of similar action-reaction forces is not always identical. Neither does it produce the same results. The affairs are frequently varied and intraspecific. Human beings do not respond to their adversarial environments in the same way, at the same time or with the same intensity. We call this the Rate of Oppression (ROp). This, as we will see, is a fundamental aspect of apartheid.

The only thing that is certain in the interaction of apartheid and its victims is the outcome. There is no motion, in the Newtonian sense, but what we shall call “Life Goes On” (LGO). It is this outcome, LGO, which is predictable and replicated from case to case. Because equalisation and oppositionality are not inevitable in human beings’ interaction with apartheid, I propose that we amend Newton’s third law of motion as follows:

To any *concomitant action* there is always a *good neighbourly* and *demoted* reaction; in other words, the actions of two bodies upon each other are *frequently uneven* and *frequently compatible*.²⁴

Whatever presses or draws something else is not necessarily pressed or drawn just as much by it. A horse may draw a stone tied to it unencumbered, as if stones being drawn by horses were the most natural thing. Apartheid debits without crediting and appropriates the difference. We go full circle. Every debit is credited elsewhere. In this case, apartheid debits and arrogates the credit. So instead of receiving an equal and opposite reaction, apartheid goes on holiday.

Apartheid, as demonstrated by the Lonmin massacre of 2012, is *concomitant action*. Miners protesting for a wage increase at one of Lonmin’s mines held fort on a hill during a week of demonstrations demanding an audience from their management. On the 16th of August, police opened fire on

the protesting miners, killing 34 of them. Cyril Ramaphosa, then Deputy President of South Africa and non-executive director and minority shareholder in Lonmin, exchanged a series of emails with Lonmin's board on the eve of the massacre, with one of the emails suggesting a heavy-handed approach to the protest. In this email, Ramaphosa wrote:

The terrible events that have unfolded *cannot be characterised* as a labour dispute. They are plainly dastardly criminal and *must be characterised* as such. In line with this characterisation there needs to be concomitant action to address this situation (emphases added).²⁵

Referring to the protest as “plainly dastardly criminal,” Ramaphosa demanded that action be taken which was commensurate with dastardly criminality. In a lawsuit filed against Cyril Ramaphosa, Sibanye Stillwater Ltd (formerly Lonmin plc) and the Government of the Republic of South Africa, “concomitant action” came to be interpreted thus: “as the workers were (murderous) criminals, concomitant action was required to be perpetrated against them (i.e. they ought to be similarly murdered in turn).”²⁶ Ramaphosa argued that he was calling for peace, “for the necessary steps to be taken to save lives.”

“Concomitant action” redefined the situation obtaining at Marikana. The labour issue was terraformed to dastardly criminality. The proverbial hyena was telling its pups that they smelled like goats and, therefore, could be eaten.²⁷ Everything hinged on characterisation. Who controls how things are characterised determines the course of events. Apartheid, the adverse concomitant act, is in the habit of transforming men into boys, traditionalists into pagans, habitable space into *terra nullius*, difference into conflict and, more critically, proportion into disproportion: “Apartheid transforms things into what they are not, so that it can appropriate the difference.”²⁸ Where others see workers protesting for a wage increase, Lonmin sees dastardly criminals bent on causing chaos. So concomitant action operates on the criminals. The protesting workers have been disappeared from the scene. Mine workers? What workers? What remains in their stead are criminals and, frankly, who really cares for criminals? Concomitant action therefore resulted in the deaths of 34 “criminals” and several injuries in Marikana on August 16, 2012.

Concomitant action belongs to the war chest of apartheid despite being routinely carried out by victims of apartheid. The policeman who shoots protestors in Marikana, the driver who propels the bulldozer over “illegal settlements” and the guard who chases away “trespassers” all have one thing in common with their targets: they live in harm's way. What separates victims, the one who shoots and the one who gets shot, are their “rates of oppression.” That is, apartheid allocates differences among its victims such that their experiences and responses to oppression vary. The community of *bata* is fragmented along the lines of ethnicity, class, race, income, gender, geography,

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occupation, education and so on. As a result, victims find themselves on either side of the gun during the materialisation of concomitant action.

As a rule, concomitant action needs no provocation despite always presenting as such. Apartheid does not need an excuse to dispense harm. In fact, apartheid only needs to convince itself that its actions are proportionate to the objective it seeks to achieve. This notion of proportionality was codified in section 20 (3) (f) of the Reconciliation Act of 1995, ahead of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission whose decisions for granting amnesty to apartheid perpetrators largely relied on the requirement.²⁹ Apartheid *is* harm. Wherever there is apartheid, there is concomitant action. This is an important point in light of what happened in Marikana. On the surface, the protest by Lonmin mine workers *caused* the shooting of the 34. Nothing could be more absurd! Protest is not action. Protest is reaction. Only apartheid acts wantonly. Victims of apartheid do not have the capacity to act wantonly. They react. Fanon succinctly explains this by saying, “the first impulse of the [colonised] black man is to say no to those who attempt to build a definition of him [...] *the first action of the black man is a reaction.*”³⁰

So, the shooting of miners in Marikana was not a reaction by apartheid. It was action, consistent with apartheid as we have known it for centuries. Instead of being triggered, apartheid merely transforms things into what they are not. The Khoisan home, for instance, is transformed into a Dutch “refreshment station,” Mosi-oa-Tunya is reframed as Victoria Falls, men are terraformed into “boys” and so on. Hence, through apartheid’s operation, protesting mine workers are suddenly available to be shot. They have been qualified for harm. Rhodes had turned the tables: the settler turned native and the native turned settler! Being a son or daughter of the soil ceases to be merely a matter of who settled first, but rather of who is powerful enough to dispossess the other with impunity. When the Dutch first landed in the Cape in 1652, they named the local populations they met as “hottentots,” to denote “stutterers,” thereby denying the locals an intelligible language and thus earning themselves the right to impose their vision of the world and their social system on the locals.³¹

Good neighbourly reaction belongs to apartheid’s victims. Hendrick Verwoerd, who defined apartheid as “good neighbourliness” in 1961, sought to justify the disproportionate side-by-side existence of whites and other marginalised races in the absence of conflict.³² A good neighbourly reaction does not axiomatically go in the opposite direction. It is a reaction with a built-in, congenital plug-in. Good neighbourly reaction carries a script whose features fragment the reaction albeit in the most compatible way. That is, instead of just being “an opposite reaction,” good neighbourly reaction is a fragmented reaction. It comprises a primary module and an overriding congenital plug-in.³³ The relationship between the primary module and the plug-in mimics that of apartheid’s crime scene comprising Scenes I and II. Referring to the Lonmin massacre, Mboti explains the undetectability of the crime scene of apartheid thus:

In the course of the Lonmin Massacre of 2012, there is a Scene that everyone remembers, because it was televised. The news cameras were all there. This is what most people ordinarily remember and imagine, as the “Marikana” massacre. This is Scene I: seventeen workers died at this Scene, mowed down in a hail of live ammunition. However, there is another Scene, which people cannot remember or imagine, because it happened away from the glare of cameras. It was not televised. This Scene was a whole field, fully spaced out. Here, a further seventeen miners were killed, but not by being mowed down in a hail of bullets. Rather, they were pursued in clinical fashion by the police and picked off, one after the other. That is, police snipers made target practice. This is Scene II.³⁴

Something similar can be said of good neighbourly reaction. It is not just what is in the frame (Scene I). Apartheid frequently unfolds away from the frame. The primary module of good neighbourly reaction is what people remember the most. In the digital world, it is set apart by a (#) hashtag symbol: #BlackLivesMatter, #BringBackOurGirls, #JeSuisCharlie. Meanwhile, the reaction’s congenital plug-in never stops working alongside the primary module. Like apartheid’s Scene II, it occurs away from the spotlight and is too frequent to notice. It is the hardest and most complex of the fragmented reactions because it does not trend on social media, does not carry placards, does not have symbols or icons, is never commemorated, and does not disrupt the routine of life: “There are no optics involved, no drama and no sensationalism.”³⁵ The viral attributes of protest belong to Scene I. Alongside them, rather, built into them, is Scene II, which consists of human beings going about their business of living. Together, the primary module and the built-in plug-in constitute a good neighbourly reaction. A good neighbourly reaction is therefore enigmatic. It refuses categorical classifications.

It is also true that to every concomitant action, there is a *demoted reaction*. Apartheid does not provide for an equal reaction. Apartheid is a system of inequalities. It is disproportionate. A demoted reaction is a reaction that is not equal to concomitant action. It is several degrees shy of the concomitant action. It is akin to McCall, the Equalizer, telling the villains who murder his friend:

1. “The mistake you made was you killed my friend. So, I’m going to *flog* each and every one of you” or
2. “The mistake you made was you killed my friend. So, I’m going to *admonish* each and every one of you” or, in the most extreme,
3. “The mistake you made was you killed my friend. So I’m going to *embrace* each and every one of you” and proceeding to do just that.

It will be seen that as we move from one to three, the reaction to murder decreases or moves closer and closer towards concomitant action instead of

receding. A demoted reaction is a *fractional reaction*. It is not wholesome and is perpetually diminishing. It is a half reaction, a quarter or an eighth and so on. It is the sort of reaction which computes that “half a loaf is better than nothing” and seeks to conserve energy. We see this sort of demotion in *Two and a Half Men* when Jack responds to his father’s query on why he is not studying for his algebra final: “I don’t have to [...] All I gotta do is get a sixty-seven to pass the course and then its ‘adios seventh grade, arrivedera! (sic), eighth.” Confounded, his father asks: “so you are planning to get a sixty-seven?” Jack responds: “Yep, anything above that would be *wasted effort*” (emphasis added).³⁶

By not seeking to collect a hundred percent, Jack settles for a fraction. The remainder of 33 must be accounted for somewhere. In the case of Jack, it remains with the system. Nothing, therefore, is really lost. Nothing disappears. If McCall chooses to flog or embrace the murderers, there remains a deficit which is credited to the estate of the murderers. Every time reaction is not equal to concomitant action, the difference accrues to apartheid. If a loaf of bread is due to me and I decide that “half a loaf is better than nothing,” it means the other half has been credited elsewhere. Apartheid Studies invites us to probe these fractions; to ask where difference disappears to. It teaches us to be suspicious of portions. “Where exactly does the half sandwich come from?” *The Big Bang Theory*’s Sheldon Cooper queries. “Are you giving me half of someone else’s sandwich or do I have to wait for someone else in the restaurant to order the other half?”³⁷ Apartheid Studies explores how some people live on one meal a day, in plastic shacks and on barren land? Where are the other meals, the houses and the fertile lands? It turns out that apartheid does allocate half sandwiches and collects the difference. Sometimes we cannot even detect where the difference is listed, having gone under terraformation. Difference becomes surplus, appearing as “white areas” in a colony or profit on the stock exchange. The bigger the difference, the smaller the fraction.

On May 25, 2020, forty-six-year-old George Floyd was killed by a white police officer, Derek Chauvin, who pressed his knee upon the victim’s neck for more than eight minutes. The black man died. Within 24 hours, millions of people stormed the streets in protest, demanding that the disproportionate murder of black men in the United States come to an end. Concomitant Action: the disproportionate murder of black men in the US. Primary (Module) Reaction: street protests in several global cities. How then do we explain that by May 2021, exactly one year after the murder of George Floyd, a further 229 black people had been killed by the police?³⁸ What does this outcome tell us if not that concomitant action spawned a good neighbourly and demoted reaction? Clearly, there was no opposite and equal reaction to the murder of George Floyd. Evidently, the #BlackLivesMatter protest was both *fragmented* (good neighbourly) and *fractional* (demoted). Life went on.

The case of the anti-war protests is even more telling. In 2003, United States President George Bush openly declared his intentions to invade Iraq.

On February 15, 2003, a massive anti-war rally in history was staged in Rome. Three million people participated in the protest and on that same day protestors gathered in nearly 600 cities to express moral outrage against the planned US invasion of Iraq; 36 million people participated in this global anti-war protest in approximately 3000 protests across the globe.³⁹ The February 15, 2003, anti-war protest in Rome is listed in the 2004 Guinness Book of World Records as the largest anti-war rally in history.⁴⁰ Concomitant Action: the movement towards the invasion of Iraq. Primary (Module) Reaction: the biggest anti-war protest in history. Now, what was the outcome? On March 20, 2003, the United States and its Western allies invaded Iraq. Tharoor captures the disillusionment of the moment when he says, "The protests, which by any measure were a world historic event, were brushed aside with blithe nonchalance by the Bush Administration and a rubber-stamp Congress that approved the war."⁴¹ The invasion lasted until 2011. The anti-war movement which started off with a definitive goal to block the US from going to war in Iraq ended up morphing into a movement marching together with and alongside the war in Iraq:

At each anniversary of the invasion or milestone of additional thousand U.S. fatalities, MoveOn and the Win Without War coalition joined with other networks to organize antiwar vigils across the country. The local events were arranged to take place simultaneously and to communicate a common message. They were often accompanied by national advertising and media efforts, usually paid for and produced by MoveOn. Hundreds of thousands of people participated in a thousand or more events in each wave of protest, which attracted news coverage in hundreds of newspapers and broadcast outlets in local and regional media markets. The other major coalitions, Act Now to Stop War and End Racism (ANSWER) and United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ), continued to organize large scale national and regional protest demonstrations. *Instead of heeding the public demand for military disengagement, however, the Bush administration escalated the war and sent tens of thousands of additional troops to Iraq.* Antiwar groups responded by forming a new coalition, Americans Against Escalation in Iraq, which added significant new energy and resources to the antiwar cause (emphasis added).⁴²

It seems the movement found a new purpose. It was no longer about preventing the war. The war was now on regardless. The largest protest to prevent war heralded a decade-long war which killed anything from 150,000 to one million civilians. Why? How is this possible? Tarrow seems to think the protest did not stop the war because "[the war] *had been, in any case, decided long before*" [emphasis added].⁴³ Not only does this confirm our point that concomitant action requires no provocation, but also that apartheid is *harm that goes on as planned*.⁴⁴ The outcome, nevertheless, shows that reaction to

the movement towards war was both *fragmented* and *fractional*. Otherwise, a protest that huge should have prevented the war. Life went on.

Apartheid fundamentally corrupts the yes-ness of the human being such that in their good neighbourly and demoted reactions they appear to be saying yes to harm. The cheering miners, the people who cross flooded rivers, the activists who receive funding from the systems which oppress other people (for instance in their own countries or in other countries) all seem to be saying “yes” to harm. This is what leads to general disillusionment, lethargy and self-mollition among activists and protestors, along with accusations of not being serious, selling out and charges that people “haven’t suffered enough!”⁴⁵ In the compatibility of protest and harm and the pursuit of fractions, the oppressed appear to be embracing harm. Psychologists would call this “Stockholm syndrome,” while decolonial critics see people living in harm’s way as proof of mental colonisation. In these approaches lies a consideration of how victims’ cognitive states inform attitudes and behaviour. Apartheid Studies proposes that we go no further than the victim’s reflexes. The body wants what it wants.

How people react to apartheid through protests is the principal subject of the book. It is suggested that currently we are experiencing “an age of global mass protests that are historically unprecedented in frequency, scope and size.”⁴⁶ *Apartheid and Fragmented Protest in Contemporary Southern Africa: Life Goes On* contributes to the discourse on protests and the paradoxical persistence of harm by examining five protests from Zimbabwe and South Africa: #FeesMustFall, #RhodesMustFall, #PutSouthAfricansFirst, #ThisFlag and #ZimbabweanLivesMatter. The choice and diversity of cases allow the book to explore the complexity of protests in Southern Africa and extrapolate insights to the wider protest universe. In all the cases studied, social media platforms were instrumental in mobilising participants, organising protests and coordinating the actions of protestors. An inductive Apartheid Studies approach is used to explore the forms, relations, meanings, trajectories, dimensions and effects online protests take, evoke and embody as fragments and fractions of a broader protest universe. Data for the five protest hashtags were collected from X (formerly Twitter), the online platform on which the five hashtags were most prominent. Octoparse, a no-code web scraping tool, was used to extract tweets, including metadata, relating to the selected hashtags.

The Inductive Forensic (IF) approach, the methodology of Apartheid Studies, empowers us to see the online protest (a protest hashtag even) and the traditional street protest; protests of the past and present; and protest in the Global South and the Global North as the same event seen at different intervals. What this means is we can discuss protest and it will not matter where, how, why or what. What we see is the same event. So much emphasis tends to be disproportionately placed on the differences among protests based on form, goal, scale, tactics, grievance, method and so on. Tarrow provides a useful breakdown of protest types, their structures and the dynamics that differentiate them.⁴⁷ But what is it that connects all protests into a single

procession if not “life going on”? Not dwelling on this results in the failure to develop a unified theory of protest or a methodology for understanding any and all protests *that take place just as life goes on or as the harms continue*. If we are right to say apartheid is the action against which *all* protests, as reaction, are caught up and implicated, then it should follow that all protests are the same LGO event merely fractured across place, time, method and size. For a protest to be different, it would have to ensure that, *meanwhile*, life does not go on.

To study online protest is therefore to study a protest fragment. Scholars have argued for the distinctness of online protests, citing factors such as its universalising potential, its mobilising efficacy, its democratisation of participation and its contribution towards traditional forms. These points, mostly valid, have dominated recent discussions on protests, especially following the escalation of social network-based, globally followed protests such as the “Arab Spring,” Occupy Movement, #BlackLivesMatter, #BringBackOurGirls and #MeToo movement. What I seek, in focusing on protest hashtags, is the search for patterns which attest to the fragmentation and fractionality of protest as a reaction to apartheid. It will be seen, for instance, that the online protests discussed in this book had a fragmentary offline presence which amplified the protests’ good neighbourly and demoted disposition. Not only are the two categories of protest singly fragmented, but they are also fragments of each other. My approach is to see the two as the same event seen at different intervals. The task for Apartheid Studies’ methodology is:

To conduct analysis that highlights collapsible differences, the collapsibility of differences and the collapsibility in differences. That is, our methodology collapses the differences that it highlights, thus exposing the prevalence of apartheid in forms that may appear distant and unrelated.⁴⁸

The Inductive Forensic approach facilitates analysis that sees the protest hashtag in the 18th century protest before there ever was a “hashtag” or the embeddedness of #FeesMustFall in #ZimbabweanLivesMatter. Fragments of observation and fragments of data are thus the basis of our analysis. Such an approach is well suited for apartheid’s fragmented universe where concomitant action is a dispersal of adverse acts manifesting at different, multiple intervals.

The Case for Apartheid Studies

The study of people’s experiences of harm and the pursuit of freedoms is called “Apartheid Studies,” following the innovative and incisive work of Nyasha Mboti, who is the founder of the field of study and author of the inaugural text by the same title. Apartheid Studies introduces a fresh understanding of apartheid away from the normative explanations of scholars who did not themselves experience it. In these accounts, we are told that apartheid *was*

a system of racial segregation in South Africa, which started in 1948 with the victory of the Nationalist Party under the leadership of D.F. Malan.⁴⁹ Its blatant separation of white people from black people, the former benefiting from government policies at the expense of the latter, ignited internal and global resistance until the Nationalist Party capitulated and paved the way for black majority rule in 1994. With the election of Nelson Mandela as the first black president of South Africa came the end of apartheid. Thus, the ostensible 46-year history of apartheid is reified, and one can consume it in the mainstream books, documentaries and museums. Mboti calls these “instant noodle” accounts, referring to their superfluity and oversimplification of facts regarding the experiences of *hata* upon whose shoulders the weight of apartheid rests even today.⁵⁰

Some critics problematise this reified biography of apartheid, rightly arguing that apartheid did not die. They propose alternative approaches to apartheid, imagining, for instance, a “new apartheid.”⁵¹ Others prefer “apartheids,” arguing for plurality in relation to forms, iterations, manifestations and regions. Hence, there are titles such as “Medical Apartheid in Palestine,”⁵² “Medical Apartheid: An American Perspective,”⁵³ “Climate Apartheid: The Forgetting of Race in the Anthropocene,”⁵⁴ “Reckoning Climate Apartheid,”⁵⁵ “Israel and South Africa: The Many Faces of Apartheid”⁵⁶ and so on, all relying on the notions of segregation and discrimination. These approaches are indelibly benchmarked on the 1948–1994 normative paradigm to which they continuously return. Furthermore, the explanations heavily rely on the Nationalist Party which came to power in 1948 and introduced the policy of apartheid as it is commonly known. Apartheid Studies is the first of its kind to reject the received explanations of a patented or copyrighted apartheid whose progeniture belongs to 1948.

There are suggestions to view apartheid as consisting of “petty apartheid,” characterised by “the everyday humiliations inflicted on the majority of South Africans,” such as the segregation of public and private life and “grand apartheid” constituting “the deep structure of economic, social and geographical subordination” in the form of pass laws, the Group Areas Act and similar laws racially governing where to stay and work.⁵⁷ This rather superfluous distinction serves to mark the ways in which 1948–1994 apartheid was implemented in South Africa. The suggestion is that apartheid was scale variant, from petty to grand, and could therefore be addressed accordingly such that the fight against apartheid or “reforms” to apartheid could target either form. “Petty” and “grand” apartheid obviously do not belong to the vocabulary of the oppressed. Scale variance for the oppressed is a function of demotion, that is, the ranking of diverse harms by the victims of apartheid, based on their Rates of Oppression, as opposed to fixed categorisation. *Hata* is confronted with multiple burdens which must be graded if one is to avoid being overwhelmed. Apartheid is the proverbial elephant which victims must deal with one bite at a time.

Apartheid Studies demonstrates that apartheid goes through three stages or transformations, namely *pre-primitive apartheid* (PPA), *primitive apartheid* (PA) and *undetectable apartheid* (UA), which I refer to in this book as *the apartheid present* (AP). Pre-primitive apartheid (PPA) takes the form of slavery, colonialism, imperialism and so on. It consists of flagrant theft, dispossession, mutilation, genocide and murder. The famous 1948–1994 apartheid in South Africa, when apartheid received validation, belongs to primitive apartheid (PA). This category includes legalised segregation as seen in the various colonies of the world from Rhodesia, Nyasaland, Nigeria, Congo, India to the Americas. It also includes the segregation of Jim Crow in the United States of America and the Israeli occupation of Gaza. What explicitly defines pre-primitive apartheid and primitive apartheid are blunt insignia, discriminatory laws, fences and barricades.

Undetectable apartheid, the final and highest stage, is the stage of disappeared apartheid. At this stage, apartheid loses its name and validation. It assumes various shapes, other names and descriptors like “sustainable development,” “democracy,” “resilience” and so on. At this stage “apartheid is now fully victim funded [...] Its victims are now fully invested in their own rates of oppression.”⁵⁸ Elaborating on this, Mboti argues that the oppressed are invoiced the costs of their own oppression or *participate* in their own oppression.⁵⁹ It is *hata*, using one’s own resources and at one’s own risk, who will cross flooded rivers, go down the mine and stay in plastic shacks. It is nevertheless important to note that *the apartheid present* is “the combination and recombination of the three levels of apartheid [...] there are overlaps in these transformations, since they are all essentially the same thing. That is, apartheid is always the same event.”⁶⁰ Apartheid goes by other forms and names within our range of vision while remaining undetectable. Apartheid Studies exposes apartheid’s pervasiveness in forms that may appear remote, detached and unrelated.

The experience of its victims demonstrates that apartheid is not just a set of segregationist laws and policies, but a set of outcomes characterised by the constant side-by-side existence and co-presence of oppressor and oppressed, rich and poor, privileged and marginalised, justice and injustice and so on, in the absence of any apocalyptic conflict. Inequality and injustice can and do exist side by side with their putative opposites, such as democracy and development. Adversity or harm co-exists with protest. This compatibility is defined as “good neighbourliness,” a construct ascribed to Hendrik Verwoerd, the so-called architect of apartheid, who painstakingly defended the system of apartheid thus:

Our policy is one which is called by an Afrikaans word “apartheid.” And I’m afraid that has been misunderstood so often. It could just as easily and, perhaps, much better be described as *a policy of good neighbourliness*. *Accepting* that there are *differences between people* and that while these

differences exist and you have to acknowledge them, at the same time *you can live together*, aid one another, but that can best be done *when you act as good neighbours always do* (emphasis added).⁶¹

When Verwoerd defended “apartheid” as “a policy of good neighbourliness,” he had in mind a segregated “white South Africa” existing alongside African communities, each developing independently. Apartheid Studies flips this definition to suggest that “good neighbourliness” could instead be utilised to critique any side-by-side co-presence of social, political, economic or cultural phenomena. Good neighbourliness explains how opposites can be within touching distance or march side by side without either disappearing or receding in an equal and opposite direction. Hence, the Guinness World Record protest to prevent war flourished alongside the very war it sought to prevent for a decade. Apartheid therefore provisions for and perpetuates the side-by-side interaction between concomitant action and good neighbourly demoted reaction; between apartheid and protest.

The central theoretical construct of Apartheid Studies is the notion of the Rate of Oppression (ROp). ROp explains why apartheid persists instead of imploding. It posits that apartheid is never experienced in the same way everywhere by all people. Instead, it breaks the world of victims into fragments such that there are differentiated frequencies, degrees and manifestations of oppression. This is what makes possible the good neighbourly presence of victims on either point of the gun in Marikana. It is what undersigns “collaboration,” “by-standing,” “flip-flopping” and several other seeming contradictions. The purpose of the ROp is to “*invoice the perfectly oppressed* constantly and permanently, in a differential and differentiated way, thus perpetually fragmenting any coherent or sustained solidarity of the sort that the oppressed would need if they were to abolish the ‘ruling class’.”⁶² There are intraspecific and inter-specific variations in how victims in particular places and moments experience oppression. There are always adjusted intensities, with the process of adjustment borne or enabled by the victims themselves.

Apartheid exploits these variations or rates to keep the oppressed in place. Protests tend to follow this pattern of fragmentation. The concept of ROp makes oppression ambivalent and arbitrary, with oppressed people responding to harm, poverty and injustice according to varying “rates,” rather than in fixed ways. Notably, “responses (and shifts in responses) rarely happen at a national level. Instead, they frequently happen *locally, within* societies, communities, families and, critically, at the *household level*. That is, apartheid enters our lives through a density of individualised fractures.”⁶³ Thus, this is not about suffering “more” oppression, but different kinds of oppression (that is, Rates of Oppression), with each kind or rate resulting in different outcomes. It is these outcomes that we can quantify by studying online protests. Just as different races and classes were purposely oppressed at varying, adjusted (adjustable) and differentiated rates before 1994 in South Africa, students at the same

university, residents of one neighbourhood, workers at one organisation and people protesting an injustice, experience oppression differently and are thus variously implicated in the persistence of oppression. The character of protests and the environment in which they occur are both shaped by apartheid. The outcomes are therefore contingent on both.

The problem that humanity faces, then, is apartheid. It is the force pressing against the yes-ness of man. Under apartheid, the human being enters life divided and denied. He comes into the world already set apart, fragmented and rendered incomplete. Judge O'Regan was considerably close to the truth when he said, "Apartheid was *a denial* of a common humanity. Black people were refused respect and dignity and thereby the dignity of all South Africans was diminished" (emphasis added).⁶⁴ Apartheid, very much present, is *Denial-of-Human-Service* (DoHS). It withholds respect, dignity, freedom, food, clothes, medicines, shelter, safety, school fees and so on from *some* people. Thus denied, the victims of apartheid must frequently and eternally queue for the services apartheid withholds from them. Even so, individuals are not in the same queue at the same time. While some are crowded at the public hospital to get treatment, others are at the communal borehole to fetch drinking water. It is only these whom apartheid denies whose humanity is diminished.

We need not look further for evidence of denial and division than the partitioning and refusal of *munhu* (the person) in hegemonic *ubuntu* discourse. In this partitioning and denial, "a person is a person with (or through) others." *Umuntu*/person is set apart from *abantu*/others at the onset. The aphorism, translated as *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* in Zulu, or *munhu munhu navamwe* in Shona,⁶⁵ is considered to be "at the centre of *ubuntu*"⁶⁶ although Gade argues that "it was in the period from 1993 to 1995 that the Nguni proverb '*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*' was used for the first time to describe what *ubuntu* is."⁶⁷ The reference to *ubuntu* discourse is therefore not arbitrary. While the communal philosophy predates 1994 and is widespread in Southern Africa, its resurgence in 1990s South Africa, led by Archbishop Desmond Tutu who chaired the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC),⁶⁸ was inextricably linked to the morphing of apartheid from a primitive state to undetectability. In Tutu's view, *ubuntu* was the answer to why victims of apartheid "[chose] to forgive rather than to demand retribution, to be so magnanimous and ready to forgive rather than wreak revenge" in 1994 when apartheid was officially declared dead.⁶⁹ Apartheid Studies sees good neighbourly and demoted reaction instead. What pressed on Africans could persist unrequited and without consequence.

Through *ubuntu*, victims were compelled to continue living side by side with perpetrators of harm. But this was not just a case of being good neighbours. Good neighbourliness would only come after setting apart, and this is where I find hegemonic *ubuntu* discourse to be in the service of apartheid. It is suggested, in this discourse, that the individual is not a "real" person, that is, a complete human being, until they *qualify*.⁷⁰ The qualifier is an amorphous

“others” from whom the individual is inaugurally separated or distinguished. It is through these “others” that the individual can attain personhood or become human. In some accounts, becoming human is “a gift” which, if not given, cannot be acquired.⁷¹ In others, the individual must be “incorporated.”⁷² Yet, others demand the fulfilment of “community prescribed stages”⁷³ or a preordained quest, by the non-person, “to seek out community.”⁷⁴ The hegemonic ubuntu of the 1990s certainly mirrors apartheid’s separation and division of the human being. It is the articulation of “no” towards man’s “yes to life.”

Apartheid vetoes the human being. It systematically separates, severs, fractures and scatters. The land disposessions in Rhodesia, the trafficking of Africans to Europe and the Americas, amputations of African labourers in the Belgian Congo, the severed head of Mbuya Nehanda taken to a British museum and Patrice Lumumba’s tooth yanked off to Belgium are all proof of this separation, severance, fracturing and scattering. The result is fragments and fractions. The outcome is disproportion. To this day there are landless people, whole communities without their young men, native labourers without limbs, a headless spirit medium and a liberation fighter without a tooth. Apartheid divides self. It divides families. It divides neighbours. It divides whole communities. The natives, for instance, are separated from their land, sources of livelihood and traditions. Mine workers are separated from homes and families. Then they are set apart from safety and compensation. Farm workers are alienated from the produce of their labour. All sorts of trespass zones keep the hungry from food within reach, the homeless from shelter, the sick from healthcare, the weary from rest, slaves from freedom and so on. Human needs, wants, desires and aspirations become bound up in a universe of setting apart.

So community, the family and the human being are divided and incomplete and the result is a state of *disproportion*, a good neighbourly state characteristic of apartheid. When apartheid divides society, families and individuals:

It is *inevitable* that some human beings will capsize in a boat, eat from dustbins, sleep under a bridge, live on a minimum wage, receive a universal basic income, work in a sweatshop and live in a township, the projects, barrio, slum, or favela and so on [...] At the same time, it is inevitable that billions of dollars, yuan, pounds, Rands and renminbi in wealth have exchanged hands on the stock exchange this very second. Trillions of dollars, yuan, pounds, Rands and renminbi in the form of capital are in circulation as we speak and are being invested and reinvested.⁷⁵

Apartheid does not possess anything in the interest of its victims. Everything that it touches results in diminution for *bata*. *Munhu*, the person, fragmentary and fractional, becomes a subject of fragments and fractions. Half a slice of bread must suffice. Without land, victims can live on top of each other. Frankly, who needs shoes when their legs have been amputated in the Belgian

Congo? There can be no 1:1 correspondence between the deficient human being and his needs. Fractional people get fractions. The victims of apartheid thereby “perpetually live steadily on less than [they] actually need.”⁷⁶ The rest belongs to apartheid. Apartheid turns all deficit into surplus.

Apartheid Studies begins with *munhu munhu* or *umuntu ngumuntu* as opposed to apartheid’s *munhu munhu nevamwe*, which reduces the human being to fractions. A person is a person. Apartheid Studies rejects the notion of withholding “the status of the person” until “incorporation” occurs.⁷⁷ It reaffirms the *a priori* value of human beings. *Umntu ngumuntu* is recast as complete and, thus, affirming the absolute and incontrovertible personhood and humanity of all human beings.⁷⁸ Hence:

Apartheid Studies is about *human beings*, about truth and about justice. The *unalterable* human being is at the centre of it. Contrary to what apartheid wants, human beings do not need to *qualify* to be human. There is no *qualification* necessary to be human. Human beings do not need to qualify for the right to live, to be and to exist.⁷⁹

In the axiom *munhu munhu* lies the indivisibility of the human being. *Munhu* is whole. The human being is not a fraction. *Munhu munhu* simply is a 1:1 ratio. 1:1 is the outcome of *being* human. Simply by being, we have the 1:1 outcome. Proportion is at the centre of being human. Because 1:1 proportion is the mark of being human, it must follow that all human beings must experience this 1:1 balance in all spheres.

“Protest Is Broken” and Life Goes On

Micah White, co-creator of Occupy Wall Street, one of the largest and long-lasting protests in US history, grimly states: “protest is broken.”⁸⁰ White has in mind the notion that protest movements have become redundant and, consequently, reached a saturation point. Activists, he points out, are recycling old and ineffective protest assumptions and tactics with the hope of achieving different results. “Change,” White explains, “won’t happen through the old models of activism.”⁸¹ Today, protest is a definingly ubiquitous and normalised presence, constituted by unorthodox and orthodox forms of action primarily associated with “democracies” in the north which have characteristically become “movement societies.”⁸² In this norming lies the legitimisation of protest, the shift towards more mainstream ways of protesting (such as petitioning, lobbying and street marches) and even the institutionalisation of protest, developments significantly benefiting from the surge in internet-based or digital activism.⁸³ Regrettably, “western democracies” are not moved by the “public spectacles and mass media frenzy.”⁸⁴ Rather, they acknowledge protests, considering them a key pillar of democracy and thus sidestepping them as a “by-product of politics-as-usual.”⁸⁵

These trends, identified with the north, have not entirely spared the south. 2011 to 2021 has been labelled “a decade of popular uprisings in Africa” owing to spells of protests in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Burkina Faso, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Ethiopia, Sudan, Algeria and Mali.⁸⁶ More recently, there have been protests in Kenya, Uganda and Mozambique. In virtually all cases, the protests possess both online and offline footprints, with online mobilisation and awareness proving to be key in driving the protests. The online footprint, which I refer to as “online protest” throughout the book, has particularly gathered momentum and inspired a new generation of protestors in Africa.⁸⁷ The extent of normalisation and institutionalisation of protests in Africa may not be of a similar nature and scale to the tendency in the democratic north due to contextual differences, but there are several points of convergence owing to the efforts, by the West, to export and determine frameworks for designating the principles and parameters of protest.

For instance, Africa distinctly bears the scourge of externally orchestrated protests. The key agents of these protests are Western embassies, foreign intelligence services, donor-funded opposition parties, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). John Perkins explains how Europe and the United States use proxies to foment protests in their pursuit of economic and political agendas in the Global South⁸⁸ while Susan White gives an account of the Central Intelligence Agency’s (CIA) role in destabilising Africa.⁸⁹ NGOs, CSOs and political parties dominate the protest terrain in Africa.⁹⁰ Empirical research has repeatedly demonstrated that protest actors, destinies and structures of these agents and social movements are mutually dependent. The common practice of finding social movement activists contesting for political office in European countries,⁹¹ is slowly becoming regular in Africa. Activists launch political careers or create public profiles through protest. All the protest hashtags studied in this book tell the story of an activist or political players who leveraged or politically benefited from protest. Generally, though, social movements in Africa require sponsorship and support from formal institutions (political parties, covert organisations, the army, NGOs, etc.) which seek alternative forms of channelling political actions otherwise “protest actions [...] would be impossible.”⁹²

In Zimbabwe, these formal institutions are implicated in almost all the major protests of the 2000s, with brazen attempts by the United Kingdom, United States of America and the European Union to foment unrest and remove the sitting government. Prime Minister Tony Blair would later testify in his autobiography:

People often used to say to me: If you got rid of the gangsters in Sierra Leone, Milosevic, the Taliban and Saddam, why can’t you get rid of Mugabe? The answer is: I would have loved to; but it wasn’t practical (since in his case and for reasons I never quite understood, the

surrounding African nations maintained a lingering support for him and would have opposed any action strenuously).⁹³

Because activism in Africa is heavily reliant on external donor funding,⁹⁴ the continent has become a space where foreign interests around politics, economics and culture intersect with people's genuine struggles against injustice. The character of these injustices bears the mark of *undetectable apartheid*, being conveniently framed by Western concepts of democracy, international development, free and fair elections, human rights, the rule of law, constitutionalism and freedom of speech while being driven by a neoliberal agenda imposed on African countries. Indeed, protest itself is regarded as "a right," something provided for in international regulatory frameworks in relation to assembly, expression and self-determination.⁹⁵

In Zimbabwe, one of the key sociopolitical contexts in which protests took place is ZIDERA, the sanctions unilaterally declared and imposed on the country by the United States, as well as sanctions by the United Kingdom and the European Union in contravention of United Nations dictates.⁹⁶ It is common cause that the economic sanctions that were imposed on Zimbabwe had a singular purpose which was to "make the economy scream"⁹⁷ and thus induce dissent that would potentially topple the government. The period gave birth to activists cynically referred to as "career cashivists," deploying what President Mugabe once referred to as "the Madhuku Strategy." Mugabe accused Lovemore Madhuku and other activists of staging protests not for genuine democratic or constitutional reform, but to attract international media attention and secure foreign funding. He implied that their activism was motivated by personal gain rather than principle. There were even openly reckless statements by foreign public officials declaring support for protesters. #ZimbabweanLivesMatter, for instance, was started and driven from outside. While there is an argument about the transnational nature of social media protests, known opponents of the Harare government, such as South Africa's Mmusi Maimane, were instrumental in fomenting protest and driving it. The role of "Team Pachedu," a cyber outfit whose membership was revealed to include Americans, meant the social media terrain of Zimbabwe had a foreign player supporting and at times calling for protests.⁹⁸

It has been suggested that Africa has gone through three protest waves: the first seeking to end colonisation and attain independence, the second advocating for multiparty democracy from the 2000s and the third publicly playing out in offline and online spaces.⁹⁹ The first and second waves are criticised for being elitist and top-down, while social media is hailed for democratising protests of the third wave. From being ideologically driven with the intention of overthrowing colonial governments to being issue-driven, for instance, protests in the so-called third wave fight for material goods, demand better service delivery or champion the rights of citizens, including minorities. The issue is nevertheless more complex than is suggested under the "protest

waves” paradigm. The answer to why protests have evolved and the nature of evolution are to be found in our understanding of apartheid and, more importantly, the *apartheid present*. The struggles against slavery, colonialism and imperialism in Africa, Asia and South America straddled the pre-primitive and primitive stages of apartheid. Apartheid was pompous, boisterous and pedantic during these stages. In South Africa, racial segregation was carried out to every detail, including where one must eat, sleep, drink, work, rest and so on. Victims of apartheid did not have rights. They could be bought, sold and physically disposed of with little or no consequences. Black people were derogatorily referred to as “kaffirs,” “monkeys” or “children.”

The struggle against imperious apartheid was relatively straightforward during the pre-primitive and primitive stages of apartheid. The situation is now complex for the former colonies which, in the past, resorted to armed struggles as the primary means of protest. Harm could be easily and accurately attributed. Fragmentation was more homogenous, based on race, so it was easier to build lasting pockets of solidarity. The repertoire of tactics that have worked in the past, which also includes marching, petitioning, boycotts and other disruptive behaviours, is no longer viable, especially in Western-style democracies, and seem only to work against “autocratic regimes,” susceptible to international pressure, when protest “is aligned with the pre-existing Western geopolitical agenda.”¹⁰⁰ This has led to protest failure and the attendant irrelevance of activism.

The problem is exacerbated and perpetuated through the reluctance and censorship from “insular activists,” the mass culture industry, social media monopolies and “influencers” “invested in promoting protest spectacles – such as large-scale marches – that are bound to fail, in order to attract publicity and donations without seriously threatening the status quo.”¹⁰¹ White alleges that these parties promote “a false triumphalist narrative,” control large social media accounts and “profit from transforming revolutionary activism into commodified social marketing.”¹⁰² Protest is thus seen as a lucrative industry frequently driven and complicated by several factors including capital, profit and resource extraction. It is an industry of perennial activists and career protestors who, regardless of the results of protests, earn rewards in the form of money, jobs, positions, stipends, allowances, visas, international podiums, sponsorships and awards.

Today, the global apartheid infrastructure is a constellation of “international” norms, global capital, resource extraction, career activism, NGOs, CSOs, structural adjustment programmes, corruption, violence, repression, austerity, war, terrorism, intruding foreign embassies, election interference, multi-national corporations, unilaterally imposed economic sanctions, colonial debt, multilateral debt, donations, foreign-backed political parties, social media monopolies, mass culture industry, influencers and commodified activism. This is the gallimaufry which constitutes the macro-political opportunity structure that constrains and/or incentivises protest in the world generally

and in Africa in particular. These constraints and incentives for protest are subject to both local, national and international processes and institutions. This complex structure and the failure or/and refusal to invent new strategies are singled out as the reasons for protest failure. To resolve the matter, White proposes and predicts, “a shift away from materialist theories of social change toward a spiritual understanding of revolution” characterised by subjectivism and theurgism.¹⁰³

White’s diagnosis of protest and the proposed solution is by far the closest someone has come to renouncing the protest paradigm. He, nevertheless, refuses to concede absolute failure in relation to the Occupy Movement, preferring the notion of “constructive failure,” or the view that the protest did not live up “to its revolutionary potential” but its cultural influence and the lessons it occasioned are reasons to remain optimistic.¹⁰⁴ This approach to protest outcomes, which forages for surrogate gains from protests, is indicative of the theoretical conundrum in protest movement studies. Understanding the outcomes of protests is a point of contention among critics. Success and failure are predominant.¹⁰⁵ However, there is a general frustration associated with the measurement of success or failure owing, in part, to causal complexity, that is, the role several other factors, other than the protest movements themselves, play towards success or failure.¹⁰⁶

In the literature, there is an ambivalence regarding protest outcomes and how best to characterise them. Whether protest is successful or not is a contentious subject. Proponents of success and failure will both cite the Arab Spring, for instance, with divergent readings of the outcome. Success is claimed based on the subsequent fall of presidents in Tunisia and Egypt and the protests’ spread to other countries in Syria, Yemen, Morocco and Libya. Failure is validated by the existence of “reverse waves” consisting of new regimes managing to reinvent authoritarianism.¹⁰⁷ There are even suggestions that “protest is not an end in itself”¹⁰⁸ but a means to send a powerful message to a large audience which, in turn, would influence decisions. Because of the fluidity of “success” and “failure,” there are propositions to use terms such as “outcomes,” “consequences” and “impacts.”¹⁰⁹ This has not been without its problems. Tarrow notes that the use of different terms reflects uncertainty and complexity in measuring and interpreting the effects of protest.¹¹⁰ The terminological inconsistency signals a deeper issue: the difficulty of causally linking protest actions to political or social changes, especially when those changes are indirect, delayed or mediated through institutions.

Schumaker’s typology, consisting of five types of responsiveness, is often used as the basis for understanding outcomes. All five refer to the extent to which authorities react to demands.¹¹¹ Attention is paid to officials and/or those who occupy positions of authority. The granting of concessions, co-optation of activists, reforms and repression feed into the assessment of “outcomes.” Consistent with this approach is the valuation or profiling of protest goals in terms of how they are viewed by the authorities.¹¹² Other approaches,

for instance, Luders' "cost-assessment" theory of movement outcomes, shift focus from government decisions, during the civil rights movement, to consider economic actors,¹¹³ while Gillion focuses on judicial and presidential outcomes.¹¹⁴ Others even go as far as placing the burden of outcomes on victims' abilities to lucidly express themselves, "such that a state responds based on complete and perfect information about the protesters, their intentions and their capabilities."¹¹⁵

Outcome is also seen in relation to the impact of protests on the resources of protest movements or protestors. Whittier believes that protest outcomes should not be assessed solely by external change like policy shifts, but also by internal movement dynamics, especially how protests affect the material, organisational, symbolic and emotional resources of the movement itself or its participants.¹¹⁶ Giugni considers how movements often reshape the identity, political engagement and worldview of their participants despite the absence of formal policy changes¹¹⁷ while van Dyke et al. observe that movements may succeed in transforming their members, even if they fail institutionally.¹¹⁸ Earl, Rochon and D'Anjou provide a rich analysis of how movements influence cultural codes, frames and collective consciousness. Their works argue that social movements reshape cultural values, symbols, norms and public perception.¹¹⁹ Outcome is also understood in relation to how movements transform how public and private societal institutions function, evolve and relate to broader social values.¹²⁰ To make sense of this diversity of outcomes, scholars have developed taxonomies of movement outcomes which go beyond the usual "did they win or not" framing. Earl urges researchers to recognise multidimensional effects and not collapse all outcomes into binary success/failure by suggesting a typology that covers outcomes affecting the movement vs changes outside the movement, whether change happens in the actor the movement directly aimed at and whether the outcome was part of the original goals.¹²¹ Kriesi et al. introduce a structural model of outcomes which covers policy outcomes, cultural outcomes and organisational outcomes while suggesting that outcomes depend heavily on political opportunity structures.¹²² A taxonomy of social movement and protest outcomes recognises the complexity of the social world which makes it extremely difficult to explain all sorts of outcomes through a single theory.¹²³ Hence, "any attempt to develop a general theory of movement outcomes would be doomed to failure."¹²⁴

Critics settle for the development and revision of theoretical frameworks targeting different sets or domains of outcomes. For instance, there would be a framework for understanding "political outcomes" or for addressing "cultural outcomes" but never one which combines the two. There are also unconnected bodies of research on the political outcomes of labour, women's and gay and lesbian's movements.¹²⁵ Barrie opts for "a more minimal understanding of outcomes," mostly relevant to democratic contexts, that includes changes in public opinion and voting, changes to policy and changes to the behaviour of political elites.¹²⁶ The result of these distinct and separate

explanations is theoretical incoherence marked by the arbitrary and inconsistent focus on explanatory variables from one protest movement and protest research to the next. What exists, then, is theoretical fragmentation, itself a reflection of apartheid's fragmented universe.

It is apt to say, "the only way to fix a broken paradigm is to replace it with a new paradigm."¹²⁷ The question that we must ask is what "protest is broken" means and what a new paradigm should look like. Protest signifies behaviour or conduct which seeks to realign the human being to the things that he or she is separated from by apartheid. In that sense, protest is inherently oppositional. In supporting a cause, rejecting a policy, demanding better, expressing disgust, showing solidarity or signalling preferences, protest is inherently framed in opposition to something or someone. Terms such as "dissent," "struggle" and "contention" recur in the various definitions of protest. Apartheid sets apart people from others and from needs, wants, desires, values and beliefs against which the individual must then dissent, struggle or contend. Some are separated from loved ones. Some from freedom. Others from good health. Some are set apart from nourishment. Some from welfare. Others from justice. Indeed, apartheid even sets apart the human being copiously and concurrently such that he or she is always-already fragmentary or broken. So, the human being, under apartheid, is broken. He is confronted by fragments of harm. Concomitant action enters the space of the human being in the form of fragments. His reaction is thus always-already fragmentary. This is what the first layer of what "protest is broken" means.

Further, despite the frequency and commonality of apartness, apartheid remains different things to different people. This is why some people will fight bitterly against climate change while others fight in defence of their traditions. Some will fight for their rights as immigrants at the same time others are fighting for their rights as citizens. Even some migrants will contest other migrants. Some protestors, some living within the same ZIP code or even streets or going to the same universities and attending the same classes, will be pro-life, while others are pro-choice. The second sense of "protest is broken" refers to the inherently fractured nature of the protest universe. Apartheid breaks the world of the oppressed into fragments. The protest universe, like apartheid, is fragmented. It is not a uniform or wholesome reality, despite the appearance of being composite. Hence, the same grievance does not necessarily result in one protest movement. The anti-war protest movement of 2003 was a constellation of approximately three thousand protests.¹²⁸ Occupy Movement was a dispersal of splinters across several locations and participants. Apartheid divides society into unequal, distinct fragments thereby inducing disparities among victims. These variations, or ROPs, are what apartheid exploits to keep the oppressed in place. The protest universe is therefore a fractured universe of often contradictory and competing protests.

Protest is broken because it is *good-neighbourly* and *demoted*. It tends to be compatible with that which it opposes or must oppose and does not therefore

exert equal force. It is broken because it is not wholesome. It is fractional. Human beings do not give themselves entirely to protests. If they did, then it would be possible for a human being to be in two places at the same time. That is impossible. Even when protesting online, people watch television, visit friends, go for the school run, attend to visitors and so on. Human beings can only give a fraction to protest at any given point. The problem is not protest but apartheid. Apartheid, the system, endeavours to “keep this nigger-boy running,”¹²⁹ ensuring that victims keep hopping from one queue to the next. Resultantly, even one of the largest and long-lasting protests in US history, reaches a limit: “In the end, the encampments were evicted with paramilitary force. Occupy evaporated and normalcy returned to financial districts worldwide.”¹³⁰ Life went on.

Caldwell’s sobering analysis of the puzzle surrounding the devastation caused by the AIDS pandemic in Africa, along with the attendant responses from communities and governments, remains relevant to every social, political, or economic problem today:

Perhaps the most extraordinary aspect of the African AIDS epidemic is its limited social and political effect. This is a disease which in a number of countries will be the cause of death of half the population [...] It has increased the mortality level of adults in their prime, 20-40 years, to pre-modern levels. At any one time one-third of the people one meets in cities like Harare or Blantyre are infected and have at the most only a few years to live [...] The additional death rate because of the epidemic, up to ten per thousand annually in some countries, is of a similar magnitude to the experience of France during the First World War, an experience that traumatized the French. Yet East and Southern Africa are not traumatized. Governments are not threatened by accusations of mishandling the epidemic. Not a single protest demonstration has occurred. Life goes on in a surprisingly normal way [...] In some ways it is very impressive.¹³¹

Affected African societies seem to continue with daily life, in spite of AIDS, showing resilience, adaptation, or perhaps resignation. This reflects a recurring pattern where even in the face of immense suffering, be it pandemics, conflict, poverty, or inequality, many societies display an “impressive” capacity to normalise crises, avoid collective outrage, and carry on. This phenomenon speaks to human endurance and the troubling ease with which apartheid or adversity can be absorbed without significant resistance or reform. “Life Goes On” (LGO) is the outcome when concomitant action triggers good neighbourly and demoted reaction. It is the outcome expressed in shops opening, people buying and selling and miners cheering and going back to work in the aftermath of a massacre. It is the outcome realised when people log out of their social networks to do other things besides retweeting a protest hashtag. Life Goes On means:

The life and actions of the oppressed, trapped in decimalised dead zones, turn out to be clustered, regularly interspaced, short, palindromic repeats of turning and turning and then more such turning and turning again, like Yeats' falcon in "The Second Coming". We keep arriving where we depart. Life goes on without actually having to move an inch.¹³²

Life goes on without any detectable movement for apartheid's victims. They remain in harm's way. Instead of 1:1 or *munhu munhu* we are left with a fraction. In going on, "[life] goes over to apartheid. This is where it banks and processes all its deficits [and] demotions [...]. The answer about where life goes when it goes on is that it is reprocessed – or re-processioned – as the Rate of Oppression (ROp), a loop of tightly clustered, regularly interspaced, short, palindromic repeats of negotiated suffering."¹³³

This book proposes protest fragmentation in place of "protest is broken," which tends to view protest independently of apartheid. Apartheid is a macro-political opportunity structure that operates in fragments. It is what shapes good neighbourly and demoted reaction. Protest rises, falls and changes as a function of the political opportunity structure.¹³⁴ The protest against apartheid must therefore dismantle the macro-political opportunity structure. It must seek, as its ultimate goal, the restoration of *munhu* to his original state of completeness and indivisibility. It must return to *munhu munhu* by applying equal and opposite force against apartheid. Anything short of that is good neighbourly and demoted reaction. It is *apartheid's protest*.

A Note on "Apartheid's Protest"

The persistence of harm, in spite of anticolonial struggles and protests in Southern Africa in the 20th and 21st centuries, challenges us to seek deeper insights into the evolution of apartheid. Mortally banished in these struggles, why is apartheid's presence pervasively evident in all societies of the world today? What sort of *kafiramberi*¹³⁵ is this which does not come to pass? Apartheid Studies provides us with the tools to unlock this mystery. It demonstrates to us that apartheid is no longer in the places it used to be, but has merged with our everyday life, has become a frequent part of us and has become undetectable. Apartheid moves as we move so much that the very natural act of our being alive is fuel for apartheid. This metamorphosis makes the struggle against apartheid a complex task. How do people fight the very thing they are entangled with?

In Marikana, workers did not intend for the mine to shut down despite being conscious of the dangers that mine work poses. Beyond the principal demand of a wage increase from 6,000 rand to 12,500 rand (\$500) a month, the striking miners had concerns including:

danger, with risks intensified by pressure to work in hazardous locations; the arduous character of work; [...] doubled-up bodies endlessly shaken

by heavy drills; artificial air full of dust and chemicals; high levels of sickness, including TB; and managers (often white) who were disrespectful and adversarial.¹³⁶

During the Marikana commission and the interviews held with surviving workers and relatives of the butchered, not once was it suggested that the mine be shut down. After five weeks of protest and 45 deaths, 34 of those being miners shot dead by the police on August 16, 2012, the workers finally accepted an offer of around 11,000 rand a month: “Strikers who gathered at a soccer pitch near the Marikana mine on Tuesday cheered when they were informed of the offer and said they would return to work on Thursday.” Even after the massacre, it was not suggested from any quarter that the mine be shut down. Workers, prospective workers and their families did not dare imagine the closure of the mine which was characterised by “danger,” “risks,” difficulty, pain, “artificial air,” “dust and chemicals,” “sickness,” disrespect and adversity. The mine was supposed to remain open *in the meantime* as the miners fought against it – because families have to be fed and school fees paid even as we fight the mine bosses. In the aftermath of protest, there was death, injury, loss and trauma. Why did the surviving miners “cheer” and commit to returning to the place of harm? What sort of reaction to adversity was this which cheers and marches back in the direction of harm?

Apartheid attaches itself to the very things that give us sustenance so much that protest must be compatible with apartheid. Protest must bypass the very being of apartheid. The life of apartheid is non-negotiable. This is why the 1993 and 1996 constitutions of South Africa, products of bilateral and multi-party negotiations between 1990 and 1996, do not mention apartheid at all. They leave “*a loophole for apartheid to persist undetected* [...] by utterly refusing to mention, define, prosecute, prohibit, or outlaw apartheid [emphasis in original].”¹³⁷ We can negotiate the rough edges of apartheid, the obtrusiveness, the protuberance or the viciousness. What gets dealt with are fragments: segregationist insignias, explicitly discriminatory laws and blatant racist pronouncements. That is, pre-primitive and primitive apartheid can be safely cached and, perhaps, intermittently retrieved as happened in Marikana on August 16, 2012. Otherwise, apartheid goes on holiday.

In the *apartheid present*, one knows better than to call an African “kaffir.” Adam Catzavelos, who filmed himself at a beach in Greece to broadcast “a weather forecast” of “blue skies, beautiful day, amazing sea and not one kaffir in sight,” learned the hard way when he faced social media backlash, pushback from his employer and criminal persecution. In a statement on the Human Rights Commission of South Africa, Catzavelos explained:

When I watch the video, not by choice I may add but because in certain circumstances I have had to, for example with my lawyers, I am truly disgusted, horrified and ashamed of my behaviour. I now, more than

ever, in the course of having to confront and take responsibility for my actions, which has forced me to consider deeply issues such as dignity and humanity, am acutely aware of how profoundly dehumanizing and hurtful it must be for black South Africans to be referred to by the “k” word with all its connotations, who a mere 24 years ago were liberated from centuries of enslavement, colonisation and subjugation and oppression.¹³⁸

The terrain has changed. The *apartheid present* is neither pre-primitive nor primitive. In the present, apartheid need not name and validate racism. This is the memo Catzavelos did not receive. Hence, the outcry against him crossed the racial divide, with white people similarly calling him out. In the *apartheid present*, the undetectable stage, even whites can be against “apartheid”! The media would not even dare repeat the term “Kaffir.” The BBC simply said, “He said a *derogatory term* used historically by white people to denigrate black South Africans” (emphasis added).¹³⁹ The Mail and Guardian preferred “k-word” and, in directly quoting Catzavelos, the redacted “k****r.”¹⁴⁰ So, if apartheid now goes unnamed or redacted, protest cannot remain the same; “the indicators have disappeared [...] and the struggle now must be completely reformulated in terms of an appropriate understanding of undetectable apartheid.”¹⁴¹

So, there is yet to be a protest or revolution that has brought apartheid to an end. There is no protest superpower yet.¹⁴² The case of the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM), formed in London following the Sharpeville massacre in 1960 when South African police shot 69 unarmed protestors in what proved to be a major turning point in the struggle against apartheid, is very instructive. AAM significantly led the international campaign against apartheid, coordinating boycotts, sanctions and other forms of protest against the South African government. It received considerable support from various countries and contributed to the hyped end of apartheid in 1994 and the establishment of a “democratic” South Africa. Among its accolades are forcing South Africa to leave the Commonwealth in 1961, influencing UN-sanctioned trade boycotts and suspension of South Africa from the 1964 Olympics and subsequent expulsion in 1970.

In 1994, the Anti-Apartheid Movement rebranded to ACTSA: Action for Southern Africa and shifted its orientation. Following the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990, the repeal of apartheid legislation and the inauguration of a black majority government in 1994, AAM lost momentum, declined in its support base, faced financial challenges and failed to justify itself to the British public. As far as AAM was concerned, apartheid had ended. All that was left, through ACTSA, was to spearhead humanitarian relief in Southern Africa and publicise regional issues to the British audience. We may conclude, therefore, that the Anti-Apartheid Movement had run its course. As far as it was

concerned, members and sponsors included, its protest actions had brought apartheid to an end.

I often wonder why ACTSA did not revert to AAM when South African police mowed down protestors in Marikana on August 16, 2012. This was Sharpeville all over again. The parallels were just uncanny. In both cases, poor black people protest injustice. South African police shoot and kill a significant number. An uproar follows. However, the reactions to March 21, 1960 and August, 16 2012 were different. 1960 galvanised the “boycott movement” into an anti-apartheid movement (AAM), and its struggle against apartheid moved to another level. In 2012, the movement, now christened ACTSA, was nowhere to be found, only to put out a commemorative statement, five years later, summarising The Marikana Commission of Inquiry’s (2015) findings.¹⁴³ While ACTSA rightly criticises the report for its shortcomings and observes that “the massacre at Marikana should never have happened,” the variance with the Sharpeville response is unmistakable. Calling the massacre “a stain on democratic South Africa,” ACTSA concludes by calling for transformation in the mining industry and the provision of support to those directly affected by the massacre.¹⁴⁴ No lobbying for sanctions against South Africa, no petitioning against its membership in the Commonwealth and no calls for its expulsion from the Olympics. Shooting miners in cold blood, concomitant action, was compatible with “democratic South Africa.”

There is yet to be a protest that resolves the crime scene of apartheid. As far as the world is concerned, “democratic South Africa” replaced “apartheid South Africa.” So, there are no more crimes of apartheid in South Africa or any other place for that matter. The dead do not commit crimes. They are not liable for anything that happens post-mortem. In fact, once dead, criminals cannot be arraigned. Their crimes die with them. In the aftermath of apartheid, there are no apartheid crimes. There are only “stains” on democratic South Africa. I am reminded of the narrator’s mother, in Marechera’s *House of Hunger*, announcing the death of her husband: “The old man’s dead [...] He was hit by the train at the rail-crossing [...] There was nothing left but stains.”¹⁴⁵ Later on, the narrator recaps: “The old man died beneath the wheels of the twentieth century. There was nothing left but stains, bloodstains and fragments of flesh, when the whole length of it was through with eating him.”¹⁴⁶ I imagine apartheid ploughing on in Marikana, undetected and leaving nothing but stains in its wake. Where do we even start to look when apartheid no longer moves on the familiar tracks and all we see is democratic South Africa? How do protests resolve the crime of apartheid under such conditions?

Apartheid is the only crime, to my knowledge, with no known or convicted criminals. In 1973, the United Nations called apartheid “a crime against humanity” and singled out “inhuman acts resulting from the policies and practices of apartheid” as international crimes.¹⁴⁷ However, the special international criminal court proposed, in 1980, to try those accused of the crime of apartheid was never established. The responsibility was left to individual

states to prosecute apartheid criminals. Despite this charge, no one has been prosecuted for the crime of apartheid since 1973. With the declaration of the end of apartheid and the coming of “democratic South Africa” on the back of *ubuntu*, that is, the continued good neighbourly, side-by-side existence of erstwhile perpetrators and victims, no prosecutions were carried out.¹⁴⁸ There was nothing to prosecute. What was required was “accepting that there are differences between people and that while these differences exist and you have to acknowledge them, at the same time you can live together [and] aid one another.”¹⁴⁹ What mattered was good neighbourliness.

Chapter Summary

In this introductory discussion of apartheid, we demonstrated that good neighbourliness belongs to apartheid. Apartheid is the side-by-side existence of disparate phenomena. In the setting apart of apartheid, human beings are forced into good neighbourly relations with their family members, those in their communities, colleagues from work and, more importantly, their oppressors. This is the demand the TRC made on victims through *ubuntu*. The TRC, through Desmond Tutu, held, “I am because we are.”¹⁵⁰ This was another way of saying “a person is a person with others.” It compelled prey and predator to live side by side amicably.¹⁵¹ It was also established that demotion belongs to apartheid. Human beings are divided into fractions. Apartheid fractures, amputates and severs the human being, causing them to live on less and less. That is, on half a loaf. It deducts boys from men and collects the difference.¹⁵² Human beings, thus denied, learn that you only need to get 67. Anything above that is *wasted effort*. Frankly, who has the luxury to waste effort? Apartheid, therefore, is both good neighbourliness and demotion. It is fragmentation and fractionality. This is what creates good neighbourly and demoted protest reaction, the balance which accrues to apartheid.

Apartheid and Fragmented Protest proposes an alternative understanding of protest based on the emerging framework of Apartheid Studies. It considers *munhu munhu* or the indivisibility of the human being as the starting point of analysis. It argues that apartheid disrupts this balance, severs the human being and replaces it with disproportion. Any protest that therefore seeks to restore the balance must have, as its objective, nothing short of 1:1 or *munhu munhu*. The book laments the absence of protests or social movements which seek the 1:1 principle. For this reason, protest, in its current form, is designated “apartheid’s protest.” Apartheid’s protest reflects the good neighbourly and demoted state of people’s reactions to harm. This phenomenon, a disproportionate outcome, is what is meant by “life goes on.” The book explains what, how and why life goes on despite the proliferation of protests and social movements in Southern Africa.

Chapter 1 discusses the notion of protest triage by looking at how protests compete for resources, attention and concessions in a world characterised by apartheid-induced disproportion. Borrowing from the medical concept

of triage, it shows how #ZimbabweanLivesMatter (#ZLM), an online campaign which went viral in August 2020, inadvertently came into collision with #BlackLivesMatter and #IStandWithLasizwe, campaigns which had roots in the United States and South Africa, respectively. This collision resulted in expressions of triage, with protest actors demonstrating an acute awareness of how different lives were subject to disproportionate values. When multiple protests arise simultaneously or close to each other around different causes, as was the case with the three campaigns, they unintentionally fragment protest discourse and enable apartheid to persist. This protest triage undermines protests by forcing them to reckon with the fact of other causes and, thus, become fragmentary.

Chapter 2 examines fragmentation in relation to the individual protest. It argues that fragmentation is not a latter development of protest occurring during the peak or decline phases. Rather, fragmentation pre-exists protest, being an inherent feature of apartheid. To demonstrate that fragmentation is foundational to protest, the chapter first looks at #ThisFlag as a hybrid protest which began with an “online” fragment but, like most contemporary protests, was oriented towards offline activism. Online protest represents a fragment of the individual protest whose key characteristic is duality or hybridity. The relationship between the online and offline fragments of protest is discussed alongside a second iteration of protest fragmentation which owes to the intraspecific, individualised experiences of actors. It is argued that protest actors embody fragments, attuned to their distinct household experiences, which they bring to a marketplace of harm where they interact with other individuals’ own fragmented experiences. This coming together of “rates of oppression” is what gives birth to public protest as we know it.

Chapter 3 examines the tension between unity and internal diversity that characterises protest movements. Protest strives to present a singular, coherent voice through the protest hashtag, while containing a multitude of divergent identities, demands and experiences. This struggle is vividly illustrated in the #FeesMustFall movement, which emerged in 2015 in South Africa as a leaderless student campaign against rising university tuition. Despite presenting itself as a unified front advocating for free, decolonised education, #FeesMustFall was marked by deep fractures across university campuses, race, gender, class and ideology. Efforts to unify the movement through the promotion of a national protest hashtag, the latter creation of leadership structures and threats to non-protestors, were frequently undermined by university-specific hashtags, differences in strategy and conflicts around protest goals. These fractures complicated the creation of a singular protest identity and exposed the inherent difficulty in submerging difference for the sake of strategic clarity. Ultimately, #FeesMustFall exemplifies the challenge all mass protests face regarding the desire for unity in the context of heterogeneous realities of those who comprise the movement.

Chapter 4 argues that sustained participation in protest can never be absolute, being inherently limited by the everyday commitments individuals must navigate in their personal lives. It invites us to rethink our understanding of protest disengagement as a reflection of protestors' experiences of competing demands such as work, family, education, survival and emotional fatigue. Apartheid, it is argued, fragments time in such a way that the experiences of victims are fractured and divided among several commitments. Drawing on observations from #RhodesMustFall, it shows how activists oscillate between moments of high-intensity mobilisation and inevitable withdrawal, leading to visible ebbs in participation. This temporal imbalance, where more time is spent away from protest than within it, is referred to as "the days of #RhodesMustNotFall." Protest lives in tension with the rhythms of ordinary life and commitment must be understood as cyclical engagement shaped by life's demands. Recognising this challenges idealised notions of protest commitment and accusations of betrayal or indifference.

Chapter 5 frames #PutSouthAfricaFirst, a South African protest against "foreigners" of African origin as an encounter with apartheid's protest. It traces direct ideological and empirical lines from primitive apartheid, when the Nationalist Party defended apartheid against foreign interference, to 2020 when South Africans took to social media to protest the presence of foreigners under the slogan "#PutSouthAfricaFirst." The chapter demonstrates that #PutSouthAfricaFirst borrows from and reproduces the mechanisms of primitive apartheid exclusion. Instead of racial exclusion, #PutSouthAfricaFirst promotes national exclusion, but the structure is the same, suggesting that apartheid's sorting and classifying has evolved rather than ended. #PutSouthAfricaFirst is therefore not a break from primitive apartheid-era thinking, but its evolution.

The conclusion draws together findings from the previous chapters by revisiting the notion of protest fragmentation and life going on in contemporary Southern Africa. It reiterates how apartheid fragments the individual and society, thus setting the stage for good neighbourly and demoted protest. The protest universe is depicted as a constellation of heterogeneously separate struggles caught up in protest triage. The individual protest, on the other hand, is phased and must contend with pre-existent fragmentation owing to apartheid's separationist logic. It also comprises individuals who are fragmented and divided along the lines of their household experiences, which make the absolute commitment to protest impossible. Finally, it is pointed out that apartheid did not die and continues to shape who protests, how they protest and how life goes on regardless.

Notes

- 1 *Hata* is Shona for a coil, usually a rolled-up cloth, placed between one's head and a load to cushion the head and therefore minimise pain. Mboti uses the term to denote how the victims of apartheid absorb pain in order that perpetrators

- are insulated or exempted from harm. See Nyasha Mboti, *Apartheid Studies: A Manifesto*, vol. 1 (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2022).
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 - 5 Cyril Ramaphosa, then Deputy President of South Africa, wrote an email to Lonmin's board on the eve of the massacre, demanding "concomitant action."
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 - 16 See the Group Areas Act, the Bantu Authorities Act and the Aliens Control Act.
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 - 22 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 1986), 2.

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- 28 Mboti, *Apartheid Studies*, 250.
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1 Whose Life Matters?

Reckoning with Protest Triage

Introduction

What sort of relations do protests, variously reacting to concomitant acts in different spaces and times, assume in the context of apartheid disproportion? In a world of scarcity, where perceived cases of injustice are disproportionately more than the affordance of justice, how do we determine which demands to prioritise? Finally, how do the individual protests negotiate space in light of protest proliferation? In the last chapter, I pointed out that the protest universe is a world broken into uneven fragments owing to what we will refer to as “apartheid triage.” This chapter interrogates “whose life matters” by looking at how the uneven fragments occasioned by #ZimbabweanLivesMatter (#ZLM), an online campaign which went viral in August 2020, interact. Among the online protests that intersect with #ZimbabweanLivesMatter are #BlackLivesMatter and #IStandWithLasizwe, campaigns which had roots in the United States and South Africa, respectively. #ZimbabweanLivesMatter was a response to real or perceived government heavy-handedness against a planned July 31, 2020 protest by activists. #BlackLivesMatter protested systemic racism in the form of police violence against black people in the United States. Finally, #IStandWithLasizwe defended the rights of gay people against homophobic views shared under the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter protest. Coinciding in 2020, the three case studies provide insights about the inter-relationships within certain forms of online protests.

The Protest Triage Paradigm

In 1959, Mao Zedong, Chinese politician, theorist and revolutionary, made the infamous declaration:

To distribute resources evenly will only ruin the Great Leap Forward. When there is not enough to eat, people starve to death. *It is better to let half the people die so that the other half can eat their fill* (emphasis added).¹

The Great Leap Forward, which began in 1958, was an economic and social campaign led by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to transform China from an agrarian society to an industrialised society. The campaign, which lasted until 1962, is blamed for millions of deaths from starvation.² Some Maoists suggested that Mao may have employed hyperbole or that his words on the necessity of “half the people” dying in order for the other half to live had been misinterpreted.³ The attribution of the millions of deaths to Mao was considered propaganda from the West seeking to depict China in the worst light. The number of deaths is also debated.⁴ The multiple arguments aside, there is nevertheless something distinctively familiar, characteristic of and consistent with apartheid in the statement: “When there is not enough to eat, people starve to death. It is better to let half the people die so that the other half can eat their fill.”

Those who cast Mao as some diabolical fiend for his utterances miss a fundamental point: apartheid *never* provisions for the even distribution of resources. Disproportion, the Denial-of-Human-Service (DoHS) to some people, defines apartheid. Some people will, of necessity, be denied service in order for others to disproportionately benefit. More recently and quite vividly, DoHS was evident during the Covid-19 pandemic. *The Atlantic*, almost echoing Mao’s “not enough to eat” declaration, grimly stated on March 11, 2020: “There are now simply *too many patients for each one of them to receive adequate care*” (emphasis added).⁵ These words, on the state of healthcare in Italy, referred to an upsurge from 322 confirmed Covid-19 cases to 10,149 in just two weeks.⁶ Reeling under immense pressure from the coronavirus, European medical systems began the arbitrary prioritisation of some patients over others. In order that some people survive, others had to die. “The question,” explained a group of medical doctors and scientists, “is not whether to set priorities, but how to do so ethically and consistently, rather than basing decisions on individual institutions’ approaches or a clinician’s intuition in the heat of the moment.”⁷ The situation was so dire that “removing a patient from a ventilator or an ICU bed to provide it to others in need” became “justifiable.”⁸ In fact, “many guidelines agree that *the decision to withdraw a scarce resource to save others is not an act of killing* and does not require the patient’s consent.” (emphasis added).⁹

By 2020, triage, the practice of prioritising some lives over others, had become standard in most of Europe. The practice, whose term originates from the French verb *trier*, means “sort, select or separate.”¹⁰ Elsewhere, it is described as “sorting out *and* classification” (emphasis added).¹¹ The goal of sorting out and classifying is to facilitate the allocation of limited resources. In the absence of laws and national guidelines on triage, the task of sorting out and classifying Covid-19 patients was virtually left to scientific societies to provide guidelines on how to make the important decision around care.¹² Ouyang, Argon and Ziya proposed some mathematical models to help doctors decide on whom to give preference.¹³ While there were variations in how

medical triage was to be carried out in different countries, there was consensus on the fact that health resources were strained and, therefore, “patients with the best chance of success” and those who presented the “best hope of life” had to be prioritised. Scarce resources were to be reserved for those with, first, “greater likelihood of survival and secondly who have more potential years of life.”¹⁴

The discussion of healthcare practices is incidental and illustrative of a larger point within the universe of protest. The protest universe is characterised by competing actors, grievances, campaigns, methods and goals. It is thus subject to what I call *protest triage*, a phenomenon where protest movements compete for visibility and legitimacy under conditions of limited attention. Like medical triage, the fragmentary protest universe stems from scarcity logic. That is, protest leaders, participants, resources, media coverage, support, sympathy and concessions are considered to be in short supply. Protest triage therefore refers to the uneven and hierarchical allocation of actors, leaders, funding, time, space, energy, public attention, solidarity, media coverage and concessions among social movements, protests or crises, often based on visibility, geopolitical relevance or emotional resonance rather than objective assessment of grievances or victim experiences. Borrowed from the medical concept of triage, where care is prioritised for patients based on urgency and survivability, protest triage describes how apartheid’s victims “triage” their experiences or Rates of Oppressions (ROps) owing to the fragmentation of the protest universe.

Yascha Mounk, who wrote about the grim state of healthcare in Italy for *The Atlantic* on March 11 2020, may not have known that the situation he was describing was not new. It was the frequent state of disproportion known as apartheid and conditioned how protesting individuals and groups interacted. Apartheid is one immense triage system constantly preoccupied with sorting and classifying people. Medical triage was the iteration through which questions about whose life matters visibly played out during Covid-19, but the forms and practices of triage are endless, as we saw in 20th century China where the deaths of “half the people” from starvation during the Great Leap Forward could not be considered “an act of killing.” Neither was the consent of the condemned half sought by those who condemned them. Basically, apartheid is *not an act of killing* and *does not require the consent* of victims. Apartheid is concomitant action. It is a service meant to veto the human.

The Group Areas Act of 1950, which unambiguously formalised and legislated triage on a wide, universal scale in South Africa, sorted out and classified the population into racial groups. On this basis, the majority of black people were forcibly packed into small, overcrowded, Denial-of-Human-Service, areas. Apartheid further fragmented groups into smaller and smaller clusters, all the way to the individual while methodologically allocating to each a fungible ROp, separating the human being from self and others. The world of the oppressed was broken into fragments, oppression unravelled into

differentiated frequencies, degrees and manifestations, and victims frequently came into contact and wrestled with the realities of finitude where demand was always-already disproportionately higher than supply. The supply of ICU beds and ventilators is disproportionately lower than the demand from the sick. The supply of food is disproportionately lower than the demand from the starving masses. This disproportion is what certifies the starvation of half the people so that the other half can “have their fill” and the removal of a patient from a ventilator or an ICU bed “to provide it to others in need.” Mboti explains that disproportion is “the algorithm that rejects or accepts, the metric that defines and adjusts specific threshold levels each time a person makes a request on a system, deciding whether to accept or reject (emphasis in original).”¹⁵

Protest is therefore constituted by individuals who are thus lumped together by apartheid’s group-area DoHS alongside (or in conflict with) other similarly constituted groups. These groups encounter others and also deal with their inherent internal fractures where they must constantly contend with the question: whose life matters? Can individuals, linked together by the present fear of being suddenly disconnected from a ventilator when a “more deserving” case arrives, for instance, not impulsively and necessarily band with co-sufferers against would-be beneficiaries and enablers? Will these sufferers speak the same language as those who will disconnect them or those who would replace them? What sort of protest movement and relations can group-area positionings give rise to when apartheid’s concomitant action determines that half the people must starve in order for the other half to get their fill? The concept of protest triage offers a powerful metaphor for understanding protest fragmentation. Just as medical triage ranks lives to allocate limited resources, protest triage involves sorting and classifying forms of suffering to determine which deserves the most recognition or support. This often pits marginalised groups against one another instead of fostering solidarity.

The relations among protests respond to the question of disproportion and reproduce the fungible ROP (a result of sorting and classifying) peculiar to apartheid’s victims. In a world where demand constantly overwhelms supply, that is, in states of permanent disproportion, “life” effectively assumes a “rate,” with different lives being subject to varying mileages, asking prices, costs, advantages and worth. This echoes Butler’s claim that some lives are made more “grievable” than others,¹⁶ Mbembe’s discussion of necropolitics or the control over who gets to live with dignity or without care¹⁷ and Berlant’s description of the ongoing attrition of life under conditions of structural abandonment.¹⁸ Apartheid life, it turns out, makes sanctity or inviolability a scarce resource to be fought for by various individuals and groups. Victims of apartheid have to compete for jobs, food, houses, land, salaries and freedoms on the basis of these varying mileages, asking prices, costs and so on: “Scarcity causes the oppressed to queue, wait their turn and compete to leverage and arbitrage their respective Rates of Oppression (ROPs).”¹⁹ Hence, movements also exist in procession and compete “to leverage and arbitrage” their presumed worth.

They engage in a performance for power, that is, an attempt to be seen, heard and acknowledged. Movements compete for media attention, donor funding, hashtags, institutional recognition and so on, as a reflection of disproportion: recognition is scarce and power listens only to one voice at a time, or at least varies the quality and length of its attention and differentiates how it listens. Protestors therefore seem compelled to scream louder or differently than the others, so that they stand out, rather than speak together or in concert.

Existing Protest Relations Perspectives

The notion of “contentious politics,” introduced by Tilly and Tarrow,²⁰ provides us with a starting point for understanding protest triage. It explains how collective actors spread across different movements and protest actions interact and consequently constitute “relational fields”²¹ or “communit[ies] of organisations that interact together.”²² The interactions among collective actors are considered frequent and fateful,²³ meaning that they are an important, integral component of protests: “Contention always brings together subjects, objects and claims.”²⁴ The levels of interaction include “patterns of domination and cooperation, the exchange of information and mutual awareness among participants.”²⁵ Protest actors are believed to “recognize each other and interact both consensually and/or conflictual”²⁶: “Such a perspective urges scholars to ask what actors populate a field, how they are connected and what properties might define actors’ relations.”²⁷

The “actors” suggested during contentious politics are not just protest actors. The relations implied do not explicitly consider the relations one protest has with another. “Relational field” is proposed to address this apparent blind spot to cover the complex and dynamic interactions social movements have with other movements, political and economic institutions, state authorities and political actors, various elites, various publics, “symbolic and value orientations available in society” and critical events.²⁸ Clearly, the concept also stipulates broader connections which have a bearing on the emergence, activity and outcomes of social movements. Social movements are embedded in a web of relationships that shape their character and success. While the designation of “relational field” also exceeds the focus of what I simply call “protest triage,” it lends utility in glimpsing mainstream thinking on how protests relate among themselves, albeit alongside several other non-protest activities. The notion seeks to replace the Political Opportunity Structure approach which considers how “key elements in the external environment of movements”²⁹ determine the development of a social movement.³⁰ The approach has a predominant focus on the “political,” or conditions relating to states, “opportunity” at the expense of threats and macro-structures.³¹

So far, two paradigms, protest/counterprotest and “oppression olympics,” come closest to discussing the relations protests exclusively have among each other. The protest/counterprotest paradigm focuses on protests which directly contradict each other. Preferring the term “interactions,” it considers

the way protests relate as a reflection of the “growing polarization of issues and political conflicts.”³² Counterprotests are considered to arise “in reaction to *the protest* and adopt an opposing stance” (emphasis added).³³ The relationship subsisting between protests framed under protest/counterprotest is oppositional. This relationship is seen as “a sometimes loosely coupled tango of mobilization and demobilization.”³⁴ A counterprotest exists as a *reaction to another reaction*, which affects its form and character.³⁵

Counterprotests are often seen as campaigns sponsored by authorities to undermine or reverse gains made by “legitimate” protests. In this instance, counterprotest is seen as anti-protest.³⁶ The relationship, then, is one which is informed by the prior existence of a “legitimate” protest movement. It is a sequential relationship as much as it is also polarised to the point of reflecting and reproducing “ideological chasms and cultural tensions within the body politic.”³⁷ It is argued that “one group’s excessively large mobilisation promotes counter-mobilisation by another seeking to maintain the status quo.”³⁸ Indeed, reports of violent clashes among protestors disagreeing over issues are reported in the news. In recent years, there have been clashes such as pro-Trump vs anti-Trump supporters, pro-vaccine vs anti-vaccine supporters and pro-Palestinian vs pro-Israel supporters.³⁹ The relations among these protests are one-dimensional. The objective in these cases is to thwart the other protest. Total dominance is the goal.

The challenge, then, is that the binary approach underlying the protest/counterprotest paradigm can oversimplify complicated and complex protest relations. In reality, protests have an enduring relationship which precedes and transcends their point of contact and interaction. Overreliance on the binary approach could mean that less attention is paid to the long-term and enduring relations that characterise protests. Specifically, the normative approach is limited to seeing interaction as focusing on the time-bound, specific ways in which two or more protests come into contact but not how this contact is governed by already existing relations. The approach that this book takes is to consider “protest triage” as a prism through which to acknowledge the enduring ways in which protests come into contact, exchange, undermine or expand each other. Interactions reflect the more enduring relations which apartheid enables.

The notion of “Oppression Olympics” is important in framing protest relations in terms of “competition.” Elizabeth Martínez, who is accredited with the first recorded use of the phrase in a 1993 conversation with activist Angela Davis, advocated the rejection of “any hierarchy of needs of different communities” and the consequent making of “a hierarchy of demands” by oppressed groups or communities.⁴⁰ Acknowledging the inevitability of some communities or groups emphasising certain needs, Martínez insisted on the formation of alliances which could set goals together and fight in unison. Literature which built on the notion, mainly belonging to the feminist intersectionality school, continues on the same path. It rejects the contentious relations among

marginalised groups and explores how intersectional resistance can defeat “oppression olympics,”⁴¹ how promoting concomitant political participation can end rivalry among the oppressed,⁴² and how to build on solidarity against such rivalry.⁴³ Apartheid Studies emphasises the inevitability of competition among protestors, because apartheid decrees that half the population starve and others be disconnected from ventilators, while demonstrating that the relations that protests occasion and undergo constitute a range of positions conditioned by the ROp. We see this playing out between 2011 and 2012, for instance, when the rapid rise of the Occupy Movement diverted media coverage, donations and activist focus away from environmental causes or how George Floyd protests vied for attention with anti-lockdown and health-focused protests during COVID-19 in 2020. These protests vied for space in the same activist and media space, thereby affecting and shaping the texture and trajectory of each.

#ZimbabweanLivesMatter took place in a context of intense political contestation between supporters of the ZANU PF government and the opposition parties. This contest was simulated on social media, especially from 2016, when Evan Mawarire’s #ThisFlag went global against the more local #OurFlag.⁴⁴ After 2017, realising that opposition players dominated social media, ZANU PF deliberately intensified its online presence and conspicuously changed the social media terrain of the country.⁴⁵ These developments have received considerable scholarly attention with emphasis on the anti-government protests conducted through the years. Social media’s affordance of space for disgruntled citizens,⁴⁶ youth appropriation of social media for political activism⁴⁷ and the complex entanglement of social media and political participation in Africa⁴⁸ are some of the areas this literature covers. Mutsvairo discusses how social media empowers African citizens by reshaping political discourse outside institutional settings,⁴⁹ while Ngomba demonstrates how social media in Cameroon enabled new forms of campaign messaging and opposition mobilisation.⁵⁰ Invariably, studies of online protests after 2015 in Zimbabwe use the “Arab Spring” as a point of departure and reference.⁵¹ Despite this considerable interest in Zimbabwean protest, there are no studies explicitly focusing on protest triage.

Modelled after #BlackLivesMatter, #ZimbabweanLivesMatter emerged on August 3, 2020 following a short-lived and unsuccessful street protest on July 31, 2020. It built on the preparatory online campaign for the 31 July protests dubbed #31July or #31JulyMovement. The 31 July call, made on June 28, 2020, came from activist Jacob Ngarivhume’s proposal for “a national demonstration.”⁵² The initiative was taken up by other opposition activists, including the main opposition party led by Nelson Chamisa, popular journalist Hopewell Chin’ono and a shadowy Twitter group, Team Pachedu. For the most part of July, #31July became a rallying call for Zimbabweans in preparation of the street protest to be held on the same date. The 31 July protest failed to take off as anticipated. So #ZimbabweanLivesMatter emerged amidst

international attention on #BlackLivesMatter.⁵³ The online protest swiftly garnered key regional and international sympathisers, including South African politicians Mmusi Maimane and Julius Malema, actress Pearl Thusi, the late rapper AKA (real name Kiernan Jarryd Forbes), American rapper Ice Cube and actress Thandie Newton.⁵⁴

“The Same Black Lives Next Door”

#BlackLivesMatter (#BLM) is the reference point and mirror of #ZimbabweanLivesMatter (#ZLM). #ZLM first arrived on the scene in when DJ Stavo, a Zimbabwean-born disc jockey based in South Africa, used the hashtag on June 3, 2020, in an apparent attempt to align it with #BLM, which was enjoying its second month of resurgence following the murder of George Floyd in May 2020. In just one week between the murder of Floyd and June 1, #BLM had generated around 3.4 million posts with more than 60 billion engagements. On June 8, there was a peak amounting to 1.2 million posts using the hashtag.⁵⁵ It is during this time of #BLM flourishing that #ZLM first appeared. While DJ Stavo’s hashtag seems to have flopped, the return of #ZLM in the first week of August 2020, about two weeks after #BLM trended globally, attracted far more attention. This time, the hashtag and online campaign went viral and even led South African X trends during that week. I refer to “online campaign” distinctly from the hashtag because one of the key impetuses came from @akaworldwide, a handle which was operated by the late rapper AKA, via a tweet on August 2, 2020: “Imagine your fellow Africans too busy with #BLM happening 15 000 kms away to care about the very same black lives NEXT DOOR. Black is King my ass. Stay strong ZIMBABWE.”⁵⁶ Notably, @akaworldwide did not use the hashtag #ZimbabweanLivesMatter. Even those who responded to the tweet before August 3 did not use the hashtag except for one @MrChirenga who posted, “Thank you Mega #ZLM.”⁵⁷ There were nevertheless tweets supporting @akaworldwide with posts like “#AfricanLivesMatter.”⁵⁸ However, on August 3, 2020, #ZLM suddenly erupted, receiving much of its fuel from South African celebrities and politicians.

#BLM set the tone for what may be referred to as “life-matter” protests to which #ZimbabweanLivesMatter belongs. #BLM counter-inspired a broad range of “life-matter” protests including #BlueLivesMatter, #WhiteLivesMatter and #AllLivesMatter in the United States, in response to perceived narrowness, “wokeness” and “racism” in the movement’s framing. #BLM went further than just counter-hashtags, determining the frames of other protests in the fields of disability, sexuality, climate change, nationality and animal rights. Hence we now speak of #BlackDisabledLivesMatter, #TransLivesMatter, #AnimalLivesMatter, #NativeLivesMatter, #NigerianLivesMatter, #ZimbabweanLivesMatter and so on. While not all protests under the “life-matter” rubric gain traction, they represent a brand of protests that explicitly betray the fragmentation, contestations, concurrences and synergies

characteristic of the protest universe. Life-matter protests, in their diversity, bring closer to home the dilemma that we began with; the dilemma that medical triage seemingly grappled with in 2020 and characteristically defines the apartheid sphere: whose life matters? At the onset of the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter campaign, @akaworldwide brings the matter to a head. Zimbabwean lives, he affirms, are not only “the very same black lives” #BLM denotes but must come first because they are just next door.⁵⁹ The blackness of American black lives is supposedly too distant to come first. @akaworldwide suggests that, under the circumstances, there is a hierarchy and queue under which Zimbabwean lives must come first and be given prominence. This point is clearly shared by the participants from August 3, 2020 who use the hashtag #ZLM.

In this hierarchy and queue, #ZimbabweanLivesMatter was not just a protest against the Zimbabwean government. It was also an indictment, apparently, of #BLM for its silence on “the same black lives next door.” It therefore entered into a complex relation, one which at once sought to ride on the global wave #BLM currently enjoyed while in tension with it and seemingly exposing the latter’s privileged place in the protest matrix. In #ZLM tweets, there are insinuations of “hypocrisy,” “bias” and “duplicity” against #BLM protestors, particularly from Zimbabwe and Africa. There also seemed to be an expectation for reciprocity from #BLM participants in the United States for the role that Africans were also playing in the protest against racism in the United States.” “Hypocrisy,” “bias” and “duplicity” in fact point to contradictions and disproportions within the universe of protest triage. As will be seen, the list of labels by which to understand contradictions and disproportions is wide-ranging and diverse. What was really happening, though, was a sorting out and classifying enacted by victims of apartheid who are informed by their rates of oppression. What we are witnessing here is an apartheid triage system.

The sense of despondence and outrage around the varied and disproportionate performances of #BLM and #ZLM arose from the innocuous sense that black lives in Zimbabwe and black lives in the US were congruous. Was black life also not at stake in Zimbabwe? Was the dignity and safety of black people in Zimbabwe not similarly under threat? Did Zimbabwean black lives also not matter? Several tweets alleged “genocide,” “killings” and “arrests” which more or less resonated with the black experience in the United States. Online protestors, including Fadzai Mahere, spokesperson of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change Alliance (MDCA), went further to deploy the hashtag “#WeCantBreathe”⁶⁰ an appropriation of Eric Garner and George Floyd’s pain when they each gasped “I can’t breathe” under the weight of a police officer’s knee.⁶¹ Mahere and supporters seemed to be simultaneously appropriating and countering George Floyd’s “I can’t breathe.” If the world came to a standstill for Floyd in the US, it must surely come to a standstill for Zimbabweans too. We are *also* crying “we can’t breathe.” The adverb “also” means in addition to. Here, the mattering of Zimbabwean lives wants to be added to the mattering of black lives, like a significant niche. There is, from

some of the tweets, what seems to be a desperate attempt to lift the protest to the level of #BLM on account of the perceived or real similarities and so share in its limelight. Now that you have heard about George Floyd, have you heard about us too? Have you heard about the suffering Zimbabweans? Why should you not *also* hear about the Zimbabweans while you are at it? It is as if protestors were not just protesting the Zimbabwe issue, but the global triage which made the Zimbabwean issue less urgent compared to #BLM. If black Americans were putting themselves first, so should Zimbabweans.

#ZLM thus shared a kindred yet ambivalent and tension-filled relationship with #BLM. On the one hand, #BLM was an inspiration whose global resonance #ZLM sought to leverage and benefit from for international recognition by aligning itself with the broader calls for justice and state accountability. It cannot have been a coincidence that the two protests thrived at the same time and shared the “life-matter” frame. The originators, supporters and users of the #ZLM hashtag must have known, at the very least, that their campaign was leaning on the #BLM protest. There were indeed efforts to establish a direct relationship with #BLM. This sense of oneness, affinity, solidarity and similarity galvanised the #ZLM campaign. On the other hand, #BLM was nevertheless regarded with envy; sometimes guarded, at times open, other times suppressed and at other times raw. It was felt that #BLM was enjoying privileges that #ZLM had a claim to but was not being fully accorded. While #BLM provided a language and model for transnational protest, it also overshadowed the Zimbabwean struggle in the global media landscape, threatening to make #ZLM practically invisible. Digital spaces in Africa are deeply shaped by asymmetries in power and visibility, which engender feelings of marginalisation compared to Western-based movements’ disproportionate attention. This dynamic reveals the uneven geography of digital solidarity where some black lives seem to “matter” more than others in the global protest universe.

#ZLM Meets #IStandWithLasizwe: Counter-Mutating Hashtags

On the evening of August 3, 2020, just when #ZLM was enjoying its moment in the sun, Thulasizwe “Lasizwe” Dambuza, a gay social media personality, posted a solidarity tweet “I STAND WITH ZIMBABWE”⁶² in support of #ZLM. Three “homophobic” responses, purportedly from Zimbabwean accounts, triggered a series of passionate reactions and unwittingly changed the form, content and trajectory of the online campaign. One of these was an invitation, on the morning of August 5, 2020, by @Mfundoyakhe_S to “Stand with Lasizwe”⁶³ in protest of what he considered Zimbabwe’s refusal to stand with Lasizwe. Thus, Lasizwe’s “I Stand with Zimbabwe” was reframed as “I stand with Lasizwe” and often expressed through the hashtag #IStandWithLasizwe.

#IStandWithLasizwe was not just an online campaign in support of a random individual. It was, for all intents and purposes, a declaration of support for Lasizwe as South African (Lasizwe-as-SA) and as gay (Lasizwe-as-Gay).

Lasizwe-as-SA was evident from @Mfundoyakhe_S' invitation to stand with Lasizwe: "When Zimbabweans can't stand with Lasizwe. I stand with Lasizwe. South Africa let stand with our Countryman Lasizwe #Lasizwe" (sic).⁶⁴ The text was punctuated by five emojis of the South African flag. The second was implied in the gay identity of Lasizwe and the "homophobia" that had ignited the "I Stand with Lasizwe" response. Lasizwe, it must be noted, had not been rejected as South African, but as gay. #ZLM had unwittingly mutated. Indeed, it had not only mutated but counter-mutated.

The most accurate online expression of Lasizwe-as-SA was #PutSouthAfricansFirst (or #PutSouthAfricaFirst), an anti-immigrant campaign in South Africa which sought to drive out black Africans, regarded as "foreigners," from South Africa on accusations that they stole South African jobs, engaged in criminal activities and exerted a huge strain on South Africa's service delivery system. It was also no coincidence that @Mfundoyakhe_S proved to be a staunch proponent of #PutSouthAfricansFirst, as early as May 2020, with later tweets such as "Nigeria is putting Nigerians first. Malawi is putting Malawians first. Ghana is putting Ghanaians first. Botswana is putting Botswana first. Why can't South Africa put South Africans first?"⁶⁵ #ZLM counter-cascaded into #PutSouthAfricaFirst as soon as the anti-Lasizwe tweets appeared in support of #ZLM. Before South Africans like LaSizwe could stand with Zimbabweans, why not put South Africans first? If Zimbabweans were putting themselves first, so should South Africans.

Thus, #ZLM inadvertently came into collision with #PutSouthAfricansFirst, which had spiked in April and May 2020 primarily against Zimbabweans and Nigerians. An entire discourse had developed around the undesirability of Zimbabweans and Nigerians as migrants in South Africa. Considering that #PutSouthAfricansFirst had received criticism for its being divisive and against the spirit of Pan-Africanism, the tweets against Lasizwe were seen to exonerate #PutSouthAfricansFirst proponents and supporters for doing what any other nation would: put itself first, whatever the situation. By rejecting Lasizwe, @Mfundoyakhe_S suggested, "Zimbabweans" had vindicated #PutSouthAfricansFirst. The anti-Lasizwe tweets were therefore reframed as Zimbabweans putting Zimbabweans first. The idea of putting a nation "first," recently popularised by Donald Trump during his 2016 presidential campaign in the United States,⁶⁶ is unmistakably a triage matter. Such "firsting," on the surface, is an invocation of so-called American exceptionalism. In a deeper sense, "firsting" invokes the apartheid queue, with nations literally arranged in a procession. It demands sorting out and classification because "there are now simply *too many nationalities* for each one of them to come first."⁶⁷ Under these circumstances, as witnessed in conflict situations, the denial of service to some nationalities, even to the point of death, is considered *justifiable*.

Through #PutSouthAfricansFirst, proponents sought to leverage and arbitrage their "South Africanness" and South African exceptionalism ahead of other African nationalities. This is despite the fact that "South Africanness,"

like other national identities, is a product of apartheid sorting and classification.⁶⁸ @Mfundoyakhe_S' tweet had a fair share of supporters, some of whom used the hashtag #PutSouthAfricansFirst. What stands out, though, is how #PutSouthAfricansFirst became a reminder of why South Africans, Lasizwe in particular, needed to heed the nationalist call. @Indile2, for instance, exhorted "This moment should teach Lasizwe and all of us [to be] proudly S. African #PutSouthAfricansFirst."⁶⁹ Other tweets were less conciliatory. Lasizwe was accused of alienating himself from #PutSouthAfricansFirst (@PutSAnskuqala, @MalukaBlaq, @thabogcakil). @uNdlov_ averred "I can't stand with LaSizwe because he doesn't stand with #PutSouthAfricansFirst"⁷⁰ while @Levigos avowed "#PutSouthAfricansFirst movement has awoken me to the reality that, support should be reciprocal. Likes of him still don't support our call. Forgive me for not standing with him."⁷¹ So South Africans are *exceptional* when and *if* they come first. Indeed, you are truly South African to the extent that you are exceptional. South African exceptionalism, coded through #PutSouthAfricaFirst, is an invitation to embrace xenophobia.

The use of #PutSouthAfricansFirst against Lasizwe, during the encounter with #ZLM, attests to protest fragmentation deriving from apartheid triage. The accusations towards Lasizwe targeted his apparent disregard of the South Africa specific ROP. *Munhu ziva nhamo yako*: a person must put his own suffering first. What got Lasizwe attacked by the Zimbabweans he stood in solidarity with during #ZLM, it would seem, was a dereliction of South Africanness: failure to leverage and arbitrage his own mileage during #PutSouthAfricansFirst. There is a dark and twisted logic to this accusation, which clearly demonstrates how inverted self-interest fragmented even the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter movement. When South Africans began their campaign against African nationals including Zimbabweans, there was no counterprotest in the name of Zimbabweans. Is it not strange that Zimbabwean lives never seemed to matter in South Africa where such lives were the target of xenophobic sentiments and attacks for the longest period? In fact, #PutSouthAfricaFirst implies that other lives matter, but only after South African lives have mattered first. It is a queue.

By the same token, #ZLM did not dismiss #BLM. Rather, it embraced it via a counterpoint: black lives matter but also alongside Zimbabwean lives or even after them! The queue of mattering lives thus induces fragmentation, which in turn triages attention itself. For example, the fragmentation in #ZLM may easily include the silence on Zimbabwean lives under threat in South Africa. Why did #ZLM not emerge or spike in response to the stabbings of a Zimbabwean tuckshop owner⁷² and a truck driver⁷³ in separate xenophobic attacks in 2018 and 2019, respectively? Why did it not escalate in response to the demonstrations held against Zimbabweans and the efforts to deport them from South Africa? Why did we never see Fadza Mahere, Hopewell Chin'ono and Ngarivhume when Zimbabweans were being targeted for xenophobic attacks in South Africa? Did not Zimbabwean lives matter then? The *triaging*

of attention is a critical element of protest relations. It also challenges claims about activist solidarity and solidarity within social movements. It would seem Zimbabwean lives would only matter in Zimbabwe and not elsewhere. There was no #ZLM for Zimbabweans in South Africa. Its absence was supposed to be justified by the fact that South Africans needed to put themselves *first* and only Zimbabweans *later*. Zimbabweans could always put themselves first whenever they wanted. Anyhow, the Zimbabwean lives which mattered were those presently domiciled in Zimbabwe. The suffering was too next door to matter to South Africans. Where AKA posited next-dooriness as an inducement to solidarity, #PutSouthAfricans framed next-dooriness as a risk and a threat. Does this not circle back to the problem that #ZLM had with #BLM fighting for black people in America?

#IStandWithLasizwe did not just accidentally evoke #PutSouthAfricansFirst. Having arisen in retaliation to anti-gay tweets targeting Lasizwe's show of solidarity towards #ZLM, it kindled LGBTQI+ responses. While both Lasizwe-as-SA and Lasizwe-as-Gay seemed motivated by @Mfundoyakhe_S, the latter owes more to two posts by @lasizwe, eight hours apart, where he lamented the "homophobia" he was experiencing following his support for #ZLM. These posts, the first appearing seven hours after @Mfundoyakhe_S' nationalist call to stand with Lasizwe, directly draw attention to Lasizwe's gay identity:

The homophobia I am currently experiencing from my fellow African brothers and sisters is heart breaking! We still have a long way to go for the LGBTQI community to be free in Africa! (@lasizwe at 0721 hours).⁷⁴

Yoh! I really thought this homophobic thing wasn't going to affect me but damn!... it got me hard! But I still stand with Zimbabwe! I wish for the violation of human rights in Zimbabwe to STOP and the rights of the LGBTQI+ to be treated equally! WE ARE HUMANS TOO!⁷⁵

If ever there was doubt that @lasizwe was dealing with apartheid triage, the two tweets put paid to such doubt. Attention could not be generalised. It had to follow a queue and a hierarchy. Also, not everything that mattered deserved the same attention in the same way. Not everything that mattered did so in the same way at the same time. Some matters were to be demoted into the background if others were to become prominent.

@lasizwe therefore shifted the narrative from national to sexual identity, thus fragmenting #IStandWithLasizwe into two sub-protests which can be surmised as #PutSouthAfricansFirst and #GayLivesMatter in its multiple iterations. Indeed, the Lasizwe-as-Gay component of #IStandWithLasizwe came to be expressed through hashtags such as #LGBTlivesmatter, #zimgayrights and #ZimbabweanGayLivesMatter. Even the individual, it was clear, was subject to apartheid triage! The national and the sexual could not be satisfied simultaneously. They were predisposed to the queue. We have already seen

how Lasizwe was attacked by fellow South Africans for not prioritising the national through #PutSouthAfricansFirst. It would appear that, despite the call by @Mfundoyakhe_S and the national solidarity it engendered, @lasizwe still chose sexuality over nation. His declaration was unambiguous. The “we” in “WE ARE HUMANS TOO” referred to LGBTQI+.

#IStandWithLasizwe was not a homogeneously South African campaign. While it carried elements of #PutSouthAfricansFirst driven entirely by South African proponents, its Lasizwe-as-Gay component had participants from both South Africa and Zimbabwe. The South African constituent of the campaign showed through tweets reaffirming South Africanness and a commitment to the rights of the LGBTQI+ community. Participants came out in support of Lasizwe as both South African and gay. @ZingelwayoC declared “He is our own no matter his sexual preference. I stand with #lasizwe” (sic)⁷⁶ while @MathePhinah advised “Focus on those tht love you. We dn’t hate you here at home.”⁷⁷ @GuguSeritsane added “As long as we love you here at home it doesn’t matter what others think about you.”⁷⁸ @CharlieDance18 took a more confrontational tone:

I don’t know how many times I have to tell South Africans this, there are a lot of fellow Africans who hate us with a passion. In your case, they just used your sexuality as an excuse but they hate South Africans with a passion. They only sing Pan Africanist when it benefits them.⁷⁹

In some of these tweets, Zimbabwean participants’ shows of solidarity with Lasizwe were dismissed as mere posturing on account of a 2018 survey by the Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ) which concluded that gay men and lesbians were systematic targets of physical assault, disownment and various forms of discrimination in Zimbabwe. In rebuffing the accusation that #ZLM protestors had rejected Lasizwe’s support, some protestors made counter-accusations that South Africans, @Mfundoyakhe_S in particular, were gaslighting since only three tweets had evidence of “homophobia.”

The campaign also drew out further types of Zimbabwean participants, in addition to the stereotypically “homophobic” ones. The first consists of those who, in a desire to demonstrate solidarity with South Africa, declared their support and tolerance or acceptance of Lasizwe-as-Gay. The second consists of those who unequivocally declared their support for LGBTQI+, having been suddenly afforded a platform to push their agenda to the fore. So, #IStandWithLasizwe was not a wholly South African campaign having benefited from Zimbabwean participants who had suddenly found their #ZLM threatened by a competing protest. For a protest which was already trying to negotiate the triage of “lives matter,” #IStandWithLasizwe was considered a fierce competitor and an unnecessary distraction. Here was a campaign which threatened to displace “Zimbabwean” lives and set, in its place, the lives of gay people. To address the matter, expressions of support were made by

Zimbabwean participants who, despite openly acknowledging the importance of gay lives, maintained that Zimbabwean lives mattered. This opportune support for Lasizwe either scuttled his sexual identity or made a show of indifference or tolerance. The content of most of the tweets under this category remained #ZLM despite the use of the hashtag #IStandWithLasizwe. Below I present a few examples of these tweets:

- #ZimbabweanLivesMatter #LGBTQI lives matters too I stand with you Lasizwe (sic).⁸⁰
- I stand with my #Zimbabwe. I stand with @lasizwe. I stand with the LGBTQI Community #ZimbabweanLivesMatter.⁸¹
- I am Zimbabwean and I stand with Lasizwe..#ZimbabweanlivesMatter.⁸²
- Thank you Lasizwe, because you stand with us I stand with you. #Zimbabweanslivesmatter.⁸³
- LGBTQI matters as much as ZimbabweanlivesMatter.⁸⁴

What is unique about the tweets above is their insistence on, or continued use of, the hashtag #ZimbabweanLivesMatter. Unlike the South African tweets supporting Lasizwe-as-Gay, the brand of Zimbabwean tweets did not abandon the original campaign. The campaign for gay rights was made an accessory to #ZLM. There seemed to be a realisation that #ZLM was compatible with #IStandWithLasizwe. There was no reason for one to cancel out the other. They could exist side by side as good neighbours. That is, the gay rights campaign could mutually exist alongside the Zimbabwean rights campaign as long as the former stayed in its “lane.”

“Strategic opportunism” is thus an important aspect of protest triage in some online hashtag movements. #ZLM came to a realisation that in order to remain at the front of the queue, with the support it was enjoying from South Africans, there was a need to accommodate gay rights despite the documented reality of a homophobic or anti-gay majority Zimbabwean population. The ruling ZANU PF party has been strongly vocal against homosexuality, with former President Mugabe notoriously declaring at one United Nations event: “We reject attempts to prescribe new rights that are contrary to our values, norms, traditions and beliefs. We are not gays!”⁸⁵ While the main opposition in Zimbabwe has not come out openly against homosexuality, it is conspicuous in its silence on the same. The silence on homosexuality betrays a fear of alienating the majority of the opposition supporters. We can thus conclude, on this basis, that when supporters of #ZLM began expressing their solidarity with Lasizwe-as-Gay, they were doing so opportunistically with the intention of keeping the #ZLM momentum which was suddenly under threat.

#IStandWithLasizwe received unequivocal support from some Zimbabwean participants who saw the campaign as an opportunity to push a Zimbabwean LGBTQI+ agenda. This seizure of an opportunity to campaign for Zimbabwean LGBTQI+ lives, whether in defence of Lasizwe or not, is indicative of the

internal fractures of the #ZLM protest. Indeed, this was not the only line of fracture, but it emerged as the most prominent following the campaign to stand with Lasizwe-as-Gay. The antigay tweets following Lasizwe's expression of solidarity had already revealed the internal contradictions of #ZLM. While it was argued by #ZLM proponents that the antigay tweets had been orchestrated by ZANU PF as a way of driving attention from #ZLM, the evidence that the "Zimbabwe lives" of #ZLM did not include gay lives is palpable. What began as three antigay tweets ended up being a significantly adjunct conversation about LGBTQI+ in Zimbabwe, with some interlocutors doubling down on the antigay stance with sentiments like "I stand with #ZimbabweLivesMatter but zvechingochani itai mega (leave me out of the homosexual agenda)."⁸⁶

#IStandWithLasizwe therefore magnified the contradictions of #ZLM and opened the door to discussions of LGBTQI in Zimbabwe. #ZLM, it turns out, was internally triaged against the LGBTQI community. #IStandWithLasizwe became a platform for the Zimbabwean LGBTQI agenda. For instance, @samuel_mijo affirmed: "As a Zimbabwean Gay man I stand with @lasizwe on this one. We matter #ZimbabweanLivesMatter #Zimbabweangaylivesmatter too."⁸⁷ @samuel_mijo was not alone. The LGBTQI campaign in Zimbabwe and the backlash it faces are not unique. It plays out globally in different forms. But it is always a question of "whose life matters." It is a triage issue. The protest relations that constitute what have been deemed "culture wars" demonstrate why we must be careful not to rely on the protest/counterprotest binary. The accusations from the LGBTQI, non-LGBTQI, pro-choice, pro-life and so on camps share one thing in common: whose life matters?

#IStandWithLasizwe was not a counterprotest in the traditional sense. It did not emerge in opposition to #ZLM. Rather, it became a reaffirmation of South African exceptionalism and perceived South Africanness, expressed as #PutSouthAfricansFirst and a campaign for the rights of the LGBTQI+ community in South Africa and Zimbabwe. It was a challenge to what was then considered a narrow and parochial view of lives which matter. Our problem lies in seeing these relations in "anti" form when they are practically "pro" forms in a queue. The difference is simply which is to come first. This is where the protest Olympics begin, but not in the form previously thought. The real or apparent phobia for LGBTQI, for instance, is not a fight for its own sake or an irrational drive or hatred of another. It is rather an aggressive claim of one's own place in the queue as heterosexual or religious or cultural and so on. Thus, the normative framing of notions of phobias may be misleading. No one just wakes up and decides they are going to fear or hate. The problem, rather, is how phobias are in fact indicative of apartheid disproportion. The problem is the triage system which, in seeking to address disproportion, forces human beings to queue for being. The problem is the procession and one's place in this apartheid triage.

Conclusion

The evolution of #ZimbabweanLivesMatter, as it contented not just with its own inherent fractures but also an unexpected protuberance, demonstrates the fragmented and good neighbourly character of the protest universe. These developments shed light on the contradictions, ambivalences, arbitrariness, oppositions, collaborations and solidarities evoked by #ZimbabweanLivesMatter's multiple encounters and how these reveal the interspecific nature of oppression and injustice. #ZLM evoked a set of relations with causes or campaigns with which it initially did not have prior contacts. These include #BlackLivesMatter, #IstandwithLasizwe, #Gaylivesmatter and #PutSouthAfricaFirst. Protests, despite being momentary or fleeting, do form relations or suggest relations or even evoke movement or resistance relations which are more enduring and lasting than the encounters themselves. The reason for this is that protests are conducted by actors who, themselves, are constituted by apartheid-induced relations.

Protests, it has been argued, do not only reckon with government repression or negative public opinion, but also compete with other social movements for limited resources in the form of funding, public attention, activists and media coverage. When multiple protests arise simultaneously, or close to each other, they inadvertently undermine one another and fragment protest discourse. In determining that some injustices and the campaigns they occasion should be prioritised ahead of others, apartheid renders protest good neighbourly and demoted. Instead of focusing solely on the grievance at hand, protest must, of necessity, keep watchful of competing protests which may undermine, contradict, minimise, distort or hog its efforts. Because the participants in protests are aware of apartheid's sorting and classifying, protest is inherently triaged. Protest triage, it was explained, operates on the logic of scarcity and magnifies differences among protest groups. The nature and texture of relations it evokes depend on the ROP of participants. Meanwhile, life goes on alongside protest triage.

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2 The Fragmented Cycle of Protest

Introduction

When does protest fragmentation begin and can it be avoided? From the cases presented here, there appears to be no protest movement which has successfully and absolutely avoided internal fragmentation. The suggestion is that fragmentation is inherent to protest. If, suppose, this is true, why do we get surprised or shocked when individuals abandon protest, sell out or change strategies during protest? Is that also not inevitable? This chapter examines how the individual protest is subject to fragmentation. To demonstrate that fragmentation is foundational to protest, it firstly looks at the composition of what is commonly referred to as “online” or “digital” protest, which is best understood as hybrid protest. To show that fragmentation exists from the outset, the chapter therefore examines how contemporary protest, particularly in its online iteration, is oriented towards the offline, thus presenting itself in two parts and characterised by a fundamental duality. Secondly, the individual protest is an assemblage of fragments, each shaped by distinct and peculiar household experiences or conditions that govern levels of protest engagement, mood swings and attitudes. #ThisFlag, a Zimbabwean “online” or “digital” protest, is used to demonstrate both the hybridity of contemporary protest and pre-existent fragmentation rooted in the intraspecific, individualised, experiences of actors.

In the Beginning Was the Fragment

In the very beginning, apartheid engineers the fragment. Humanity, apartheid finds, is a profusion of phenotypically diverse individuals whose variations can be exploited in the allocation of finite resources. Human beings, ever expanding, can be divided or set apart, one group from another and ranked the same way tomatoes are graded on a stall according to size, shape, colour, firmness and overall quality to determine their aptness for different markets or uses. That is, human beings, thus sorted and separated, can be organised in a service queue where they will be allocated resources *pro rata*. For the majority of people, bunched together, set apart, ranked lowest or placed at the crowded rear where human service is practically in short supply, life becomes a day-to-day, minute-to-minute and second-to-second scramble. Here, following

initial fragmentation, society explodes into smithereens of tall, short, plump, bald, white, black, female, male, talkative, introvert, married, childless, single, orphaned, unemployed, managerial, illiterate, degreed, homeless and so on, human beings as individuals seek to leverage existing or newly found distinctiveness in the scramble for life. In these smithereens lie the Rate of Oppression (ROp).

In dealing with fragments, apartheid conserves energy, having no need for the aggregate dominance of whole societies or individuals. Colonialism can lay claim to a colony but cannot exercise absolute domination or totalising control. It does not need to. This reality is acknowledged in postcolonial literature where it is contended that colonialism is constantly confronted by fragments, pockets and zones of resistance through culture, terrain, spirituality, local governance and so on.¹ Control is always fragmented. The fact that victims can protest is proof that victims can create and enjoy “pockets of non-cooperation.”¹ They do not necessarily have to go outside the colony to protest. Concomitant action and reaction can occupy the same space. In any event, colonisers are always disproportionately fewer than the colonised: “the people with power are fewer than those that they dominate. There are *always* more *bata*.”² Apartheid works with human beings in a queue, to be hurting or harming them, each in a special way distinct from their neighbour. Thus, concomitant action is neatly segmented so that it is never identical in its application or in the way it is experienced by the oppressed. Even the individual, so divided into several fragments, does not undergo the experience of complete oppression. Apartheid claims the individual in parts and therefore leaves sufficient room to create the sense that life may not be that bad after all or that life can go on anyway. Sometimes all apartheid wants are the hands that carry David Livingstone for an hour or so and nothing more. The free-range chicken, even when claimed by a farmer, will go everywhere as if it were independent, but we know that it belongs to the farmer who, in good time, will dispose of it. What matters to apartheid is that when it requires any part of the individual, that part complies. It is in these “life is not bad after all” spaces of joy, sharing a joke, being with friends, self-indulgence, going on holiday and so on, where the individual replenishes and returns to the very place of harm.

The fragment, then, is the foundational module of apartheid. It is right there in the beginning, like the Biblical word,³ pre-existent and predominant. There is no apartheid without the fragment. Is apartheid not an apparatus of fragments? Is it not the one which commands, “let there be fragments?”

1 Benita Parry, “Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse,” *Oxford Literary Review* 9, no. 1/2 (1987): 27–58. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43973680>; Jelle Jongerden, “Colonialism, Self-Determination and Independence: The New PKK Paradigm,” in *Kurdish Issues: Essays in Honor of Robert W. Olson*, ed. Michael M. Gunter (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2016), 117–38; Sean Chabot and Stellan Vinthagen, “Decolonizing Civil Resistance,” *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (2015): 517–32, <https://doi.org/10.17813/1086-671X-20-4-517>.

Apartheid is the system of breaking things apart. It divides societies, families, self, space and time into distinct parts such that any reaction must proceed from the point of fragmentation. There is no good neighbourliness without the fragment. Good neighbourliness exists precisely because society is divided into constituent parts, which must subsequently persist side by side in the absence of crisis. As we will see in the chapters which follow, the fragment serves to organise time into distinct parts which the victims of apartheid must subscribe to always and is the basis upon which space is systematically ordered.

The individual under a state of apartheid is a fraction and the involuntary embodiment of fragmented needs, dreams, wants and desires. What the divided individual wants or needs are, all the time and in all places, small, distinctive parts of an indeterminable whole. In pursuing or expressing their needs, individuals are betraying their ROP. We get a glimpse of the datum of their household situations, what Mboti calls *household expenditure*: “We eat. We shit. We rest. We work. We fuck. The household is the site where apartheid literally launders itself, concealed in localised, every day harm-absorbing demotions and the Rate of Oppression (ROP).”⁴ I am reminded of how, as children, we were not allowed to share information about the inner goings-on in our household. You were supposed to be vague or hide the true causes of the mysterious illness at home, parental arguments, the plans for holiday travel or the new furniture, the visitors, the lack of food and the financial struggles and so on. It was taboo. *Kufumuka*: the exposing of that which was not to be exposed. Protest showcases *kufumuka*. We get to encounter bits and pieces of protestors’ household experiences. We learn about one individual’s inability to pay medical bills, another’s employment status, another’s low paying job and so on. It is when people express themselves, when they react to apartheid, that we are able to sketch a fragmentary profile of them. As a result, the assembly of protestors is a parade of diverse rates of oppression. Protest, then, is implicated in fragmentation from the onset, being constituted by human beings who are constrained by and must constantly negotiate their various Rates of Oppression from time to time.

Protest therefore begins with the individual set apart from others. It is the individual who, at the very beginning, must react to concomitant action. Whether a protest will take off or not depends on the ability to project the pre-existent fragment as global. That is, would-be activists or protest leaders must of necessity universalise their fragmented household experience by framing it in ways that resonate with others’ fragments. Would-be protestors must be able to see their fragments in another’s. When that happens, we encounter the collaborative reaction that we ordinarily refer to as protest. Protest does not begin with solidarity or unity. Neither does it fragment during the course or at the end of protest. In the very beginning, protest is fragmented. Individuals join protest already saturated and interpellated by apartheid as unemployed, workers, homeless, childless, illiterate and so on. Their relationships to the basic necessities of life such as food, transport, utilities, school fees, medicine

and so on are thus personal and varied. Apartheid lays claim to all points of distinctiveness and difference, not at once, but in sequence and cycles such that the individual is subject to:

The constant tracking, negotiation and renegotiation of [their] own Rate of Oppression (ROp) from time to time, day to day, hour to hour, minute to minute, place to place, issue to issue, circumstance to circumstance.⁵

In one situation, one must be a pastor preaching to a congregation about Jesus. As they descend the pulpit and depart the church, they enter another circuit: they must become a fare-paying passenger in a commuter taxi or a petrol-pump-paying motorist driving home in traffic and navigating potholes or police roadblocks. At home, they become a father reading a newspaper, mowing the lawn, going through bills and expenses, learning that the sugar or bread is finished, negotiating rent with the landlord, or arguing or commiserating with a neighbour over the fence. When schools open and school fees are demanded, they not only remain a father but also a citizen suddenly unable to pay fees. Normatively, we tend to regard these as aspects of everyday identities. In Apartheid Studies, however, these are the circuitry of Rates of Oppression since in each circuit the individual constantly adjusts their “price” or “rate” – which is the sum of what a person puts up with in daily existence so that life goes on.

Evan Mawarire, a Zimbabwean pastor, recorded and published a video in April 2016, venting his frustrations at the situation he personally faced regarding the inability to pay school fees for his children. This set in motion what came to be known as the #ThisFlag movement, a Zimbabwean digital protest, with offline aspects, waged putatively against government corruption, economic collapse and poor governance.⁶ We will see that abstract concepts such as “corruption,” “economic collapse” and “poor governance” are only relevant to the extent that they can be translated to household expenditure. The real indicator of “how” any struggle is waged is the household or home where, as proverbially said, the heart is. In the household is where lie Armah’s “the loved ones”⁷ who symbolise the material and emotional ties that often determine *bata*’s reaction to apartheid or where the individual confronts the expenses that embody his entire existence: food, water, school fees, hospital bills, electricity, transport and so on. Mawarire’s tweets of this period and the conversations they occasioned demonstrate how fragmentation pre-exists protest and how the negotiation and renegotiation of the ROp, showing its ugly face through difference and individuals’ diverse relations to household expenditure, fuels the evolution of a protest from its beginnings to the end.

#ThisFlag took place in 2016 towards the end of Robert Mugabe’s thirty-seven-year reign. At the time, Zimbabwe was experiencing yet another round

of economic decline and growing public frustration attributed to corruption and illegal Western sanctions by opposition players and government, respectively. High unemployment, unpaid civil servants and cash shortages created widespread anger. Citizens had little faith in political parties, the main opposition MDC-T having lost the plebiscite in 2013 and struggling with factionalism, making non-political activism appealing. It was under these conditions that on April 19, 2016, Mawarire recorded a passionate video message, expressing frustration over Zimbabwe's decline.⁸ Draped in the Zimbabwean flag, he spoke about how the flag no longer represented pride, but suffering. Highlighting and explaining each colour on the flag and expressing his disillusionment, Mawarire appealed to the moral sensibilities of his audience, ensuring that his message resonated with the average frustrated Zimbabwean.⁹ Mawarire's speech goes thus:

This flag. This beautiful flag. They tell that the Green is for the vegetation and for the crops. I don't see any crops in my country.

Hanzi the Yellow is for all the minerals, *goridhe*, diamond, platinum, chrome. I don't know how much of it is left. I don't know who they sold it to and how much they got for it.

The Red, they say that is the blood, the blood that was shed to secure freedom for me. And I'm so thankful for that. I just don't know that if they were here they that shed their blood and saw the way that the country is, that they wouldn't demand that their blood be brought back

This flag. They tell me that the black is for the majority. People like me. And yet for some reason I don't feel like I am a part of it. I look at it sometimes and I wonder: Is this a story of my future? Or is just a reminder of a sad past.

Wherever I go and I put on the colours of Zimbabwe they look at me and as if they want to laugh they ask. "Are you from Zimbabwe?" *Vachiseka*.

And sometimes when I look at the flag, it's not a reminder of my pride and inspiration. It feels as if I just want to belong to another country.

This flag. And so, I must look at it again with courage and try to remind myself that it is my country. I look at the Green and think to myself: It is not just vegetation but the green represents the power of being able to push through soil, to push past limitations and flourish and grow. That's me. My flag.

The Yellow yes is about the minerals but not just the minerals that are in the ground, but the minerals above it. You, me, we are the minerals, we are the value of this land

The Red. Yes, it's blood, but not just blood. It's passionate blood, it is the will survive, it is the resolve to carry on, it is the want to push through to see the dreams come to pass.

This flag. And the Black. The Black is the night sky, yhat which we emerge from and we shine. It is the brilliant colours. It is the wonderful and lovely fruition of everything that we have ever hoped for. It needs a black for it to be visible

This flag. It is my country, my Zimbabwe. We go through so much. We don't look like much even now but there is promise in it. I will fight for it. I will live for it and I will stand for it

This is the time that a change must happen. Quit standing on the sidelines and watching this flag fly and wishing for a future that you are not at all wanting to get involved in.

This flag. Every day that it flies it's begging for you to get involved, it's begging for you to say something, it's begging for you to cry out and say why must we be in the situation that we are in. This flag, it's your flag, it's my flag. This flag.

Mawarire ended the monologue with the hashtag #ThisFlag, urging Zimbabweans to share their grievances. Within hours, thousands of Zimbabweans shared the video, starting a national conversation.¹⁰ #ThisFlag quickly transformed from one man's frustration to collective online activism.

Unlike traditional protest leaders, Mawarire's leadership seemed spontaneous, emerging from an emotional outcry, a whim even: "[#ThisFlag] started as a fad. And that's just what it was. It just was, hey, let's do something on social media that's gonna be fun."¹¹ While Mawarire was the most visible figure, several activists, journalists and influencers helped in shaping the movement's identity, message and direction. During the early phase, several leaders and activists emerged and helped transform #ThisFlag from a personal frustration into a national conversation. A human rights lawyer, Fadzayi Mahere, would benefit from her participation in the protest movement to launch a political career as an independent Local Government candidate and, later, spokesperson for the opposition Movement for Democratic Change Alliance (MDCA) and its successor Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC).¹² Acie Lumumba, former ZANU-PF youth leader turned activist, was outspoken during the early phases of #ThisFlag; Pastor Ewan McMillan urged Christian communities to get involved in activism and diaspora activists engaged with international news outlets, ensuring that global eyes remained on Zimbabwe.

The erstwhile US Ambassador, Harry Thomas, added his voice to the protest by tweeting "wonder if #Zimbabwe's #thisflag movement will spread to the US and other nations,"¹³ raising suspicions that Mawarire and #ThisFlag were sponsored by the West to destabilise Zimbabwe and cause the unconstitutional removal of Mugabe's government.¹⁴ On his acquittal, following his arrest in July 2016, Mawarire fled into exile in the US. With Mawarire in exile, #ThisFlag lost momentum and eventually fizzled out. It is this period, from the July Shutdown to exile and the eventual decline, that is usually associated with #ThisFlag's fragmentation. Here I examine the movement by taking

protest apart to see it, not as a complete episode, but as temporal and spatial fragments inexorably linked to the Rate of Oppression and how life goes on.

The Duality of #ThisFlag

This flag was a hybrid protest movement in the tradition of most contemporary protests with a digital footprint. While there exists online-only protest such as #Kony2012, which sought to raise awareness about the Ugandan warlord, and #LasMorras, a fully feminist digital expression from Latin America, the majority of protests today can no longer escape hybridity. But what characterises these hybrid compositions? To study online protest is to study a protest fragment. The current misnomer “online protest” or “digital protest” exists in reference to protests which combine online and offline footprints, especially in cases where the online is perceived as predominant. #ThisFlag illustrates the fragmented cycle of hybrid protests as they seek to balance and negotiate their two faces. It provides clear evidence of protest fragmentation and how this fragmentation pre-exists protest. The originary split between online and offline activism is taken as a matter of fact. Such fragmentation is considered the natural course of protest. In fact, people bemoan the absence of an offline fragment or encourage the use of digital tools to speed up and amplify the offline protests.

Studies of the relationship between online and offline activism are mixed and variegated. They generally take the form of social media evaluations, debating the significance of online activism in specific or general contexts. Following Gladwell’s dismissal of social media activism as “weak” and illegitimate,¹⁵ some studies downplay the utility of online activism as a democratisation tool.¹⁶ Considered “techno-pessimist,” these studies argue that social media activism’s power is enormously exaggerated¹⁷ and that online protests do not produce meaningful results. Social media is associated with millennials, considered “the lazy generation,” whose primary pursuit is the attainment of popularity and the narcissistic desire for personal online identities with little bearing on the political.¹⁸ Concepts like “slacktivism” are used to demonstrate the problematic reliance on social media as an agent of change.¹⁹ Meanwhile, other scholars acknowledge the benefits of social media to activism in Africa.²⁰ A distinction is made between “awareness and advocacy-oriented activism and mobilization focused activism”²¹ to explain the contradictory outcomes of online protests.

Mercea emphasises “the entwinement of online communication and offline participation in protest events,”²² while Summer describes online activism as a precursor of offline activism, without which offline actions would be of little or no impact.²³ Porta and Mosca go as far as suggesting that “online activism can replace offline activism, thus becoming just a simulacrum of real protest.”²⁴ The convergence of online and offline activism and how they mirror each other is duly emphasised.²⁵ The 2011 Arab Spring in North Africa, which is usually cited in debates about online and offline activism, is a clear

case. Undeniably, social media provided the organisational impetus that set protests which overthrew governments in North Africa in motion.²⁶ The protests even came to be referred to as “Twitter and Facebook revolutions” in recognition of the unique appropriation of social media to offline actions.²⁷ Chitanana reveals that online activism mobilised #ThisFlag protestors and provided an alternative political space, but failed to fully transition towards and sustain, offline action.²⁸ The reasons for this included the failure to breach the digital urban/rural divide.²⁹ The movement was seen as elitist, restricted to the urban middle class with access to technology and divorced the masses and opposition players who had capacity to organise mass offline campaigns.³⁰ Government also moved in to repress offline activists through arrests and countered digital dissent with internet blackouts and censorship.³¹ The absence of long-term offline organisation³² and the exclusion of opposition players who had capacity to organise mass offline campaigns³³ also made offline activism unsustainable.

The debate on what role online or offline activism plays must start by recognising the dual nature of protest and that the existence of one fragment does not preclude the existence of the other. The two are symbiotic and tend to individually and jointly affect the outcome of protest. The fragments have a good neighbourly relation. While the partial nature of online protest is presented as a matter of fact,³⁴ there is no corresponding regard for the offline protest, with an online footprint, as equally fractional. It is taken for granted, especially on account of past traditional protests and techno-pessimist literature, that offline activism is complete in and of itself and does not need social media. Whether true or false, contemporary protest is increasingly dual and the continued debate on which component is more important is unnecessarily superfluous and not worth posing after every protest episode.³⁵

#ThisFlag existed as a two-legged protest, bearing online and offline footprints. The online/offline fragmentation of #ThisFlag was dramatised in the tweet “In solidarity, my virtual self shall also stand alongside out (sic) nation’s glory, the Zimbabwe National Flag. #ThisFlag.”³⁶ The qualification “virtual” signals partiality. The virtual self is an extract, derived from an assumed complete “my.” This incompleteness, reminiscent of the individual separated from others in ubuntu discourse, is nevertheless projected as effective. The non-virtual other, not mentioned in the tweet, is no impediment to one’s participation. Several tweets actually conveyed the belief in social media as a revolutionary tool, emphasising that digital activism alone could achieve desired protest results. For instance, constant tweeting and post sharing were depicted as necessary and rewarding efforts in Mawarire’s encouragement: “C’mon Zimboz I need lotsa selfies with yo ZimFlag. post it with #ThisFlag we gotta push this & do smtg amazing.”³⁷ The mood and attitude are maintained in the celebratory tweet “Yikes! it crossed 100k views & 2.2k shares! #ThisFlag livesAgain4real. KeepSharing & posting #ThisFlag”³⁸ a few days later. The charge and celebration suggested an urgency for virality and a sense of duty towards online activism. The lack of visible change was attributed to

low traffic or low volume of protest tweets. Retweets, likes and video sharing were the staple of the virality agenda. This resonated with diasporans and those who feared government repression in the streets, who participated only digitally, by sharing tweets, posting videos and engaging in online discussions.

The idea of a self-sufficient online protest was offset through demands for street protests. The most cynical participants cast doubt on the attempts to “fix Zimbabwe by buying flags then posting pics with hashtags.”³⁹ The calls for “more noise on the streets than on social media”⁴⁰ reflected a broader critique of so-called “slacktivism,” where people engage in online activism but do not take part in real-world activities that carry higher risks and responsibilities. However, it also aligned with the general view of online activism as partial and, therefore, ineffective. Online activism is not complete in and of itself but is fragmentary and, like *munhu* at the beginning of apartheid, needs to be qualified, in this case, by physical action. The online fragment was therefore a battleground where the fault lines between the online and offline divide were made evident. Polarised tweets and contentious messages reflected the divisions that characterised #ThisFlag as it sought to transition from a predominantly online character to the offline space. There is a sense that the transition was supposed to be wholesome, with the entirety of online activism “moving” offline, the same way a group of protestors at place X would move to place Y. The call to take #ThisFlag to the offline space suggested a need for political organisation, leadership or a structured plan. The wholesale transition, implied in tweets, would have meant the end or expansion of #ThisFlag’s online fragment. In fact, such a view which sees protest as unitary and moving as a monolith is consistent with the monologic impetus of protest discussed in the next chapter.

Social media played a crucial role in documenting the emergence and progress of offline protests from the time participants heeded Mawarire’s invitation to carry the Zimbabwean flag wherever they were and post visuals on social media, to the shutdown protest of July 6, 2016. Social media served to galvanise participants by showing the “success” of offline actions against the government’s attempts to downplay the shutdown. By pushing back against government propaganda through social media, protestors reinforced their belief in the movement. Tweets held a mirror towards offline #ThisFlag activities. Details about #ThisFlag having “demystified police today at Fife Avenue”⁴¹ and reports of trucks filled with riot police along Nelson Mandela Avenue⁴² point to physical and confrontational street protest. In this regard, the online leg of #ThisFlag alludes to offline activism which, as it turns out, is split across various locations (Fife Avenue and Nelson Mandela Avenue). This brings to the spotlight how offline activism, like its online counterpart, is subject to further fragmentation. We see this spatial fragmentation and how it then feeds into differences among protestors owing to their group area placement in Chapter 3.

The online component therefore played a dual role of raising awareness/amplifying the message about offline activism while shedding light on and

acting as a mirror of #ThisFlag. Online activism further assimilated these offline fragments and, through the hashtag, connected them to each other and to the broader national struggle. In the absence of this role, some fragments would be forever lost to the protest episode. They would be like missing scenes of a television episode. The ability to instantly share updates reinforced the effectiveness of online activism. Seeing real-world results boosted morale and encouraged continued participation. While social media was instrumental in mobilising people, offline actions amplified and legitimised digital discourse. Protest images validated online narratives, making activism more credible. Social media allowed powerful visuals to reach thousands, reinforcing the momentum of the protest. Unlike traditional media, social media enabled real-time coordination and updates. Evidence of repression was crowdsourced via social media. Videos of repression often went viral, drawing global criticism of Zimbabwe's government. Online platforms quickly spread information about planned shutdowns, boycotts and protests. Hashtags like #ShutdownZim became synonymous with offline resistance. During the peak phase of #ThisFlag, there was, therefore, a dynamic interplay between online and offline activism. This phase demonstrated how digital platforms facilitated mobilisation, awareness and coordination, while offline protests validated online discourse through direct action.

Government response to the #ThisFlag was equally fragmented. To deal with online activism, the government attempted internet shutdowns, arrests of social media users and online surveillance. Pro-government accounts pushed an anti-protest discourse to disrupt the #ThisFlag narrative. This included the cultivation of a #OurFlag hashtag which served as a "counterprotest". Offline repression took the form of arrests of activists, beatings and intimidation of protest leaders. There was a deployment of riot police and military to stop street protests. The government used digital censorship for online activists and physical brutality for offline protestors, deepening the disconnect between the two groups. Offline protestors complained that online protestors faced less risks because they did not have to physically confront or encounter resistance or danger.

The Moving Parts of Protest

Fragmentation begins with apartheid, not protest. It is not a latter occurrence of protest. Rather, it pre-exists the protest, its contours only becoming more glaring as the protest develops. Protest is just one of the arenas through which apartheid's fragments are expressed. As soon as the fragment comes into contact with others, protest as we know it begins. It is set into motion. People do not emerge at the commencement of protest as a class or group. It cannot happen. The group or class associated with protest is a function of the monologic impetus of protest, that is, protest's enforcement of cohesion, unity and the single voice. Even when apartheid classifies and sorts individuals into groups, it ensures that their experiences of harm remain customised. So, at the very

beginning, protest is already fragmented. All the people who join, at whatever phase of the protest, are partial or subjective in their needs, desires and wants. They are invested in their rates of oppression and therefore react accordingly.

Protest is not one long, unbroken monolith. It is not the group performance of a monolithic act, from start to finish, in one place, for a monolithic cause. Rather, it is phased, divided as its participants are divided and moving as the participants track, negotiate and renegotiate their rates of oppression. Protest moves in accordance with the rates. That is, how they interact, how they are negotiated and how they are leveraged. The fluctuations, the oscillations, the interactions, the exchanges in ROp are what propels the protest, determining its texture, its form and its trajectory. #ThisFlag owed much to Evan Mawarire's fluctuations and oscillations as he confronted the changes in his circumstances. As he moved, so did protest. Human beings are what makes a protest. They are its essential parts. Protest is an assemblage of actors, thoughts, actions, behaviours, utterances and agendas betraying a profusion of rates of oppression or household experiences. We can only see it by knitting together its fragments so that in the end we are able to say therein lies such and such a protest that was waged by such and such a group against such and such a target for such and such a cause. Even then, it is impossible to assemble all the protest fragments in one place because of the multiplicity and diversity of voices, acts and behaviours that constitute a reaction to adverse action. This difficulty is what the protest hashtag, the unit of online protest, tries to address.

Further, despite the multiplicity, several experiences remain inaccessible, hidden or concealed by the individual participant. What we know or what we have access to is always little compared to what we do not know. The ROp is passcode protected. Only the individual knows and has access to their ROp. So, like apartheid's Scene II, we do not have ready access to the underlying movements occasioned by the ROp. What we see is the vehicle moving, but not its constituent parts. At the time of joining a protest, at any other time of protest and beyond, the individual is always the embodiment of fragments in motion. The ROp is not static. It is always on the move, constantly responding to signals, the same way monetary currency responds to internal and external events such as the election of a new president, war, the resignation of a Minister, the printing of notes and so on. As the ROp moves so do the fragments or parts of protest. During the protest, what we observe is not fragmentation but the movements, the exchange and oscillations of the ROp as apartheid's victims move, respond and readjust to concomitant action. In other times, fragmentation is latent because nothing is introduced to bring it to the surface. Sometimes, all it takes is an arrest, a court appearance, the birth of a child, a statement by the government, deployment of the police or exile.

Like apartheid, protest can only be experienced in fragments. Apartheid does not present itself and act as, or upon, a monolith. Apartheid breaks society, space and time into fragments. Likewise, protest is phased and partial both

in terms of expression and observation. Social movements evolve through a series of stages, which scholars have sought to define in order to understand how collective action emerges, develops and declines. One of the most widely accepted models is the four-stage theory developed by sociologist Herbert Blumer⁴³ and later refined by Charles Tilly⁴⁴ and Sidney Tarrow.⁴⁵ These stages – emergence, coalescence, bureaucratisation and decline – provide a framework for analysing movements from their inception to their potential success or decline.⁴⁶ The four-stage model, though most suited for traditional protest movements, is useful in not only showing how protests evolve and interact with political and societal structures, but also reflects the negotiations and renegotiations of participants' ROp. Alternative frameworks to explain the evolution of social movements and protests include the resource mobilisation model, which links the availability of resources such as money, networks, media support and leadership; the political opportunity model which asserts that movements emerge when political opportunities create space for activism; and the new social movement theory which focuses on social movements' preoccupation with questions of identity, culture and post-materialism. Nevertheless, the stages of protest are proof that participants are not going in the same direction at the same time. Some need to be convinced to turn towards specific directions. The very fact that protest does not begin with mass mobilisation, with protestors spontaneously involved from the onset and at the same time, demonstrates to us that protest begins from a point of fragmentation and ends at the point of fragmentation. Rates must be mobilised. They must be made to converge somehow.

Tweets of the coalescence stage, marking the peak phase of #ThisFlag, reflect several points of convergence and fault-lines representing pre-existing fragments. They refer to medical bills, poor salaries, the cost of basic foodstuffs and unemployment. Each grievance represents a fragment, pre-existing protest, which propelled the movement forward. Economic hardship was the most unifying and emotionally charged theme in #ThisFlag tweets. Participants complained about unemployment, delayed civil servant salaries, absence of necessities in government hospitals and the decline of the education sector. These grievances were juxtaposed with the flamboyant and privileged lives of politicians who could afford to “send their kids outside the country or to private schools,”⁴⁷ get treatment in foreign hospitals and afford to go on holidays despite the economic challenges.⁴⁸

Others' pre-existing fragments are reflected in the following tweets: “Have an aunt at home dying from breast cancer, no medicine, no pain killers no counselling, no help from anywhere whatsoever! #ThisFlag,” “We are unemployed graduates with a bleak future”⁴⁹ and “I had and i still have dreams of going back home.”⁵⁰ What we see from the varied tweets is the multiplicity of ROps that coalesced around the #ThisFlag hashtag. An aunt suffering from breast cancer, unemployment after school and exile are experiences of harm, existing prior to the commencement of protest. They represent fragments

which we only learn of during the protest. They are fragments because they each represent a fractional experience of apartheid and exist alongside each other. While they reveal a common frustration with “economic mismanagement,” they indicate the mass and diversity of household concerns which constituted #ThisFlag. The protest even becomes an opportunity for immediate gains, as observed by @KudakwasheChits, who observes, after buying a flag in solidarity with #ThisFlag: “The vendors are making money, there is more than one benefit to the #ThisFlag movement!”⁵¹ Apartheid does not withhold the same things from all people at the same time. It denies food from one, school fees from another and employment from a third such that when individuals assemble to protest even under the one banner, they constitute a heterogeneous parade of ROPs.

As the movement grew, disagreements emerged. The easy part is to agree that the problem is economic and display a multitude of economic grievances. It proved quite complex to decide how to express each grievance in a way that made every Zimbabwean want to leave everything that they were doing and join the protest. Most people agreed that the grievances were genuine but without ever rising beyond expressions of sympathy and symbolic solidarity through reposting the hashtag. Different groups and individuals interpreted the movement’s goals in their own way. As already observed in the discussion of the online/offline fragments, some saw #ThisFlag as a purely symbolic protest while others pushed for direct political action. Splits also emerged between those who preferred collaboration with political opposition parties which had been fighting ZANU-PF for years and those who were sceptical. Alliances were seen to amplify impact while political involvement was seen as carrying the potential to dilute the movement’s authenticity. This fed into demands, by some protestors, for political change with several tweets directly criticising the Zimbabwean government and pushing for the deposition of President Robert Mugabe.

These discernible shifts from economic grievances to demands for political change – which the authorities immediately regarded as clamouring for regime change – represent a different iteration of the ROP. The fact that divisions emerge and shift as the aims of #ThisFlag shift affirms the profusion of ROPs and the constant negotiations and renegotiations they demand. The expansion meant those who were primarily driven by economic motives, which resonated at the start, had to contend with those who had primarily political motives. The interaction and collision of these rates meant the internal reconfiguration of the movement. Its shape, character and trajectory changed. This does not mean that those who had economic motives also did not have political vendettas and vice versa, or that the economic is not political and so on. It merely affirms that, at a given time, a person is able to foreground certain interests while others are demoted, leading to a momentary fracturing of solidarity in a movement that seems to have broad agreement.

Thus, as the protest expanded in its aims to the offline space, so did the strategy divide between direct street protest and passive resistance. Some activists believed that economic shutdowns were the best way to protest without violence, while others sought street confrontation. These differences accentuated questions around the leadership of the movement with some activists rejecting Mawarire's centralised leadership. Disagreement emerged over whether #ThisFlag should remain a grassroots campaign or be structured under a single leader. The push for a decentralised approach was accompanied by declarations such as “#thisflag is for everyone its not [Mawarire]'s alone its for us.”⁵² On the surface, such declarations and demands reflect mere choices and even “tribal” political party affiliations. In a deeper sense, however, the divisions are already shifting and unstable, meaning that even people belonging to the same political party can still fall victim to these divisions and individuals can face doubts about what to do. This is because of the ROPs and the apartheid triage discussed earlier. Once there are suspicions that the existing structure is not aligned with one's ROP, or that life will not go on in a certain way, or may not go on at all, squabbles about strategy and changes in approach or leadership increase.

It is during the peak and decline phases of #ThisFlag and protests in general that most fragmentation is generally situated and manifested. This is consistent with the tendency to treat fragmentation and decline in interest and attention similarly as both negative outcomes of protests. Resultantly, fragmentation rarely figures in discussions where protests are regarded as successful. Fragmentation, rather, is synonymous with the failure of a protest. Hence, some models associate it with the terminal point in a protest's life, having been conspicuously absent in the beginning. The emergence and mass mobilisation phases of protest are therefore set against the “decline” phase with the first two representing “initial success” and the latter representing “fragmentation” (read failure). The reasons given for #ThisFlag's fragmentation all belong to these latter stages. These include government repression and internet censorship,⁵³ lack of organisational structure and leadership⁵⁴ ideological and strategic differences,⁵⁵ and the use of social media considered to encourage factionalism.⁵⁶ Yet, government repression does not, on its own, fragment protests. Rather, it is parasitic: it exploits, manipulates and widens already existing fissures.

Arrests succeed as a deterrent because those who calculate that they have other “more urgent” things to do at that stage or cannot “afford” to be detained “at this moment” or have a criminal record for fear of losing their jobs, sponsorships or families, withdraw or go into hiding. Protestors will not present themselves for arrest in the same way that Africans did under the leadership of Sobukwe and the Pan-African Congress (PAC) in 1960 when PAC called on supporters to present themselves at police stations countrywide, without their passes and make themselves available for arrest. PAC's idea was to overwhelm the police and the jails to bring the primitive apartheid economy

to a standstill. These protests are remembered for the Sharpeville massacre, which occurred on March 21, 1960, when police opened fire on a crowd assembled outside the police station in the township of Sharpeville. Even then, not all oppressed Africans in Sharpeville or Langa participated in the protest. Intimidation is successful because it inflicts different rates of oppression, sharpening differences and tensions and bringing them to a boil. Hence the splits in movements. Interestingly, it is oppression which induces life to go on the basis of “rates.” Co-option, selling out, betrayal and abandonment are all manifestations of individuals’ investments in their rates of oppression. Apartheid knows that its victims, whom it denies human service such that they constantly deal with deprivation, are susceptible to a constantly fluctuating “rate” exchange. By targeting the ROp at the right price, that is, by invoicing the cost of oppression at different rates, the individual may be induced to abstain from Sharpeville or to change direction during protest.

The Individual Protestor’s Fragments

Apartheid induces a state of *munhu munhu navamwe* (a person is a person with others). The human being is cut off from others at the onset. By the time he or she encounters “the others,” they are already walled in by different rates of oppression. The protest action thus becomes a negotiation in these rates. #ThisFlag started with one man, a fragment, set apart from the rest. It was this one individual leveraging a fraction of his household condition who “started it all.” His individual sufferings resonated with a mass of other individual sufferings, leading to the potential for mass mobilisation and, ultimately, potential revolution. That protests fail is because the mass suffering fails to mask the differences in the rate at which the individual suffers. Solidarity merely publicly masks the fissures. Many protests are catalysed by the actions of a single individual, but always resonate with collective frustration and grievance. For example, Rosa Parks refusing to give up her seat in the bus to a white passenger, inspired a the civil rights movement in America; Mohamed Bouazizi, the Tunisian street vendor who set himself on fire, after police humiliation and confiscation of his cart, sparked nationwide protests that reverberated across the Middle East and North Africa; Colin Kaepernick kneeling during the US national anthem to protest police brutality sparked global activism around racial injustice and Chumani Maxwele throwing human excrement at the statue of Cecil Rhodes, galvanised a student-led campaign, #RhodesMustFall, demanding the removal of the statue and the broader protest against institutional racism. That “individuals” choose to “start” a protest against grievances that many others are already feeling but not openly protesting about means that the beginnings of protests can be conveniently “staged” and choreographed for effect. That is, virtually all protests are contrived. This does not mean that protests are not rooted in popular grievance. It merely points to the performative nature of specific forms of protest.

#ThisFlag ostensibly started with Mawarire “staging” the fact that he was unable to pay school fees for his children and venting his frustrations online. This does not mean that he was faking that he could not pay his children’s school fees. Rather, it merely indicates that he could collectivise his individual frustrations. We saw a repeat of this staging in mid-2024 when Zimbabwean former veteran Blessed Geza appeared in an interview demanding a ministerial appointment, a big car and bodyguards: “I want to be rewarded [...] not to be used like a political condom all the time.”⁵⁷ Though his narrative shifted between the personal and the collective during the same interview, it was clear that personal grievances lay at the heart of his protest. By early 2025, however, those grievances had been recast as a broader outcry over the neglect of war veterans, state corruption, and government incompetence, culminating in what became the ill-fated 31 March 2025 “Geza Revolution.” The movement ultimately centred on a single figure, Blessing Geza, who conceded, “We cannot all be angry at the same time. The leader is the one who gives guidance,”⁵⁸ implying that collective anger is not spontaneous but must be channelled or deliberately cultivated under the leader’s direction.

In the case of #ThisFlag, not all parents who were struggling to pay school fees thought of going the overt protest route. It was Mawarire who did. In the end, not all parents who were struggling to pay school fees even joined the protest. It was Mawarire and some others who participated in the protest – and even this participation proved to be intrinsically fragmented. School fees were the original fragment, certainly among numerous others, which triggered his actions on the day he went live on social media. If unpopular ZANU-PF rule was an elephant, then the only way to eat it was one bite at a time. School fees were that bite. Everything else was subject to demotion. Demotion is our way of juggling multiple harms so that life can continue as if we had everything under control. It is not pain suppression or deflection. It operates by organising problems in order of the most urgent: “Essentially, we put our problems in a queue for socio-economic reasons, so that we do not attend to what we deem to be the least urgent issues before the most urgent ones.”⁵⁹ Demotion therefore works with fragments of the individual’s household experience.

But because not all those who were struggling to pay school fees had reacted with protest the way he did, it means that it was Mawarire’s “rate” that drove him to vent *when* and in the manner he did. Such “experience” cannot be generalised. In an interview with the *Daily Maverick*, Mawarire explained: “The day it happened was a really tough day for me. I was thinking of ways I could get more money for school fees, or I could borrow money, but it just wasn’t happening.”⁶⁰ “Alone” with his problem, just as millions of other Zimbabweans were alone with theirs, Mawarire then sought the others who could affirm what he was going through, doing so by recording and sharing a video venting his frustrations. The affirming others, disparate individuals, who had their own household budgets and expenses to contend with, still did not and could not join blindly. They aligned and negotiated their rates

with Mawarire's and a protest was born. #ThisFlag was therefore individuals set apart from each other forced to bring their rates to a marketplace of harm. While it is true that protests are not always triggered by the symbolic act of one individual, often requiring background preparation, organised structures and coordination, every protest transitions from isolated frustrations to mass mobilisation and back again to isolation. The cycle can be repeated a thousand times with the same result. But, at the end of protest, individuals return to their earlier, fragmented, states.

The fragmentation of the individual protestor presents through contradictions and inconsistencies. Despite the individual presenting as a fixed, stable and unified self, scholars posit the self as dynamic, fragmented and context-dependent. Foucault considers the self as a product of disciplinary practices within institutions, shaped by power and discourse,⁶¹ Derrida argues that the self is never fully coherent or self-identical,⁶² and Deleuze and Guattari regard the self as a multiplicity of flows, intensities and connections.⁶³ The ROP functions to make oppression fungible, fluid, dynamic and contingent. As the rate fluctuates, so does the individual who must constantly realign thoughts, utterances and actions to match his or her current rate. At the beginning, for instance, Mawarire appeared clear on what the problem was. He was certain about what needed to be done, would give directions to his followers to "urgently take a selfie holding or wearing yo Zimflag with pride put the hashtag #ThisFlag"⁶⁴ and boldly define the movement thus: "Clarity – #ThisFlag is a peaceful nonviolent confrontation of the issues tht beset us. Its nt a party or a march, its a conversation."⁶⁵ This kind of clarity gives the impression that one is fully in control of their unified self against the ROP's mutability.

When he was arrested, Mawarire had to confront a newly urgent ROP. This had a bearing on his participation, leadership and the nature and direction of the protest. Getting arrested and detained was a rate which was only immediate to Mawarire and not the other protestors, some of whom even gathered outside the courtroom in solidarity. The others could go home to their loved ones and he could not. The arrest changed the texture, approach and course of his struggle and, by extension, the #ThisFlag movement. After the arrest, upon getting bail, Mawarire pivoted from "I am not going anywhere" to "I had to leave." Thus, the Mawarire who vowed to fight to the end and the one who fled to exile must be understood in the context of the ROP fluctuating, being fluid and always on the move. Mawarire's circumstances had changed owing to external stimuli, in the form of arrest and threats by the government. It is no surprise that when the situation demanded, he behaved in ways that were seemingly inconsistent with his previous utterances. However, there is no inconsistency or contradiction. Fleeing to exile was Mawarire responding to and negotiating an adjusted ROP.

There are several examples where Mawarire's tweets during the #ThisFlag movement reflect the fluidity of the ROP and how individuals negotiate and renegotiate the Rate. We see this in his evolving emotions, decisions and

strategies as well as the contradictions evident in shifts in messaging, changes in tone and conflicting stances on key issues. There were contradictions regarding leadership and ownership of #ThisFlag. Early tweets emphasised collective ownership: “#ThisFlag does not belong to me alone, FIND A WAY TO SPEAK UP.”⁶⁶ In later tweets, he positioned himself as the leader, explaining how everything started with him. When he later went into exile, critics used this contradiction to accuse him of using protestors for his personal achievement. Another contradiction regarded non-violence and radical resistance. In early tweets, Mawarire distanced himself from street protests and violence, taking care to remind his followers that this flag was “a conversation” and not a march or a political undertaking.⁶⁷ During this initial stance, Mawarire positioned #ThisFlag as a peaceful movement, rooted in Christian values and moral resistance. In later tweets, he encouraged more aggressive resistance pointing out “NO MORE #Hatichada #Hatichatya (No more compromises. We are no longer afraid).”⁶⁸ In the early tweets, Mawarire denied any political agenda, but as the movement evolved, his tweets became more explicitly anti-ZANU-PF, making #ThisFlag inherently political. Later he would unsuccessfully leverage #ThisFlag in his bid to launch a political career as a local government representative in Harare.⁶⁹

The reactions to Mawarire’s “contradictions” and subsequent exile were mostly negative. There were accusations that he used #ThisFlag for personal gain, that is, he leveraged his ROP against those of other protestors, benefited financially from international speaking engagements and turned activism into a career, benefiting personally while the movement faded. It is true that #ThisFlag propelled him into the limelight, providing him with international platforms and earning him global awards. Mawarire is certainly not the first nor the last to materially benefit from protest despite and after its decline stage. The accusations of betrayal, selfishness and selling out stem from a suspicion that oppressed individuals can be bought or can leverage their positions to negotiate better ROPs. In reality, every oppressed individual has a “rate.” Others would say everybody has a price – but this is more than the suggestion that one can always be bought. The production of different rates is apartheid’s forte. The accusations reflect a refusal or failure to acknowledge that life goes on in harm’s way only if individuals pursue fractional or fragmentary goals. When their fractional goals are met, or if they realise the risk of diminution or losing more than they seek to gain, individuals will pivot.

Accusations of treachery, betrayal and selling out always come at the back of a wilful refusal to acknowledge that all individuals participate in protest in accordance with their intraspecific ROPs which are constantly moving and shifting. Protest does not begin or end with the crowd. It begins and ends with me, my grievance and my circumstances. To that end, my ROP is the protest ROP. The labels hero, martyr, sell-out, villain and so on that we associate with activism represent the blind spot in our ROPs and those of others. There is a seeming irrationality in expecting our neighbour to exchange the

everyday struggle for their family for an urgent public cause, even as we ourselves abstain for the same reason. Who must bell the cat? Who must take one for the team? What are the limits to taking one for the team? The lesson is that the protest universe inevitably fragments in harm's way. God forbid, if during the protest, someone is wounded, shot or arrested, may it first be my neighbour and not me. My neighbour's availability to be harmed before me acts as a shield between me and the monster chasing us. This is not necessarily cowardice or selfishness but, rather, a calculated outcome whereby I cannot afford to be caught at this time. My life must go on.

At bottom, every individual action taken in harm's way is conditioned by the individual's "assessment" of their own ROP. "Reality," we must understand, "only exerts its pressure through the needs of everyday life – the need to eat and drink, to get shelter and clothing, to avoid swallowing poison or stepping out of top-storey windows and the like."⁷⁰ Mawarire understood this. This is why everything for him began and ended at home. As he would point out, "Whatever you do in life always fight for your family."⁷¹ "You will never be able to genuinely fight for 'people'," he reiterated, "until you you (sic) learn to fight for your family. *It starts at home*."⁷² When he started, it was about his children. Seven months later, he was still talking about his family. Nine years on, while looking back, he would point out, "my initial source of frustration was my family [...] *that was my cause*."⁷³ His rate. There is no joint ROP, no joint experience and, therefore, no co-reaction to apartheid. The source of frustration for all protestors is the household wherein lie the family and demands they exert on life itself. *Munhu* is set apart. He merely seeks the affirming others who, incidentally, face a similar predicament. So, when protest ends, the losses or gains are household-specific.

Conclusion

Online protest, like any other protest, is not monolithic. It is dual, comprising online and offline components. It is phased, materialising in stages from emergence to decline. Finally, it consists of actors who are themselves fragmented, being embedded in complex webs of responsibility, survival and social navigation. The #ThisFlag movement reflected these attributes of fragmentation. It was a hybrid protest that started online but evolved in pursuit of its offline fragment. The fact that contemporary protests are increasingly hybrid proves that protests, whether they begin online or offline, are fragmented at the onset. Originary or pre-existent fragmentation was also shown in the discussion of how individual protest actors are fragments, set apart from others, long before the onset of protest. Individuals arrive at protests already rated, embodying intraspecific and unique experiences of apartheid or household experiences, which they export to protest. In joining protests, individuals seek to align their rates of oppression or merely seek to express their fragmentary grievances with others. As a result, conflicts and contradictions emerge, thus

bringing to the surface the pre-existent fault lines and differences among protestors. Protest, then, is lived in tension with other individuals.

Notes

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- 3 John 1 verse 1 reads "In the beginning was the Word" in reference to the preeminence of Jesus.
- 4 Mboti, *Apartheid Studies*, 47.
- 5 Mboti, *Apartheid Studies*, 50.
- 6 P. Muzambi and S. Dombo, "A Fart in the Corridors of Power: A Socio-Theological Analysis of Evan Mawarire and Raymond Mpandasekwa's Activism," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 79, no. 4 (2023): a9105, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i4.9105>.
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- 18 Morozov, "Why Kierkegaard Hates Slacktivism," 186.

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3 The Protest Hashtag as a Monologic Force

Introduction

We have established that protest is inherently fragmentary and it is just a question of how the fragmentations manifest. It can also be noted that, if it is to trend, every protest desires a single, unified voice. To trend, protest would flatten multiplicity or diversity if it could. So, protest seeks an appearance of uniformity, unity and cohesion – it seeks to excise and exorcise the demon of Rates of Oppression (ROps). One of the ways it does this is through the protest hashtag. The protest hashtag serves as the point of convergence for diverse utterances in the online fragment of protest. It keeps all tweets bearing its mark connected towards the “one voice” it represents, even if underlying the single voice is, in fact, an extremely unstable plurality of voices. Using the #FeesMustFall movement, I demonstrate how every protest is oriented towards monologism. While the single unified voice is protest’s ideal, the reality nevertheless depicts a constant struggle between inevitable fragmentation and the monologic desire. The chapter looks at how this struggle played out during the #FeesMustFall protest and what it demonstrates to us about the notions of unity, class and solidarity.

Nhunzi Patsvina (Flies on Human Waste): Hashtags as Group Areas

Apartheid not only wastes the human, but forces its victims to congregate and compete for waste, such that the oppressed are akin to *nhunzi dzasangana patsvina* (flies that come across each other at the place of dung). This was the essence of influx control and the Group Areas Act. There is an inevitable humiliation in having to fight for that which is discarded, to live in a township, or to be employed only in cheap labour roles. There is even further humiliation in being divided because of it. The flies that encounter each other next to human waste are complete strangers who only “come together” at the “group areas” to feast on the prepared humiliation. Anyone who has observed houseflies or any other flies clustered on human waste would see that waste is a “unifying” agent. Flies do not cluster on waste out of sentiment for each

other. The “solidarity” is not intentional. It is not even unity, even though there is a critical mass gathered together. They do not consciously travel or move towards waste out of a tendency towards cooperation. While the flies can move *simultaneously*, or even *side by side*, that does not translate to moving *with each other*. The reality is that they converge in large groups at some unifying landing spot but are themselves not even seeking unity or solidarity. It is fragmented “unity.” Even “cluster flies” are so named for their habit of gathering in groups at a destination. Notwithstanding, they are not necessarily doing anything *together* as much as they just happen to be *individually* expressing themselves *in the same place at the same time*. They are a class of species that are inevitably apart – a class apart.

Nhunzi, the common housefly, spends most of its adult life, which rarely exceeds thirty days, feeding and breeding on faeces, animal matter and food waste. Where there is such waste, one will likely find a swarm. These flies are not attracted to each other and do not intend to stay as a group. They are all at various stages in their life cycles, various stages of feeding and various stages of breeding. Their “class-ness” goes only as far as being on the waste. The meeting of flies therefore breaks up constantly whenever circumstances change. The mechanics of their coming together, any explanation of the swarm, or dispersal, cannot ignore the reality of human waste. If the waste is removed, flies will scatter or become solitary once more, until another agent brings them together, over and over again. The notion of *nhunzi patsvina* is useful in explaining the way apartheid dehumanises and brings victims into forced contact in “group areas” (in this case protest triage and hashtags) and keeps them together, for as long as it takes.¹ The calculated waste creates its own dynamic which not only causes division and competition but also exonerates the oppressors and provides them with plausible deniability. In this chapter, I am interested in this dynamic and how it operates. Victims are preoccupied and consumed in the minutiae of their group areas, losing sight of apartheid’s invisible hand.

Apartheid’s victims are frequently seen in groups at workplaces, dormitories, stations, hospitals, prisons, universities, homelands, townships, reserves, water sources and so on. We cannot see every passenger coming to the bus station. Neither can we see every patient making the trip to the public hospital nor the journeys people travelled until they settled in the townships nor the underprivileged students coming to university. What we see is the queue at the bus station, the patients crowding in hospital corridors, the ramshackle structures leaning against each other in the township and the students in class. We are alienated from the knowledge of where they come from, when they came, how they came, at what pace they came, their reasons for being there, for how long they will be around, their level of investment, what they benefit from being there and so on. Even if we deliberately seek out this information, we cannot and will never exhaust the range of possibilities that each person represents. Our “knowledge” is therefore always incomplete.

This gap in our knowledge refers to a peculiar apartheid condition which we call the Rate of Oppression (ROp). We have explained that ROp sorts out the world of victims into fragments to ensure the existence of disparate experiences of oppression. Apartheid simultaneously creates *group-area* communities of victims and perpetually fragments them by dramatising and choreographing the fault lines of gender, class, tribe, race, geography, educational level and so on. To “group area” people is to bring them together to dehumanise. Further, at an even more nuanced level, the victims of apartheid, who find themselves part of a group, are constantly set apart from others on account of mundane things such as when they became part of the group, how they joined, how they are positioned, what they have, what they do not have, who they know, who they do not know, what they seek and when they will leave. Mboti explains how the ROp operates:

By allocating (or, more precisely, *locally governing*) -*nth* wedges, radix points, fault lines, edges, borders, barriers, margins, no-go-areas and no-trespass zones and *also* by layering, combining, ratioing, disaggregating and differentiating these allocations and local governances. The outcomes of apartheid allocations and local governances are hundreds of distributed variations, variables, ratios and options.²

These factors make the joint experience of apartheid impossible. Hence, passengers travelling in the same vehicle do not necessarily experience their journey in the same way. Never mind that they departed from different points or they go in different directions, some sit at the back, others in front, others are squished to the side and so on.

The desire for university education and its attendant benefits is what brought students in South African universities together in 2015 when #FeesMustFall began. Students did not choose who to be with at university. In sorting and classifying, apartheid does not empower victims to ordinarily choose their neighbours in the townships or who they stand next to in the hospital queue. Apartheid clusters lack premeditation on the part of victims. Individuals come alone or in small groups, from different directions, under different circumstances, at different times and to varying degrees. In South Africa, the dispossession of San and Khoi inhabitants in the 17th, 19th and 20th century anti-squatting legislations, the 1920 Native Affairs Act, the 1924 Class Areas Bill, the 1934 Slums Act and the Group Areas Act of 1950, which progressively “segregated together” indigenous landowners as labour tenants, led to mass evictions and divided the country into racial clusters, which attest to *nhunzi patsvina*. We see this play out in all colonies, with reserves, concentration camps, prisons, etc.

The universities were not spared from apartheid’s group-area divisions, which were an element and symbols of colonialism.³ The Extension of University Education Act of 1959, which augmented the 1953 Bantu Education Act,

segregated South African universities by race and ethnicity. Not only were whites grouped together at Stellenbosch University, Rhodes University and Potchefstroom,⁴ but black students were also fragmented into ethnic clusters with only Zulu students, for instance, expected to attend the University of Zululand, while the University of the North was restricted to Sotho students. While the composition of universities in South Africa has changed, traces of racial and ethnic segregation persist in institutions of higher education.⁵ Despite the token changes, students were grouped at various universities on account of their qualifications, offers of acceptance, financial status, proximity and so on. They were essentially *nhunzi patsvina*.

#FeesMustFall was primarily triggered by the announcement of fee increases in the universities. It brought together students from various backgrounds, enrolled in different degrees, at various levels of education and at different institutions under a single protest hashtag. The unifying agent or platform for the student protest was #FeesMustFall. While enrolling at a specific university fostered a kinship among students, one that took a different iteration under #FeesMustFall, it must be pointed out that the ROP continued to undersign these kinships. Indeed, students moved *simultaneously* and even *side by side*, but did they move *with each other* or did they just happen to be reacting *in the same place at the same time*? We must therefore rethink the notions of class, unity and solidarity on account of how the protest hashtag is inherently fractured and accompanied by a multiplicity of other voices. The notion of ROP enables us to dissect *nhunzi patsvina* and see the multiple configurations of voices that converge and diverge from the protest hashtag. In this centre, seen by Karl Marx, as a class, are several fault lines, divisions, niches and so on whose voices and individualities are subsumed, silenced or expunged in the intention or orientation towards protest singularity and monologism.

The phenomenon of *nhunzi dzasangana patsvina* is transferable to predominantly online phenomena of protest hashtags. Thus:

The individuals in such [...] media campaigns [...] remain loosely connected by the abstractness of their ‘problem’ and consequently lack the capacity to weave their individual frustrations together with others into a tapestry of collective anger and revolt against a common ‘enemy’. Further compounding the loose connection of the networked individuals is that there is no sorting and consolidation of their diverse and multiple voices, often collected through likes and comments on Facebook or replies and retweets on Twitter.⁶

Social media is seen to engender “‘networks of individuals’ rather than collective agents of social and political change” (Benski et al. 2013, 548; Treré 2015).⁷ This view is corroborated by perceptions of online platforms’ “weak tie connections,” as opposed to the “strong tie activism” of civil rights sit-ins, for instance.⁸ Use of digital technology is associated with leadership problems

and “a lack of collective capacity in organizing and decision-making.”⁹ Despite its mobilising potential, social media is therefore seen as weak on leadership matters, organisation and decision-making.¹⁰

Nhunzi patsvina nevertheless demonstrates to us that all gatherings of people are contingent on the continued existence of the “unifying” agent that creates classes apart. The apartness is within the class itself and within the actions of individuals in each class and across classes. They are no different from the outpouring of pupils from their classrooms when the alarm goes for morning *assembly*. This is not true togetherness but, rather, mere assembly – an assemblage. The entire school files towards the meeting point for the national anthem and an address from the school principal. At some point, when this business is done, the pupils scatter, each returning to where they came from. This physical consolidation of diverse individuals shares similarities with the online experience in its ephemerality. “Loose” connections appear more pronounced online because we are able to distil a networked community and see its fault lines, but it is the norm in all human assemblages under apartheid. One only needs to see the persistent differences among those who assemble and how they scatter when the unifying agent dissipates.

The #FeesMustFall Fragments: Togetherness or Mere Assemblies?

Every protest hashtag serves as a point where the protest’s monologic orientation and the ROP are brought to bear. The processes of centralisation and decentralisation, of unification and disunification, intersect in the hashtag; the hashtag not only answers the requirements of its own language as an individualised embodiment of a speech act, but it answers the requirements of heteroglossia as well; it is in fact an active participant in such speech diversity. And this active participation of every utterance in living heteroglossia determines the profile and style of the protest to no less a degree than its inclusion in any normative-centralising system of a unitary language. The authentic environment of a hashtag, the environment in which it lives and takes shape, is fragmented and subject to apartheid’s group-area algorithm. When one traces the aftermaths of protest hashtags, the pattern is the same: divisions, splits, disorientation, disillusionment, scandals and so on. The problem does not seem to be in the aftermath. The aftermath reveals what the hashtag was always from the beginning: fragmented. The issue is not that the hashtag faltered along the way. The issue is that from the onset, protest was undermined by the presence of the ROP.

The nature of the hashtag is therefore determined by a dialectical relationship consisting of its intention, on the one hand, and the process of realising that intention, on the other hand. The intention represents the “centripetal” need to unify a text and stabilise its meaning, while the process fulfilling this need demonstrates the “centrifugal” destabilisation of the text amid heteroglossia.¹¹ The protest hashtag is a “normative-centralizing system of a unitary language,” participating in its “centripetal forces and tendencies,” while “at

the same time [partaking] of social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces).¹² This is a struggle, an ongoing process of dialogic tension, which is widely acknowledged in critical theory at large to be a significant feature of all utterances. The hashtag reveals divergences, contradictions and simultaneities as manifestations of the centrifugal/centripetal struggle, within a Bakhtinian understanding of textual dialogism. Bakhtin expresses this when he says, “a single voice ends nothing and resolves nothing. Two voices are the minimum for life, the minimum for existence.”¹³ A monologue, even when desired, is untenable.

The ROP considers oppression to be differentiated and fungible. This leads to fragmented responses. The level of commitment, the strategy, the end game and so on are subject to individuals’ customised experiences of oppression. They respond to the customised fetters which are not accounted for in Marx and Engels’ call for “workers of the world [to] unite.”¹⁴ *Life goes on* at and away from *nhunzi patsvina*. If, therefore, we are to study the hashtag (any form of protest even), we must do so *pro rata*. A hashtag is a fragment which embodies and reinforces our experience of the world “in daily, hourly or minute-by-minute clusters and *fragments*, as if all that matters is what we are looking at (right now) or what we are looking to get or receive in compensation for enduring such and such a task.”¹⁵ We rarely see the hashtag in proportion to its unknowns and its invisible metadata. The call for “workers of the world [to] unite” does not transcend *nhunzi patsvina*. It is fixated on the assembly of flies. The invitation, which sees workers in the factory with “nothing to lose, but chains”¹⁶ is consistent with the monologic orientation of protest. The call is blind to the customised fetters that bind each worker and set them apart from their colleagues.

Marx’s chains do not refer to the low qualifications which make one worker indebted to the company or the three extra mouths that must be fed by the other worker or, even, that this other worker is nearing retirement and will not risk his pension, however little. The chains that Marx sees are assembly chains linking one worker to another in one big swoop. There is no acknowledgement that workers at a factory have more to lose than just chains because it is blind to the mechanics of where the workers came from, how they got there, why they are there, what they are doing there and for how long they are there. “Workers” have a lot more to lose than their assembly chains. The tag “workers,” by which Marxists address individuals in a factory, is an assembly tag, one which is but temporary. It is the protest hashtag individuals must accept, carry and take with them to the authorities. The tag is projected as if it is all that one is, all that matters and all that defines the individual eternally. Nothing exists outside it. One is either tagged, or they are condemned. This essentialist view of the unified human being is rejected in postmodernist and poststructuralist literature, with the individual considered fluid, unstable and multiple.¹⁷

#FeesMustFall rose on the back of the #RhodesMustFall movement at the University of Cape Town (UCT).¹⁸ There is early evidence of the #FMF

hashtag being used on X during the #RhodesMustFall campaign in March 2015. However, it was not until October 2015, following a declaration by Witwatersrand University (Wits) to hike the fees for 2016 by 10.5%, that the protest movement effectively began.¹⁹ Similar proposals by other South African universities to increase fees and to demand upfront payments accelerated the movement beyond Wits. The #FeesMustFall campaign initially aimed to lobby against fee increases but later expanded to remind the African National Congress (ANC) government of its pre-1994 pledge of free education through the Freedom Charter. Protestors argued that higher education fees disproportionately affected students from low-income backgrounds, who faced significant challenges with the high costs of fees, registration, accommodation, travel and food.²⁰ Additionally, non-academic workers were reportedly subjected to suboptimal working conditions due to the policy of outsourcing.²¹ Resultantly, #FeesMustFall rapidly escalated to a broader rallying protest against the financial exclusion of economically disadvantaged students and the practice of outsourcing.²² The protest is erroneously recognised as the first South African nationwide protest to be virtually waged entirely on social media.²³ Nevertheless, during its duration, it was among the five leading online protests in Africa and the longest hashtag campaign.²⁴

#FeesMustFall, like all protests, sought to be all-inclusive, uniform, coherent, stable and unitary as opposed to fragmentary, fluid, multiple and diverse. Against its orientation, #FeesMustFall remained a centrifugal force which carried multiple voices resonant of the intraspecific and interspecific Rates of Oppression characteristic of apartheid conditions. The repertoires of voices that constituted #FeesMustFall refused to be submerged. There were debates about how to protest, where to protest, when to protest, who must protest and reasons to protest. These realities are used to explain why #FeesMustFall, like other protests, suffered disintegration, betrayal, accusations, counteraccusations, splits and so on. This fragmentation is usually attributed to a combination of racial, ideological, political and structural tensions among students, political organisations and university management.²⁵ Racial divisions alienated some white academics and students,²⁶ while incidents of homophobia and gender discrimination weakened solidarity.²⁷ Further, the shift of focus from fees to broader calls for decolonisation, economic transformation and land reform led to divisions.²⁸ Disagreements emerged on the use of violence and disruptive tactics, with media attention on violent incidents contributing to the perception of fragmentation. University management, government and police also played a major role in disrupting the movement through arrests, legal action and the strategic co-optation of leaders. Accusations of homophobia, male chauvinism, rape and leadership battles came to represent what Langa called “the darker side of the #FeesMustFall movement.” This darker side reveals the tensions and contradictions of the protest, leading to divisions and ruptures which ultimately contributed to the collapse of the movement.²⁹

But can protest have a darker side? Can the reaction to the darkness of apartheid qualify as darkness? Is this not the same as accusing victims of being perpetrators of harm? Can victims perpetrate harm? From what power? Concomitant action is darkness. The reaction to concomitant action has no capacity for darkness but, when it is not opposite (which would be light) and equal, is good neighbourly and demoted. The ROp, which makes impossible the identical experience of darkness by all people, is what creates value out of the pain or humiliation of a fellow victim. It creates an economy of victim sacrificing, that is, using fellow victims as human shields against apartheid harm. In discussing the monologic impetus of protest and the fact of fragmentation separately, I am cognisant of the fact that the two occur alongside each other rather than in sequence. The intention and the fulfilment of that intention are two distinct realities that can and do operate alongside each other. They represent a good neighbourly relationship. The ROp makes impossible the materialisation of reified *nhunzi patsvina*. #FMF fragmentation is therefore not a result of the failure to elect campus and national leadership to steer the movement³⁰ or inherent darkness. Even the best of movements, with clearly defined, structured and solid leadership, cannot escape fragmentation. The motive force which certifies the fragmentation of protest is apartheid. *Nhunzi dzasangana patsvina*, flies on human waste, represents a constellation of individual flies, each at various stages of their life cycle and merely doing something *at the same place and at a particular time with other flies*.

To elucidate the monologic impetus and fragmentation of #FMF, it is essential to first examine #FMF's initial fragmentation. As previously mentioned, at the time of #FMF, students were coincidentally present at the same location simultaneously. They were *nhunzi patsvina*, meaning their convergence was not a consequence of uniformity as much as it was about the existence of *tsvina*. They were disparate entities within the movement, enrolled at different universities, in varying programs and at various levels of their education. #FMF had to contend with both spatial and temporal fragmentation. The spatial was perhaps the most prominent considering that the movement was spread across various South African university campuses. The student protest was segmented along university lines, had differing interpretations and expressions, leading to conflicts based on these variances. The existence of university-specific divisions and the underlying factors contributing to these splits are subjects of interest. The temporal applies to how students on the campuses understood and expressed their temporality vis-à-vis the #FMF protest. Students were awake to their timetables, the stage of their education and the progression of the protest. This governed their attitude to protest.

#FMF was unique in that it began on the premise of being decentred, leaderless and so on, factors which would give the impression that it was a protest unlike others; one which did not seek the inclusion of all, was free to join, had decentralised decision-making and therefore was sensitive to differences. In a sense, it would appear as if #FMF sought to celebrate and allow differences to

thrive. Yet, even as it gave this impression, the monologic tendency of the protest was already at play. The move to centralise decision-making, the inclusion of violence and the use of threats against those who were against the protest all demonstrate the monologic impetus. It must be noted that even at its inception, in the phantasmic leaderless and horizontal level, #FMF was evidently monologic. It sought to reproduce and replicate itself, to include all victims and subject their multiple voices to the one unified protest voice.

#FeesMustFall was individual protestors routinely reacting *in the same places, around the same time* as other individual protestors. For instance, participants were fragmented by university, with varsity experiences varying from one to the next. Priorities differed among students across and within individual universities. Strategies varied. The degree of participation was uneven. Objectives diverged. There were even disagreements, in cases where protestors appeared to concur on the goal, on whether the protest had achieved its purpose or not. The #FMF dataset can be divided into active authors, moderate contributors, occasional users and one-time posters. These differences in participation, although difficult to accurately account for, demonstrate to us that victims of apartheid do not respond to apartheid at the same time, in the same way and with the same intensity. Whether on account of time, access to technology or level of commitment, participants are subject to the ROP, which makes responses fungible, customised and individual.

University students did not simultaneously embark on the fees must fall protest. Wits is cited as the first to undertake the protest following the university's announcement of a fee hike in October 2015, a point which is disputed by those who point out that technical universities had been protesting fees for a long time, way before #FMF became popular. Prior to that, protests against fee hikes and the financial exclusion of poor students, and for increased financial aid, had mainly been held at universities of technology and rural, historically black universities away from news media. What Wits did was revolutionise the way of protesting against fees through online and offline action repertoires by relying on new social media tools and protest tactics, thus creating possibilities for a nationwide protest under one efficient campaign slogan.³¹

Even when most universities had joined the #FMF protests, engagement was uneven. Questions were raised about protest visibility at the start of the protest, seen as an indication of commitment, in the various universities. Participants would express concerns about Rhodes University operating as "an island of its own" divorced from issues of free education and #FeesMustFall³² and ask "#UCT comrades, where are you?"³³ Based on tweet mentions, more than ten universities participated in the #FeesMustFall protest. The number of mentions per university partly reflected the extent of involvement during the period in question. The University of Pretoria (UP), the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), the University of Johannesburg (UJ), Rhodes University and the University of Cape Town (UCT) had the highest mentions, indicating significant student activism, media coverage and public

discourse. These traditional universities benefited from their historical role in activism and larger student populations. They had also been and remained at the centre of the #RhodesMustFall protests which had started seven months earlier at UCT.

Technology and applied sciences universities, Tshwane University of Technology (TUT), Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) and Durban University of Technology (DUT) had disproportionately fewer X mentions, owing to different institutional dynamics and student activism culture. Students at Limpopo University (Turfloop), traditional beneficiaries of NSFAS funding, were less active. Limpopo University students had reservations about the relevance of #FMF, considered an elitist event popularised by the media because historically white universities were affected, to their institutional experience. NSFAS was actually considered “a product of the violent protests that students at Turfloop waged over the years.”³⁴ Students from the University of Zululand were already enjoying free education. They felt no motivation to protest.³⁵ The historically white, wealthier institutions had a stronger motivation to protest than the historically black students on government subsidies. Unisa, a distance learning institution, lacked the added advantage of offline mobilisation at residential universities, its constituency being dispersed.

The grievances pushing students to protest varied. Regarding fees, some wanted zero fee increase while others demanded free education. Others even called for the broadening of #FMF to include non-fee matters. For instance, there were arguments for the centrality of decolonisation in the #FMF discourse by participants querying, “What good is Thomas Hobbes to me?”³⁶ Several universities were mentioned alongside demands for curriculum changes and an end to institutional racism. Mentions of Wits, UP, UCT, UJ and Rhodes drew attention to questions of policing, the outsourcing of workers, institutional reforms and the rights of students. The issue of worker rights, in particular, came to dominate #FeesMustFall discourse with expressions of solidarity by participants declaring, “#FeesMustFall and #EndOutsourcing are 2 sides of the same struggle, a struggle for decolonisation”³⁷ and “We, the students & workers of SA, are rising up! viva! #Decolonisation #EndOutsourcing #FeesMustFall #LanguagePolicyMustFall.”³⁸ The broadening of the #FMF movement was not universally accepted. Some participants felt that it compromised and diluted the primary pursuit regarding university access. One participant went as far as suggesting that workers “fight (sic) own battle & let students go back to class.”³⁹ Some felt the movement even degenerated because it ended up getting involved “in abstract issues like labour.”⁴⁰ Protestors who advocated the end of outsourcing and better conditions for academic staff were seen as differently positioned from those who refused to broaden demands beyond fees.

What we experience, then, with 1984's Winston is “a tremendous shout of hundreds of voices” which turns out to be “a multitude of individual quarrels.”⁴¹ These quarrels are further typified by the use of university-specific

hashtags reflecting the existence of different priorities, demands and ideological approaches of students at various institutions. #RhodesMustFall and #UCTShutdown were common in mentions of the University of Cape Town where there were broader calls for decolonised education and transformation of university culture. Historically Afrikaans institutions, such as the University of Stellenbosch, the University of Pretoria and the University of Free State, were mentioned alongside #AfrikaansMustFall to underline the problem of linguistic exclusion. Hashtags such as #UKZNFeesMustFall (University of KwaZulu-Natal), #WitsFeesMustFall (University of the Witwatersrand), #ULFeesMustFall (University of Limpopo) and #TUTFeesMustFall retained the archetypical “fees must fall” but highlighted or suggested the importance of remaining true to their campus-specific experiences and championed local grievances. Nevertheless, the diverse, university-specific hashtags represented various degrees of disconnection from the broader #FeesMustFall movement, as protest sought narrower and campus-specific goals. The challenges and reservations of aligning with the broader national movement were reflected in acknowledgements that universities had different struggles, a point raised by one @NoksEight in defence of TUT’s different approach: “People are quick to judge TUT students but none of them understand their struggle.”⁴² “Our histories are too different,”⁴³ it was pointed out. Struggles could therefore not be the same.

There were disagreements over strategy, with some students calling for radical action instead of peaceful negotiations with university management. In the midst of increased radicalism, supported by some activists,⁴⁴ calls were made by some supporters of #FMF to “STOP burning Universities!”⁴⁵ Hashtags like #ViolentStudentsMustFall, #StopTheViolence and #NoViolence came to represent a faction of protestors who disagreed with the radical approach to protest, which saw university buildings and property torched. Finally, the ROP manifested in how individuals reverted to their personal fears, desires and experiences amidst protest. The most evident concerns were the fragmentation around ending and continuing the #FeesMustFall protests. Several students wanted to return to class, frustrated by continued disruptions to learning. Fears of academic failure, fatigue from ongoing protests and disillusionment with protest leaders for failing to reach resolutions with university management abound. The disagreement led to an imbalance of rights between those who wanted to protest and those who wanted to study. Some students were “desperate not to write exams”⁴⁶ and sought to “get on with life while furthering [#FMF].”⁴⁷ Participants withdrew from the protest on the basis that it would have a negative effect on their exams.⁴⁸ One participant even explained, “I want to write exams because my family is expecting an income from me next year January.”⁴⁹ These remarks were met with anger, hostility and disappointment by students who wanted the struggle to continue. Sometimes it took on a racial dimension, with white students being accused of being “in classes and being educated,” while black students were protesting.⁵⁰

As the section “The Monologic Impetus of #FeesMustFall” demonstrates, the withdrawal and non-participation of some students was met with resistance because it undermined the protest’s desire for coherence, unity and oneness. @doubleuwilliams tweeted: “I appreciate the #FeesMustFall cause but I would really like to attend the lectures.”⁵¹ The question addressed in the next section is: could one be admissibly both a student and a non-protestor? Does protest contain space for bifurcation, or everything must be subjected to one consciousness?

The Monologic Impetus of #FeesMustFall

Writing in *The Conversation* towards the ninth anniversary of the Charlie Hebdo shooting,⁵² Emma Connolly concluded:

The story of Charlie was complex, but *the structure of the hashtag demanded that people pick a side*. To be or not to be Charlie was something beyond the attack on Charlie Hebdo’s offices. It represented historical and cultural debates deeply embedded in French society around freedom of expression, human rights, the role of cartooning and *laïcité* (the separation of religion from the state).⁵³

The tag was transcendental, having an existence which was not just limited to the prevailing situation but making it seem as if being Charlie was predestined and that everything had always been leading to the moment of *nhunzi patsvina*. Just five years after the national and global solidarity, the creator of the slogan JeSuisCharlie (I am Charlie), Joachim Roncin, lamented, “I wish this slogan would cease to exist because in the form it’s taken today, it deepens the divide.”⁵⁴ G  r  me Truc, a sociologist at the National Center for Scientific Research, believed the slogan had been weaponised “to generate divisions, to distinguish those who are with us and those who are against us.”⁵⁵ Karim, apprehensive that at the height of #JeSuisCharlie *to be was to be Charlie*, sought answers from the French President Macron: “I’m French, I love my country. But I am not Charlie. *Am I allowed to be?*”⁵⁶ Macron suggested, “I think we must get away from the slogan.”⁵⁷ How bad could a protest hashtag get that a country had to be exhorted to “get away” from it? One of the most viral hashtags in history,⁵⁸ which achieved an outpouring of global solidarity, had become something to “get away” from! What had happened?

Protest is fundamentally oriented towards the monologic. Despite the heterogeneity of participants and the diverse means of representation available to it, protest ultimately seeks to project a single and unified consciousness. Hence, it prefers the assembly of flies as opposed to their varied and multiple movements. Monologic discourse represents only one point of view.⁵⁹ At its extreme:

[It] denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities [...]. With a monologic approach [...] another person remains wholly and merely an object of consciousness and not another consciousness. [...] Monologue is finalized and deaf to the other's response, does not expect it and does not acknowledge in it any decisive force. Monologue manages without the other and therefore to some degree materializes all reality. Monologue pretends to be the ultimate word. It closes down the represented world and represented persons.⁶⁰

To advance a shared and universal idea, belief, attitude or thought, protest must, of necessity, subdue the differences that characterise distinct individuals and amplify the one voice. These differences, superficially encouraged or tolerated, are to serve as objects of a single and unified consciousness. Like tributaries, differences must all surrender to and be submerged by the protest consciousness. Participants are called upon to sacrifice personal interests for the greater good, to work as a team, to pursue a common vision, to be selfless and so on. The individual protest's universe is therefore unitary. Uniformity, unity, conformity and stability are the key attributes of this world. The victims of apartheid are frozen at the point of meeting. Their meeting becomes an end in itself.

Despite primordial fragmentation and celebrations of decentralisation, #FME was oriented towards the monologic from the onset. It determined to project itself as a national movement fed from university students in the various campuses of South Africa. At each campus, it was imperative that the protest be unified and aligned to the broader cause of fees. In this, #FME was like any other protest. Its digital uniqueness of horizontal participation, flexibility and spontaneity,⁶¹ attributes which enabled it to appeal to a wide spectrum of society of students, university workers and civil society,⁶² did not preclude monologic desire. Claiming to be decentred at inception, it resorted to the hashtag as the unifying force and evolved to fill the vacuum, observing the risk of continued multiplicity, diversity and openness. Consolidating amorphous utterances towards its promise, it sought to project a single, unified consciousness.

The protest hashtag, a social media or online unit of protest, perfectly illustrates the orientation towards all-inclusivity, unity, stability, uniformity and conformity. Considered "an actor in its own right"⁶³ and a "coordinating mechanism,"⁶⁴ the hashtag is applauded for democratising the field of political communication historically dominated by elite interests. In most communities, protest hashtags are associated with the voices and perspectives of marginalised groups who ostensibly share a vision, an objective, methods and so on. Its centrality in coordinating publics and bringing together networked communities of strangers with a heightened interest in a particular issue is thus underscored.⁶⁵ Yet, its ability to assemble statements and form collectives

while screening differences and obscuring nuances that do not conform to a singular, unitary rubric demands attention. The hashtag unifies and fosters uniformity on an ever-growing and unstructured mass of tweets which would, in their diversity and multiplicity, lack any form of kinship. It is thus characterised by an irreparable ambivalence where scattered voices are rallied and simultaneously suppressed for the attainment of a single, unified voice.

At the same time, the protest hashtag functions as the protest's DNA. By tagging individual tweets, the protest hashtag reproduces itself. It creates copies of itself every time a tweet embeds the hashtag, in the same way that each protestor amplifies one voice and avoids undermining or fracturing it. Besides being a control mechanism, the protest hashtag is therefore a cloning mechanism. Tweets do not necessarily need to be identical. Protest seeks only that each tweet contain within it the hashtag in order to reproduce itself in the same way Rhodes, that is apartheid, does. The protest hashtag wants to be replicated, to multiply without necessarily multiplying the content/variety of its message. It seeks sameness. It wants to remain the same throughout. Even as it seeks growth, it wants to forever remain the same from the beginning, saying the same thing over and over. The metadata is of less consequence. For all we care, the content may be in conflict with the hashtag, but as long as it is tagged, it has been claimed for the protest. All the hashtag needs to do is pass down its genetic material down the line of tweets. As the protest moves, so does its DNA, tagging and claiming tweets along the way.

The protest hashtag functions to regulate and replicate protest. It sets the boundaries of the protest, determining the parameters of what every tweet must say. The purpose of the hashtag #FeesMustFall is to ensure every tweet articulates the point of fees falling. The hashtag becomes a control mechanism responsible for advancing, coordinating and securing the correct discharge of protest. It ensures that the protest stays on track and remains constant. During the protest, it is conventional for activists and supporters to use the protest hashtag. Once the protest reaches this point, it will have established informal rules, in the same way that customs, traditions and folkways govern the institutions of family, marriage, religion and so on. Attempts were made, early on, to use only the #FeesMustFall hashtag to create a nationally unified movement. It was deemed important to synchronise university-specific struggles into a single digital conversation. National WhatsApp and Twitter networks were created to align messages across different universities and encourage the use of #FeesMustFall only. The march to the Union Buildings in Pretoria on October 23, 2015 was intentionally held under the unified #FeesMustFall hashtag in order to dispel the perception that #FMF was a set of separate university protests. As the movement gained national traction, more tweets relatively shifted towards the exclusive use of #FeesMustFall. There were more tweets with the hashtag #FeesMustFall than there were university-specific ones. Despite the failure of the monologic agenda, hashtag standardisation was largely successful.

In other words, competing voices were significantly submerged and localised struggles eventually absorbed into the broader #FeesMustFall conversation.

Participants choose to acquiesce to the protest hashtag because acting as a group promises results. Just as apartheid creates clusters, human beings also learn the advantages of acting as, in and through groups. Indeed, the most potent weapon at protestors' disposal is numbers.⁶⁶ It is the means by which the status quo can be disrupted⁶⁷ and the collective good be obtained.⁶⁸ While it is known that a 100% turnout is virtually impossible, the orientation, always, is to incorporate all victims and as much additional support as possible.⁶⁹ We saw how #ZimbabweLivesMatter tried to enlist competing campaigns such as #IStandWithLasizwe to its cause. Even the choice of "lives matter" was strategically designed to align the movement with the more popular #BlackLivesMatter. The numbers are to be maintained, with participants expected to remain consistent, devoted and compliant to the cause. From this mobilisation, protest demands the presence of a single, loud and unified voice.

The monologic orientation of protest is therefore not merely a function of central leadership. The one, single, voice can still be championed and projected in the absence of such leadership. Protest, by nature, must self-regulate and replicate. While the term "leaderless" was often deployed by critics to vilify #FMF as chaotic and unorganised,⁷⁰ supporters were exultant:

As a movement we don't have any official members [...] it is a leaderless movement. We don't have any formal structures [...] the plenary [decides on strategy]. We have a gathering of all the people involved and decide on the way forward [...] The plenary chooses representatives [to negotiate with the university]. They change all the time, anyone who decides they want to be in a meeting with management puts their name up.⁷¹

In this exultation, nevertheless lay contradictions reflecting the ongoing process of good neighbourly tension. On the one hand, #FMF was "leaderless." On the other hand, it had "representatives" supposedly chosen by a plenary, and "anyone" could be a representative by putting their name up for, I assume, election. Otherwise, how else would the selection of "representatives be done?" The "leaderless" movement therefore had "representatives" who would meet with university management on behalf of the students, a clear indication that protest naturally seeks the consolidation of difference. The plenary itself, a public sphere of sorts, was obviously a fraction of the student body engaged in protest in the same way that the voice of the people who cast their votes during an election comes to embody the multiplicity and diversity of an electorate. Who attends a plenary and who gets to be a representative are subject to the ROP. That is, their circumstance in that moment of plenary and representation must be opportune.

Indeed, various groups jostled for influence in the absence of leaders.⁷² This apparent void, repeatedly flagged as both an ephemeral strength and ultimate weakness of #FMF, which exposed it to fragmentation,⁷³ constitutes an impossibility. A leaderless crowd is still subject to inherent power relations. These undermine and make impossible the idea of a protest which abstains from the single voice. Even in movements that reject formal leadership, power relations and informal leadership roles develop. The notion of a “leaderless” movement is aptly considered “a fantasy” that allows members to avoid confronting the complexities of leadership and power sharing.⁷⁴ Specifically:

A distributed, egalitarian and altruistic leadership style [...] often ignore[s] power relations. While recognizing that power is not derived from the leader but is given by the followers [...], this relational reconfiguration of leadership does not account for how power flows in these relationships, nor does it negate the need for some form of leadership. [...] there can be no organized action without power.⁷⁵

Power, and how it is distributed in a leaderless group, demonstrates both the unattainability of decentralised protest free from hierarchy and power and the limits of sustaining collective action in the absence of a centre. In fact, several students came to be identified as leaders of the movement. These include Nompandolo Mkhathshwa, who was later accused of using the movement for her political ambitions and being too closely aligned with the ANC, Mcebo Dlamini and Vuyani Pambo. The emergence of known leaders was a later development occasioned by the need for “*an organised structure of leaders responsible for coordinating the spirit and direction of the movement*” [emphases added].⁷⁶ It marked a significant shift from the illusory leaderless origins of the protest⁷⁷

#FMF’s “leaderlessness” also existed alongside vigorous competition among groups seeking to control the movement. Various political student organisations, such as SASCO (South African Student Congress), the EFF Student Command, PASMA (Pan Africanist Student Movement of Azania) and the ANC Youth League (ANCYL), emerged as centres around which decisions about the movement were made. The factions sought to enforce unity and coherence around their partisan positions and, in the process, further divided the protestors. At Wits University, the Progressive Youth Alliance (PYA), affiliated with the ANC, wanted to suspend protests after securing a 0% fee increase, whereas EFF-aligned student activists pushed for continued protests to achieve broader goals, such as free education and workers’ rights. These decisions were not just meant for each party’s followers but for *all* protestors. Protest seeks to be all-inclusive. There was no suggestion that some could suspend while others continued with the protest. Protest only seeks to impose one position for all participants.

Then there is the matter of coercion. To achieve the ultimate monologism, protest must aspire towards the unreserved enlistment of *all* victims of the grievance in question and those in the spatial proximity of direct victims. By tagging victims or a grievance, protest interpellates would-be participants experiencing specified harm in order to maximise numbers. Even so, this is done with no real intention to leave any victim behind. In fact, in certain cases, protest wills the participation of non-victims and would give everything to incorporate them. Protestors will force others to join if need be. Around 20 workers were forced to join protest marches and a security guard was stabbed in Durban during a strike by the South African Municipal Workers' Union (Samwu) and the Independent Municipal and Allied Trade Union (Imatu) in 2005, for instance.⁷⁸ Protestors will cajole, shame, ridicule, mock, assault, tease and troll those who disagree with them or who do not join them in the online campaign in order to increase protest numbers. In extreme cases, protestors are even prepared to eliminate those who are opposed or indifferent to their cause to remove impediments to uniformity and homogeneity. In the 1980s and 1990s South Africa, for example, the practice of killing non-protestors and collaborators through a method called "necklacing," where victims were set on fire with a rubber tyre drenched in petrol around their chest and arms, was common. Other examples include the murder of bystanders during the EndSars protests in Nigeria and Kenyan post-election violence of 2007–2008. The attack on non-protestors or bystanders is usually legitimised by accusations of working for the system or betraying the cause. Everything must be sacrificed on the altar of *nhunzi patsvina*.

The all-ness of protest, that is, total enlistment, showed its face through benign expressions such as "#FeesMustFall is a March for all students. Not just black students. All ethnicities"⁷⁹ and the argument that #FMF was not a Wits campaign but belonged "to ALL students nationally."⁸⁰ There were suggestions that students were "all victims" and therefore needed to stand together.⁸¹ Other tweets were more exacting: "All those tweeting should participate in #FeesMustFall."⁸² Expressions of unity and the entanglement of universities towards a single cause reflected in the tweets "This is not a battle over the colour of your skin. Its time for everyone to stand together to address a bigger cause #FeesMustFall."⁸³ Activists noted the "politics of competition between universities" and sought to "break down these barriers & work together."⁸⁴ What the tweets share is an attempt to enlist, or recognise the connections across, South African students regardless of university. The show of unity appears through mentions of multiple universities in single messages.

However, there was a less tolerant side to total enlistment. Violence, threats and blackmail served the ends of monologue. Students who chose not to participate or prematurely withdrew from the #FeesMustFall protests became targets. References to forced boycotts, class disruptions and accusations of selling attest to the monologic desire. A testimony by a non-protesting student sheds light on forced recruitment: "They...enter and take out the students, vandalise

inside. Students fear being in their rooms so the best option is to come out and join the strike, whether they want to or not.”⁸⁵ Tweets point to the use of violence in order to disrupt other students’ examinations,⁸⁶ the disruption of classes and tutorials,⁸⁷ and forced evictions of non-protesting students by protestors in some universities.⁸⁸ What the above evidence of benign and coercive “mobilisation” tells us is that protest seeks total enlistment and will pursue that goal through bribery, threats, blackmail or violence.

Conclusion

We argued that any protest, which is worth its salt, is averse to difference, contradictions and the multiplicity of voices. Protest is oriented towards monologism. It seeks to reduce multiplicity to a single voice. No protest projects itself as fractional and divided. The whole idea of protest rests on the ability to assemble differences under one banner. We observe how, in the face of fragmentation, #FeesMustFall sought to achieve a monologue, that is, the single unified voice unbothered by the multiplicity of rates which characterise the actors in protest. This was attempted through a centralised hashtag and the efforts to eliminate university-specific hashtags. A leadership structure also emerged to regulate and coordinate the protest which had begun as leaderless. Finally, threats, blackmail and force were deployed in the pursuit of total enlistment of all students for the protest.

By studying metadata, that is, information about the individuality of participants, we saw how the protest hashtag’s monologic orientation was made untenable. It is this metadata, multiple and contradictory, that demonstrates to us that apartheid’s victims are not essentially, exclusively or permanently *nhunzi patsvina*, but individuals each with a ROP. The boundaries of protest are porous. Other voices, agendas and preoccupations escape its boundaries. We see this in the discussion of #RhodesMustLiveOn where participants use the #RMF hashtag to talk about cricket, television or Jacob Zuma. The protest hashtag enters into relations not only with other hashtags, but also with text, images, other tweets and so on, to the point where we can conclude that the hashtag is a fragment of something bigger, that is, a heteroglot world, which lends it a fragmentary character.

Notes

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- 14 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. Samuel Moore (London: Penguin Books, 2002), 94.
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4 The Days of #RhodesMustLiveOn

Introduction

A decade after the #RMF protests, whose aim was that British imperialist Rhodes must fall once and for all, Rhodes has still not fallen, at least not completely. Aside from the removed statue at UCT, the imperialist still seems to live on in many guises. How do we account for this continued existence in the face of one of the biggest post-1994 protests in South Africa? What shall we make of this? We saw, in the discussion of #FeesMustFall, how fragmented space contributes to the good neighbourly and demoted protest. That is, how apartheid's group-area universities pursued the matter of fees falling differently. This chapter looks at how apartheid fragments time and determines time to produce the outcome "life goes on." In the discussion of "the days of #RhodesMustLiveOn," two sets of X data, representing fragments of the same data set, are used. The first covers tweets, containing the hashtag #RhodesMustFall, posted between March 9, 2015 when the protest officially started and April 7, 2015, when the statue of Rhodes was removed from the University of Cape Town (UCT) campus. Altogether, the 3,194 #RMF tweets of this period cover a range of orientations, positions and perspectives reflecting the movement's international reach and diversity.

The second data set looks at both #RMF and non-#RMF posts from the top five contributors to #RMF tweets during the same period. While tweets from the first set are ostensibly #RMF tweets due to their explicit use of the hashtag, the second set recognises the presence of tweets, from key contributors to the movement, which do not subscribe to the hashtag or the protest during the intense #RMF period. The second set, comprising 3,427 #RMF and non-#RMF tweets, demonstrates that between 9 March and April 7, 2015, there were materially more than 3,194 tweets, and the unknown inundation did not contribute to #RMF. In both instances, then, data is scrutinised for departures from #RMF or evidence of fractional reaction to the protest and what that says about apartheid, protest and life going on.

It is important to note that #RMF tweets were a heterogeneous mix representing various, sometimes contradictory, orientations, perspectives, agendas, methods and positions. The tweets considered for the discussion used

the hashtag but may well be categorised differently in terms of their sentiments towards the movement. The tweets, their multiplicity considered, are representative of the #RMF movement. University students were the key contributors, discussing activism, protests and campus events. Contributions also came from academics, who discussed Rhodes Must Fall from an educational and intellectual perspective. Politicians also engaged with the discourse from a political standpoint, including government involvement while the media reported and covered events related to the movement. The discourse was also amplified by activists, commentators and non-categorised voices. Students largely focused on direct action, campus protests and demands for decolonisation; politicians discussed the movement's national and historical implications and academics debated educational reform, historical narratives and colonial legacies. Overall, the tweets reflect a mix of activism, historical debate, international engagement and public sentiment, showcasing the broad impact of the #RMF.

A Time for Everything: The Stop-Start Nature of Protest

It is often taken for granted that no one lives entirely in, of or for anything. Not religion, not love, not work, not country, nor cause. Not even self. People can only be in one place at a time and *cannot*, even if their life depended on it, be indivisibly available at two places at once. That is, at some point, people must set aside, postpone or demote religion, love, work, country or cause for other things. It can be for something as mundane as a bathroom visit, an urgent phone call, a visit to one's mother or mere sleep. These liminal "moments away" are too numerous to mention and inevitable. Apartheid Studies calls this "the *availability problem*":

We can only be where we are. We cannot be where we are not. If I am present in one place, there is no means, chance, or sense for me to be in *another* place in the same moment [...] If I stop to rest, the work that I am doing ceases *in that place where I am* until I stop resting and start working again. Either I work or I rest. But I cannot do both at the same time. I cannot work and rest at the same moment. Instead, I must stop one to start the other and start the other to stop the one [emphases in original].¹

It follows, then, that no one lives entirely in, of, or for protest. Rather, protest is stop-start. Sure, one may protest. One may sit in, march in the streets, picket, boycott or submit a petition. In so doing, they *consciously* partake in *work to dismantle apartheid*. The work to dismantle apartheid does not go on in the absence of conscious undertaking. It is not quiescent. Which is why even a boycott, whose modus operandi is withdrawal as opposed to enactment, also undergoes sentience. Public protest is therefore work during which one cannot simultaneously be resting, watching television, tilling the field,

dating or preparing a meal. Once the protestor engages in other tasks and commitments which life requires for it to go on, that is, once life goes on, the work to dismantle apartheid stops. Either one protests or they do not. That is, either one protests or life goes on. The two cannot occur at the same moment. The two actions must exist alternately, in a queue.

#RhodesMustFall, the student protest which reverberated across South Africa and the world in 2015 and 2016, was work to address the unfinished business of apartheid, work against apartheid. In this chapter, I examine this historically significant protest movement and how it subsisted side by side, in good neighbourly fashion, with the *work of apartheid* itself. For even in their anger towards the persistence of Cecil John Rhodes, participants had intermittent breaks from the protest in order to carry out other tasks or focus on other things as demanded by time. The work to dismantle apartheid and these other commitments could not happen simultaneously. They could only alternate. This is pretty much what the author of Ecclesiastes exhorts:

There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.²

As we can see, time can be sequentially divided into a procession of polar opposites. Hence, it is customary to speak of the era of apartheid against the era of constitutional democracy in South Africa; the time of slavery against the time of free men in America and the time of settler colonialism against the time of majority rule in Southern Africa. Yet, this dichotomous approach obfuscates how apartheid time is distributed. Apartheid does not divide time into distinct antonyms. Scattering and gathering stones may co-occur, albeit at faint intervals. It may even be difficult to tell one from the other. The time to make love, play sport, eat, fall sick, visit relatives, joke, tweet, read, sing, play, argue or agree is compatible with the time for war. Hence, some Israelis would gather on hillsides, most evenings, to watch and cheer the bombing of Gaza while drinking, snacking and taking selfies.³

Our issue, then, is not that there is a time for everything as much as it is about how this “time for everything” persists *because* life goes on. In Marikana, during the miners’ strike, a segregation of temporalities occurs: it was deemed that, for some, the time to die had come. Referring to the miners’ strike, the South African police vowed, on August 16, 2012, to “end this thing *today*” (emphasis mine).⁴ This thing had to end so that “normal” life and

work continued. Thirty-four miners woke up that morning without an inclination that their time to die had already been determined. The time for war and peace, for Covid-19 lockdown and the lifting of restrictions, for removing a patient from a ventilator or for killing half the population is politically determined. Apartheid piggybacks on life going on's alternations and tendency to optimally schedule tasks, breaks, retirements, promotions, appointments, paydays, recruitment, school visits, hospital visits, vacations, business opening times, closing times, waiting times, half-time, full-time, recess, operating times, turnaround time, departure times, executions, births and so on around which apartheid life is minutely divided.

When Che Guevara, the Cuban revolutionary, declared "There is no life outside the revolution,"⁵ he envisaged a world where the character, behaviours and actions of revolutionaries were wholly consistent with the revolution. In the *apartheid present*, such a world is impossible. Or, at least, it provides breaks even in constantly revolutionary life. Indeed, one wonders if constantly revolutionary life is even possible. Human beings, no longer masters of the fragmentation that is life, increasingly and frequently find themselves in places they do not want to be at⁶ because apartheid arrogates the responsibility of allocating tasks and commitments, of defining the nature, direction, methods, manifestation and course of fragmentation. Apartheid not only sets apart one task from another but also demands compliance and places a premium on failure to conform to allotted times. By not observing or adhering to the right fragment at the right time, violators are punished. This is why protesting is high risk. The risk is not just the adverse reaction from authorities. Not at all. The risk is the effect non-compliance and defiance have on household expenditure which is inextricably linked to one's ability to read and observe the time (circadian rhythm). It is the effect on the life that must go on. If I go to this protest, will I have time to get my kids from school? If I join this protest, will I not risk my job? If this protest happens, will it not disrupt my trip to the hospital to see a sick relative? If the protest goes on, will it not affect my examinations scheduled for the afternoon? If the exams are cancelled, how will this affect my finances? Does it mean I will go back home and come back when university reopens? Thus, apartheid's hold on the fragments is firm. The price that must be paid is too high. In other words, protest must not irrevocably disturb apartheid on which the life that must go on is hinged.

In a televised address in July 2024, Ugandan President, Yoweri Museveni, warned protest organisers: "We are busy producing wealth... and you here want to disturb us. You are playing with fire because we cannot allow you to disturb us."⁷ While Museveni sought to prevent planned protests in Kampala by drawing attention to the disturbance that protests would have on government business and the day-to-day lives of other people, the real "disturbance" that protest portends is against the persistence of ordinary everyday life, livelihood and sustenance. In Marikana, protestors did not wish for the mine to close. In Cape Town, students did not intend to shut down the university.

Protestors merely wanted apartheid to alter its manner of service *as far as possible*. The ROP also ensures that the individual participant remains plugged into *apartheid time*. If she has a job interview, a final examination to sit for or a doctor's visit at 2 o'clock, she might abscond from the protest for the duration of this other commitment. True, another participant may sacrifice these commitments for the time being, but all victims of apartheid, on account of each one's ROP, sooner or later comply with apartheid time in their individual, separate ways. One's time may be a final year examination. Another's time may be a doctor's visit. Participants know that rent must be paid, the last bus must be boarded, groceries should be bought, all-night prayer services must be attended, an assignment must be submitted or a meal must be prepared. All these mundane tasks must be completed *on time*. They are not a contradiction. Rather, they are a feature. Life goes on. Hence, even as we protest, apartheid itself must not be disturbed. As Mboti says, it is already on holiday.⁸

Consequently, time, like the passbook, must be always kept on one's person and in all places.⁹ To keep time, like the passbook, is to do the work of apartheid. Easton, a character in Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, realises as he goes to sleep that he has forgotten the clock downstairs and alerts his wife who, aware that everything depends on keeping time, descends the stairs to retrieve it. On her return, she informs him about the clock's previous, intermittent malfunction. Easton responds, "Well, I hope it don't stop in the night [...] It would be a bit of all right not knowing what time it was in the morning." Without the clock, but knowing he must always keep the time:

[Easton] woke several times during the night and struck a match to see if it was yet time to get up. At half past two the clock was still going and he again fell asleep. The next time he woke up the ticking had ceased. He wondered what time it was? It was still very dark, but that was nothing to go by, because it was always dark at six now. He was wide awake: it must be nearly time to get up. *It would never do to be late*; he might get the sack [emphasis added].¹⁰

Oblivious of the time, but fearful of being late and getting dismissed, Easton prematurely leaves the house for work. In a scene reminiscent of influx control in South Africa,¹¹ he is intercepted by a policeman for wandering the streets in the early hours. Like the black South African caught in the white man's town without a passbook, Easton finds himself at the mercy of the police. His crime is the failure to keep *correct time* on his person at all times. Fortunately, he is released with a warning to "buy a decent clock, or you'll be getting yourself into trouble."¹²

Apartheid demands that time be painstakingly kept so that its holiday can go on. Even the work to dismantle apartheid must cease at some point, however briefly. No one, then, lives entirely in, of or for protest, cause or campaign. There is no exclusively protest time. What we probably live in,

full-time, is apartheid and, until we eradicate it, must keep its time on our person always and in all places or get ourselves into trouble. In the *apartheid present*, even the most radical and committed activists, revolutionaries or protestors must keep time on their person always. This time, which they must keep, belongs to apartheid. It is time optimally scheduled to reproduce and perpetuate victimhood. Protestors come face to face with the inevitability of life outside the revolution. That is, they become partakers of good neighbourliness and demoted reaction. The time of protest must and will be shared with apartheid.

#RhodesMustFall began when University of Cape Town (UCT) students demanded the removal of the Cecil John Rhodes statue from campus in March 2015. The statue was considered symbolic of persistent colonialism and institutional racism two decades after the “end” of apartheid.¹³ The movement broadly challenged the institutional culture at UCT and other universities, called for radical decolonisation and critiqued preferred and established discourses of “reform” and “transformation” as insufficient.¹⁴ Specifically, protestors wanted a more inclusive and representative academic environment which addressed the predominance of a European curriculum, the lack of black professors and an institutional culture which alienated and marginalised black students and staff.¹⁵ The protest had traces of the student-led protests of yesteryear that had fought similar battles. These include the Soweto Uprising of 1976 and the Black Students’ Movement (BSM) of the 1980s. The Soweto Uprising was a response to an inferior Bantu education and the South African government’s plans to impose Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in schools for Black students. The BSM sought to address racism and discrimination against black students in the university. #RMF was therefore proof that institutional harm against black students in South Africa and the protest against harm had a long history, persisted and was perennial.

#RMF quickly spread to other universities in South Africa and then to Oxford University, providing both inspiration and a framework for the struggle against colonial symbols in other parts of the world.¹⁶ It raised awareness about the legacies of colonialism, institutional racism and the need for decolonisation in higher education. It brought issues of race, coloniality and institutional culture to the forefront of public and academic discourse. Having gained significant online and offline traction, #RMF earned both support and criticism from students, student organisations, other universities, academics, political parties, civil society organisations and the media. The highlight of the 2015 protest at UCT was successfully championing the removal of the statue of Cecil Rhodes from campus on April 9, 2015, amid cheering and dancing by students.¹⁷ This was a significant symbolic victory against colonial legacies. #RMF also created physical and symbolic spaces for black students, workers and staff to express themselves, develop solidarity and engage in discussions about decolonisation. This included the occupation of spaces like Azania House at UCT.¹⁸ At UCT, #RMF was central to the wave of student protests

that erupted across South African higher education institutions, coalescing with uprisings at other universities under the banner of #FeesMustFall, focusing on abolishing tuition fees, decolonising education and society and ending campus worker exploitation.¹⁹

Despite its impact, #RMF presented myriad problems in terms of protest relations. These issues tend to be proffered as reasons for the movement's failure to reach its full potential. For example, internal divisions around issues of representation, gendered violence and ideology are cited in the literature. It is claimed that some voices and experiences were marginalised, while new hierarchies and exclusions were created within the movement.²⁰ This led to the departure of some groups, for instance feminist and queer activists, who felt marginalised.²¹ #RMF also faced criticism from within and outside the university community. This included racist and derogatory responses from various quarters, particularly on social media platforms with a view to delegitimise the movement and its participants, a reflection of deep-seated racial tensions and prejudices in South Africa.²²

The movement also lacked identifiable leaders and leadership structures (which, as noted, was intentional and by choice), making it difficult to maintain a unified brand and communication approach and address internal conflicts effectively.²³ The occupation of university buildings and the burning of artworks and vehicles were met with accusations of criminal behaviour. This criminalisation of protestors by both the university administrations and some of the citizenry further complicated the movement's efforts to gain broader support and achieve its goals.²⁴ The movement's commitment to intersectionality, which aimed to address multiple overlapping oppressions, was often at odds with more essentialist views within the movement. Some participants argued that the focus should be solely on racial issues, sidelining other forms of oppression such as gender and sexuality. This tension between intersectional and essentialist perspectives, a reflection of protest triage, created significant challenges in maintaining a cohesive movement.²⁵

There was nevertheless something more noteworthy about #RhodesMustFall, which contains key lessons about apartheid. It turns out Cecil Rhodes, certified dead and buried in 1902, was *living on* in the year 2015, otherwise why would a generation of university students want someone or something dead to fall? How was "dead" and buried Rhodes still the subject of anticipated expunction some 113 years after being declared dead? In his final will, Cecil John Rhodes, the target of #RMF, reflected on his death and concluded: "I find I am human and should like to be *living after my death*" (emphasis added).²⁶ In keeping with this wish, Rhodes embedded himself in space and time, naming countries after himself, birthing a cartel with the intention of "gradually absorbing the wealth of the world," determining a "horizon of work" to last "for the next two centuries," choosing the place of his death at Matobo in then Rhodesia, dictating the construction of institutions in Southern Africa and Europe and instituting a scholarship for the grooming of African elite scholars in England.

To consolidate his grip on the land, bodies, minds and souls of his new-found lands, Rhodes and his progeny erected statues and monuments in his honour (and in honour of some of his acolytes and fellow amakwerekwere like Jameson) and named places, things and people after him, to ensure that he, like Dracula with a drop of blood, would continue to reactivate himself into life eternally, even when physically he was no more.²⁷ By the time Chumani Maxwele, a University of Cape Town student, threw human excrement at a statue of Cecil John Rhodes on campus, Rhodes was still “living” some 113 years after his “death.” His grave was still blossoming at Matobo in what is now Zimbabwe, the Rhodes Scholarship was doing fine at 115 years, Rhodes University was 111 years old, the cartel had multiplied and spread its tentacles through De Beers, Anglo American and the London and Rhodesian Mining and Land Company Limited (Lonrho). As the Testator died and was being buried in Matopo hill, the process of living on after death was just commencing. By calling for Rhodes to fall, South African students seemed to confirm that Rhodes had thus far succeeded in his life-after-death scheme. Essentially:

Students in South Africa were effectively reproving historians for failing to understand a simple fact: that there are many things which historians do not see coming and for which they do not have words. Rhodes’ death certificate and his grave at Matobo, if anything, are mere traces left over from a simulation of death. This simulation marks the point of transformation and metamorphosis.²⁸

Transformation and metamorphosis are the pulse of apartheid. Apartheid, we observed, does not want to be seen; hence, it continually reinvents itself.

Reconciling with #RhodesMustLiveOn (#RMLOn)

In one of the episodes of *Bean: The Animated Series*,²⁹ Mr. Bean darts up his favourite tree, where he first found his teddy bear and permanent companion, to stop it from being chopped down. While perched on one of the branches, he announces, “tree protest” and swears “I’m not leaving here. If you want the tree down, you have to get me down!” The tree cutter, frustrated, tries several ploys to get Bean down to no avail. At one point, Bean chides him, “you’ll have to try harder than that, I’m afraid.” When the cutter tries to hose him down, he cries out to his long-suffering girlfriend, Irma, who had earlier gone to buy sandwiches. When Irma arrives, Bean desperately cries out, “Irma, he’s trying to cut the tree down.” Irma declares, “we won’t let him” and unsuccessfully tries to join him up the tree. As Irma is being escorted from the tree, Bean’s stomach grumbles, reminding him of an earlier pang of hunger. He asks Irma if she managed to get him a sandwich. The response is no. The tree cutter, aware of Bean’s hunger, lures him with food under the tree. Irma encourages him not to come down. His stomach grumbling, Bean

agonises, “I’m so hungry,” before coming up with a trick that enables him to get the food unnoticed and without leaving the tree.

At this point, it feels like Mr Bean’s protest has prevailed. Even a phone call to the police does not move him. “I am not going anywhere! No!” he shouts. He can even afford to give a shout out to his woman on the ground. Then, nature calls. Mr Bean must use the toilet. Peering from the tree, he sees a toilet and wonders how to get there undetected by the tree cutter, who now sits under the tree completing a crossword puzzle. Leaving a dummy in his stead, Mr Bean surreptitiously climbs down the tree and reaches the bathroom. While inside, the tree cutter, now in the company of the police and a land developer, discovers that what he thinks is Mr Bean up the tree is merely a dummy. At this point, nothing up the tree can stop him from cutting down the tree. In that moment of Bean’s unavailability, while relieving himself, the cutter observes its “*time* to cut this tree down.” Bean’s time of relieving himself is the cutter’s time to cut down the tree. Bean exiting the toilet and realising this fact convinces the land developer to make the tree a part of her designs for the new café she intends to build. It is she who then saves the tree.

A large part of the moral of this Bean story is about *availability* or the impossibility of being in two places at the same time. Bean cannot be up the tree and in the toilet simultaneously. He can be either up the tree or in the toilet. Even while intending to immediately return to the tree, the fact is that while in the toilet, he is not up the tree. There is a time to be up the tree and a time to be down the tree. Not only does Bean’s story show us that one cannot be in two places at the same time, but it demonstrates to us that in the moment of unavailability, the work of apartheid goes on. Even the most mundane acts, such as going to the toilet, are sufficient time for apartheid to go on. The tree cutter is only prevented from cutting down the tree during the time of protest when Bean is up the tree. As soon as this time is abandoned for the toilet, he is clear that it is time to cut down the tree. Essentially, the work to dismantle apartheid alternates with the work of apartheid. Suffice to say that apartheid is not bothered by protest, knowing fully well that protest is demoted and exists as a good neighbour.

To get a sense and approximation of the numerical and demoted value of protest, we need not look further than the sceptically styled “16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence,” an annual global campaign spear-headed by the Centre for Women’s Global Leadership (CWGL) and adopted by global institutions including the United Nations, to mobilise action to end violence perpetrated against women and girls. If #RMF were the 16 days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence held from November 25 to December 10 each year, then 349 would be the number of days away from “Rhodes Must Fall,” translating to a whopping 95.6% of the year! UN Women alleges that “every 10 minutes, a woman is killed” and states that “the crisis of gender-based violence is urgent.”³⁰ Why then the 16 days instead of going the whole 365? While this has not been explicitly said anywhere, amid scant calls to go

beyond the 16 days,³¹ the fact is that no one, even the most resolute of activists, can afford more than 16 days of activism against anything. In spite of the urgency of the problem, during the 16 days themselves, participants will not give themselves entirely to activism. By simple mathematics, it makes sense that the #RMF days get cancelled out by the #RMLOn days. The problem is availability and the demand by apartheid that time, like the passbook, be always kept at one's person.

Protestors who demanded that Rhodes fall were clear, as are the protestors against other injustices, about what they wanted. It was not for the continuance or perpetuation of harm. What they wished for is the eradication of harm. So #RhodesMustFall was unambiguously about getting rid of colonial legacies and decolonising universities and the wider society. Yet, Rhodes did not fall. Of course, the statue was removed from the University of Cape Town campus, but there is consensus that the protest did not achieve its goals.³² Chumani Maxwele, whose solo act of throwing poo on Rhodes' statue at UCT triggered the movement, would concede six years on that "the curriculum and teaching approach in the University remain the same and the majority of buildings continue to bear White/colonial names [...] UCT remains White, the culture of the university as well as the teaching approach remains Western."³³ It is on account of this continuance that we say Rhodes lives on.

So, the "live on" in #RhodesMustLiveOn does not just refer to the defence of institutional racism or the continued presence of Rhodes' statue on university campuses, despite the existence of such. There were indeed arguments by journalists, academics and the general public focused mostly on the removal of Rhodes' statue, while remaining silent on the wider cause of decoloniality. It was observed that keeping colonial statues and symbols was a means of preserving the ugly history of colonialism to make it accessible. Removing the statue was tantamount to deliberately erasing history and stifling free thought.³⁴ These views were more pronounced in Europe, particularly the UK, where 59% of British people voted against the removal of Rhodes' statue at Oxford University while 44% professed their pride in British colonialism.³⁵ In a separate survey conducted by Cherwell, Oxford's independent student newspaper, 54% of students expressed a desire for the statue of Rhodes to remain at Oriel College.³⁶ A group of Oxford academics also organised to lobby the government against the removal of the statue in the event that the university conceded to protestors' demands.³⁷

In both South Africa and the United Kingdom, the statue was considered part of institutional heritage and history. It was argued that the statue should remain as a reminder of the past, both good and bad, and that it could serve as an educational tool to discuss and understand historical contexts.³⁸ In this regard, removing the statue would be an affront to academic freedom and free speech. The university was supposed to be a place where different viewpoints and historical narratives were preserved and debated, rather than censored or removed. Oxford University Chancellor Chris Patten told students

to respect intellectual freedom or “think about being educated elsewhere.”³⁹ The Vice-Chancellor of Rhodes University in South Africa, Sizwe Mabizela, defending the naming of the university, explained, “The name of Rhodes has now become synonymous with advancement of education. You think of the Mandela-Rhodes scholarship and you can think of Rhodes University. It’s about excellence in academics.”⁴⁰ On X, a token #RhodesMustNotFall expressed similar sentiments:

“#RhodesMustFall – Actually, no. No he mustn’t. Lest we forget.”⁴¹

“If we remove statues of bad leaders, we are going to forget their stories, good/bad and fo it all over again #rhodesmustfall.”⁴²

While the resistance to #RMF has been documented, the Days of #RhodesMustLiveOn go on undetected. There is no hashtag to accompany them, no protestors in the streets, no banners, no media coverage and no fiery speeches. We know that #RhodesMustLiveOn is an empirical truth by observing the outcome: Rhodes does not fall. Life goes on. Simply put, the Days of #RMLOn point to people’s natural desire to rest. After the work to dismantle apartheid, human beings must rest. What humans want the most is rest: to conserve energy and to replenish.⁴³ Without rest, humans will die. Human beings must relieve themselves. They must unburden the same way, at the appointed time, Bean called on the toilet. It is that simple. So, people will take time off, even from the work to dismantle apartheid. Even protest must be abandoned for 349 days in spite of an emergency so that life itself does not stop. In order for life not to stop, to avoid getting in trouble, human beings cease the work that preoccupies them in that moment and rest.

365 days is such a long time to be protesting. Yet the human being has so many adverse fragments to traverse, one at a time. There is poverty, homelessness, disease, war, corruption, climate change, racism, genocide and unemployment. There is an abundance of Denial-of-Human-Service (DoHS); it is a miracle that apartheid’s victims do not meltdown like *Two and a Half Men*’s Alan agonising “There’s not enough time. There’s too many books and there is not enough time.”⁴⁴ Allan’s predicament is unavailability. He cannot read all the books at once. He can only pick one at a time. In other words, he must continually work and continually rest. Meanwhile, the work of apartheid goes on in our availability elsewhere. Mr Bean’s tree is now at the mercy of a chain-saw simply because he had to go to the toilet. In the pursuit of our dreams, response to nature’s call, entertainment and desires, already entangled with apartheid and subjected to its time, we do the work of apartheid. Our natural desire to rest is thus enlisted in the service of apartheid. We may even realise the contradictions in our work for and against apartheid, but that is just that. Indeed,

Apartheid can coexist with resistance to apartheid. There is no incompatibility. You may hate apartheid and still do its work in full. You do not have to want to do such and such a harmful or hateful thing. No. It just has to be *doable*. All that is required is the *capacity*, or *availability*, for such and such action.⁴⁵

We do not consciously decide that Rhodes must live on. Protest occurs at intervals, the same way every other activity transpires. Sport, work, school, prayer and travel all happen at intervals. Protest, thus, is broken. It is distinctly divided into fragments. In between those multiple fragments, in the intermissions, lie the days of #RhodesMustLiveOn (#RMLOn). Our resentment is entangled with the things we love. What we are probably saying is “I must keep my job” or “I must feed my kids” and so on, but this feeding of kids and keeping of one’s job is located inside harm. It is like reaching for the sweet prickly pear through painful spines and glochids. To turn our backs on the spines and glochids is to abandon the sweet fruit. Wherever the victims of apartheid are, they must contend with this predicament. The Rhodes that must fall “reproduced himself abundantly [...] through an internationally influential imperial secret society and a trust fund which have both continued to influence and shape Southern Africa and the world after his death.”⁴⁶ Rhodes proliferates in our jobs, our education and our finances.

The days of #RhodesMustLiveOn are testimony that one cannot work and rest simultaneously. Human beings cannot be in two places at the same time. One is either up the tree or in the toilet. It cannot be both at once. This unavailability problem makes it inconceivable for protestors to be entirely in, of or for #RhodesMustFall. This is illustrated through three aspects. Firstly, I discuss what I call the *protest queue*, which shows our staggered reaction to apartheid. The *protest queue* compels individuals to oscillate among diverse struggles. Secondly, the *same hands* concept highlights the ambivalence that contaminates reaction to apartheid. It demonstrates how individuals can and do conduct the work of #RMF and #RMLOn seamlessly. Finally, I pose the question, “which Rhodes must fall,” in the context of Rhodes’s ability to multiply himself.

Same Hands and the Protest Queue

Fundamentally, apartheid is composite harm constituted by a series of fragmentary adverse acts, called *concomitant action*, which victims frequently experience contemporaneously or/and in succession. Victims can be simultaneously denied access to university due to exorbitant fees, subjected to institutional racism and economically burdened by a corrupt government. Their reaction, however, cannot take all three at once. Reaction must be divided into the various struggles against fees, institutional racism and corruption and consequently staggered. Like an individual mobbed by assailants, apartheid’s victims will throw punches, one adverse act at a time, in succession, until they

succeed or fail. They must abandon one to fight the other and so on. In that moment of abandonment, apartheid reinvents itself. The protest queue simply expresses our staggered, hence fractional, response to apartheid. The apartheid queue is proof that apartheid cannot process everyone and everything at the same time. The protest queue, on the other hand, is proof that reaction to apartheid cannot bypass the availability problem of the human being. While it does not denote a break from protest, it does represent a break from a specific protest. For a fleeting moment, for instance, Bean protests that Irma has been seized by the cutter. In that brief moment, Bean is not concerned about the tree but the safety of his woman.

The #RMF tweets accommodate at least ten other campaigns including #FeesMustFall, #RhodesSoWhite, #AllMustFall, #CorruptionMustFall, #AfricaMustRise, #BlackLivesMatter and #EndAllOppression. In terms of distribution, #RMF and associated hashtags, such as #UCT, #RhodesWillFall, #TransformUCT and #RhodesStatue, approximately had a 76% share, followed by #RhodesSoWhite with 4%. The other 10% was split across the other protest hashtags. This attests to the existence of multiple forms of adverse acts and points towards a fractional reaction. There are acknowledgements of #RMF and accompanying appeals to target other vices, in turn, in tweets such as “After the successful student protest on #RhodesMustFall would love now to see a serious assault on #CorruptionMustStop #CorruptionLetsTalk.”⁴⁷ Other tweets are not so kind to #RMF, seeing it as wasted energy considering the existence of other vices:

“#RhodesMustFall another imaginary foe to focus on as SA falls apart! Why not fight corruption maladministration threats to our constitution?”⁴⁸

“Forget #RhodesMustFall how about #ZumaMustFall?”⁴⁹

“#RhodesMustFall? Rather find a cause that creates change. Statues change nothing. Fight corruption, gender violence, poverty, hiv and more.”⁵⁰

“#RhodesMustFall ... What about #CorruptionMustFall or #ShacksMustFall or #DrunkenDrivingMustFall ... Priorities for a real difference?”⁵¹

“#rhodesmustfall – complete waste of time, energy, resources. #zuma-mustfall – he has wasted our time, energy and resources...”⁵²

“While we bemoan and call for #RhodesMustFall et cetera, we should also campaign for #UniversityFeesMustFall.”⁵³

While these tweets do not positively contribute towards the #RMF movement, they are proof that individuals cannot fight several battles at the same time. At the exact moment students find institutional racism as a sore point, corruption, gender-based violence, HIV and poverty persist. In the very moment protestors are focused on #RMF, they become unavailable to the struggles against other ills. This is why there are desperate pleas from other quarters to channel energy to the next adversity in the queue, seen in some tweets as either corruption or fees, immediately or as soon as the #RMF protest is done.

In the criticism of priorities lies the knowledge that individuals cannot fight two struggles at once.

The alternative, as seen in the data, is to swap or substitute reactions in the same way players are substituted during a match. During substitution, the player in the match must *completely* vacate so that the substitute may be allowed in. The two players cannot be in the game together at the same time. Similarly, two campaigns cannot be conducted by the same individual at the same time. One will, of necessity, organise their anger or frustrations with different vices in a queue. Even within the same tweet, struggles will appear in sequence. We see this in the tweets “Absolute Justice now. Comprehensive Freedom now Black humanity. #RhodesMustFall #BlackLivesMatterTO freedom fighters love & unity & respect,”⁵⁴ “Sometimes keeping up with current affairs is depressing #RhodesMustFall #PrayForKenya #BlackLivesMatter”⁵⁵ and “I feel the world is abt to have a Race Revolution #TPAB #RhodesSoWhite #RhodesMustFall #blacklivesmatter #decapitedhoodie.”⁵⁶ There were, of course, attempts to see these struggles as one and rightly so, but the fight itself remained fragmented, sometimes resulting in calls to privilege one struggle over the other, consistent with protest triage (see Chapter 2).

The non-#RMF dataset provides deeper insights into participants’ staggered reactions to apartheid. The percentage of tweets containing the hashtag #RhodesMustFall in the non-#RMF dataset between March 12, 2015 and April 9, 2015 is approximately 7%. The hashtag #RhodesMustFall accounts for approximately 21% of all hashtag occurrences in the dataset, while #RhodesSoWhite, a protest targeting white privilege on the Rhodes University campus, sparked by a Facebook post suggesting that Rhodes’ statue be moved from Cape Town University to Rhodes University, accounts for 5%. Indeed, as the #RMF protests continued and escalated, they became part of a larger protest universe including #FeesMustFall and #ZumaMustFall, both of which started in October 2015. Participants ricocheted from one protest to the other. This was true of both online and offline campaigns. While the online platform enables one to bunch several protest hashtags in one tweet, they must type them in succession. The failure to type two letters, words or hashtags concurrently reflects the availability problem we discussed earlier. To articulate one, the other must be temporarily abandoned. In the moment of typing “#FeesMustFall” or “#ZumaMustFall,” objectively speaking, #RhodesMustFall is abandoned. The participant has temporarily or permanently (whichever is the case) become unavailable to #RhodesMustFall.

The problem of availability causes protestors to react in procession. Multiple harms are organised in a queue and dealt with fractionally. Through demotion, that is, the knowledge that one cannot commit to one cause for 365 days or fight on two fronts at the same moment, human beings organise their reactions in a procession. 365 days must not be wasted. They must be distributed across several struggles. Sixteen days, only, must be dedicated to the fight against gender-based violence. The rest should be allocated accordingly. Each

protest must therefore wait its turn and know that nobody lives in, of, or for protest. Even #RMF must, at some point, give way to other needs. It is like trading one fight for another or switching from one channel to another. In the meantime, the broadcast on the relegated or demoted channel will continue, but one cannot claim they were immersed in it. In this unavailability lie the days of #RhodesMustLiveOn.

Protestors do not always advance from one protest to another. Often and more frequently, the same individual proceeds from protest to non-protest engagements. Sometimes this movement is plainly antithetical to protest and may even give the impression that one is positively predisposed towards harm. Activists and protest organisers find the idea of participants partaking in non-protest acts exasperating. During a Netflix Special, Wanda Sykes breaks down the general and accepted blueprint about protests:

When you're in a fight, big thing, you got to stay consistent. You got to stay consistent ladies. Especially us. [...] you can't be out there at the Women's March: "Fuck Harvey, yeah! Equal pay! Yeah, we got to get equal pay!" and then be like, "Ohh, girl, I got to get home and watch *The Bachelor*." No. The Bachelor cannot coexist with Time's Up, Me too. You can't have it. [...] Got to let *The Bachelor* go.⁵⁷

The frustration with protestors chanting "Me Too" and "Fuck Harvey,"⁵⁸ on the one hand, and going home to *The Bachelor*,⁵⁹ on the other hand, arises from the knowledge that the days of watching *The Bachelor* are not credited to the protest but to apartheid. The conventional view, expressed by Sykes, is that nothing must exist outside protest: "Got to let The Bachelor go." The expectation is that protestors must be entirely in, of and for the protest. The only worthwhile time is the time of protest. This view, despite its absurdity, is quite commonplace. During the Kenyan Gen-Z protests in 2024, Hopewell Chin'ono, a Zimbabwean journalist-cum-activist, applauded Kenyan youth for being "determined to shape their country's future" while chastising "Southern Africa's Generation Z/Ama2K [...] busy doing Uncle Waffles half naked dance challenges"⁶⁰ following a video post by one Kenyan youth explaining why protestors were against proposed tax hikes in Kenya. The suggestion, it seems, is that the youth must always be seen talking about their grievances or protesting injustice. No entertainment. No fun. The only time of note is the time of protest.

The demand to "let The Bachelor go" is a futile exercise. We pointed out that apartheid time is neatly divided into fragments and individuals find themselves moving from one task to another. Protest does not insulate individuals from this problem. Hence, individuals will still move from protest to school run, class, an exam, a hospital visit, the gym, soccer, music and so on in a very good neighbourly way. That is, these movements from protest to non-protest tasks are without crisis. In rebutting Chin'ono (who, despite his predominant

focus on “government corruption” in Zimbabwe, never misses an opportunity to post about his dogs, beer and football), @lebomashile explains “Activism & twerking aren’t mutually exclusive. #FeesMustFall #RhodesMustFall [...] are just a few of the social movements I’ve seen #onhere that were largely driven by young people.”⁶¹ Protest and non-protest acts are very much congenial. To understand these movements and why they are possible, we only must observe how people use their hands:

The same hands that a moment ago were wringing a chicken’s head, thus killing it, are used to massage a painful elbow. The very same hands that only a moment ago were the instrument of spanking a child’s bottom are used to caress the same child to sleep. The *same hands* that we use to punish and torture are the hands that we use to reward and to pleasure. Often all it takes is a *transition* marked by washing hands, or wearing gloves (or taking gloves off).⁶²

The notion of casually and seamlessly transitioning from one state to the next is called *same hands*.⁶³ The *same hands* is an expression of *good neighbourliness*. The hands that destroy also build. The hands that plant also reap. It is just a question of *timing*. What time is it? What is the time? If the Bachelor is on between 8 pm and 9 pm, whoever wants to watch it live must sit down to watch during that time. When it is time to go to the toilet, one must visit the toilet. Even the hand that types “#RhodesMustFall” ought to abandon that task when it is time to stir the pot.

Same hands is the basis of apartheid’s essential economy. The individual may protest against apartheid but, at the appointed time, must become unavailable to protest. During the moments of unavailability, apartheid collects its due. The same Twitter handle that has become synonymous with struggle is fragmented into intervals where transitions occur from anger to joy to fun, from protest to soccer to gym and a new hairdo. The individual is both the protestor and non-protestor. He is binary.⁶⁴ Surely an argument, contrary to one held by Chin’ono, can be raised that one cannot be tweeting about protest all the time. But that is precisely the point! One cannot and will not be in protest all the time. There is a time for everything. The Ecclesiast reminds us that “There is a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them.”⁶⁵ So it is that there is a time to protest and a time to watch *The Bachelor*. Life must and does go on. In the multiple transitions from one task to the next – the fact of there being a time for everything and not living in, of and for anything full time – we find our #RhodesMustLiveOn.

Same hands appeared in both the #RMF and non-#RMF data. The most glaring example involved the Cricket World Cup, which took place from February 14 to March 29, 2015, during which the #RMF movement started and gathered steam. In the #RMF tweets, it is evident that participants keenly followed the games, especially where the South African national team,

the Proteas, had a vested interest. To their credit, most contributions to the #RMF dataset express disaffection, extending #RMF concerns and demands to national sport. Tweets express frustration and criticism, often linking cricket to racial inequality and the colonial legacy debates. The racial composition of the Proteas team, historically associated with racial inequalities and transformation debates (e.g. limited Black representation in the team), comes under scrutiny, while poor performance is linked to broader social injustices.

Negative references suggest that, like universities, national sports teams are sites of struggle over identity, representation and inclusivity. This was clearly reflected in the tweet “#ProteaFire have shown us the relevance of #RhodesMustFall. We must reject the norm that white = progress. #Proteas must #Transform like #UCT.”⁶⁶ Terms like “Proteas so white” suggest concerns about transformation in sports, similar to debates in academia, alongside Rhodes Must Fall. The Proteas’ poor performance is framed as symbolic of deeper racial and transformational issues in South Africa. We can infer from all the #RMF tweets mentioning “Proteas,” “cricket” and “Cricket World Cup” that #RMF participants devoted time to watch or follow the Cricket World Cup. Considering sentiments towards the Proteas team, the inclusion of the hashtag #RhodesMustFall in the tweets represents participants’ fractional response to the glorification of British imperialism, the legacy of Rhodes, institutional racism, the lack of racial transformation and lack of access to tertiary education by black students.

One can certainly fight Rhodes and watch the Cricket World Cup. Nothing really stands in the way of that as long as one transitions from one to the other. There is no shared time for both dismantling apartheid and upholding it. There is a time to protest. There is a time to not protest. When one purports to do both at the same time, they are merely being insincere and fractional. In one tweet, “That part where the Proteas sing Die Stem [the national anthem of South Africa during primitive apartheid] and you mute the TV. #RhodesMustFall,”⁶⁷ we encounter the sense of ambivalence that the *same hands* engender among those who become conscious of their binarity or dualism.

The scenario presented to us is that of a #RMF participant watching or getting ready to watch a cricket match involving South Africa. Suddenly, the Proteas begin to sing a colonial anthem reminiscent of primitive apartheid, something which goes against the very struggle #RMF is engaged in. The participant is triggered and, in response, decides to “mute” the television instead of switching it off in disgust. The lesson is that one can be outraged at racism and still enjoy watching the perpetrators play cricket. Indeed, the demand to transform the Proteas team does not preclude watching them play. In the end, the reaction to racism and the glorification of apartheid is good neighbourly and fractional. The risk of being unavailable to #RMF was not lost on some participants who pointed out:

#RhodesMustFall. Right after we finish supporting our country in a sport taught to us by British colonisers.⁶⁸

I've been distracted. But I haven't forgotten #RhodesMustFall.⁶⁹

Proteas lost but before we forget #RhodesMustFall.⁷⁰

Oh I forgot #RhodesMustFall!!⁷¹

How does anyone “forget” harm except by demoting? The focus on sport is considered momentary while the #RMF remains constant. The phrasing implies that while national attention may temporarily shift to the Proteas, the issues raised by #RhodesMustFall remain significant and should not be forgotten. Despite this affirmation of #RMF, the tweets recognise the spectre of the *same hands*. The tweets, serving as reminders to stay focused on deeper structural issues, are an acknowledgement that Rhodes cannot fall at the same time that participants are supporting the Proteas. It is acknowledged that participants can be “distracted” away from the protest. Finally, it is acknowledged that the time of witnessing the Proteas losing is not the time of #RhodesMustFall. This time, which is not the time of #RMF, represents the Days of #RhodesMustLiveOn.

The non-#RMF dataset is a different matter altogether. Being a collection of tweets by the top five contributors to the #RMF online movement between March 9, 2015 and April 7, 2015, it covers diverse topics on the protest, cricket, corruption, rugby and so on. A look at a #RMF participant's typical tweeting day, on March 13, 2015, shows the multiple transitions which occurred during the protest. Between 0436 h and 1600 h, @Clint_ZA had tweeted about the internet, South African cricket, reconciliation, WhatsApp voice calling, traffic violations, Zuma and #RhodesMustFall. The example of a typical tweeting day, where #RMF and non-#RMF tweets are interspersed with other subjects, is indicative of the typical offline day of the average #RMF protestor and human beings in general.

Which Rhodes Must Fall?

The experience of “Rhodes” is not monolithic, that is, apartheid is the same event experienced differently. The range of how victims experience Rhodes is exceptionally broad, exemplified by differences in what to do and how best to make Rhodes fall. These differences are not due to a lack of solidarity or because of class differences, even if these can be important in deciding the form of protests. Rather, the differences in protest strategy arise due to rates of oppression. Some students were fixated on the statue on their campuses. Others were concerned about decolonising the curriculum. Another constituency was interested in the racial composition of staff and students at the universities, while others wanted to burn the libraries and, ultimately, even burn the whole university down and start over. Still others wanted the Rhodes Scholarship to be abandoned or, failing that, expanded and made accessible to all. In demanding #RhodesMustFall, different students focused on different

aspects of the falling. The fallist paradigm was as wide as the individual, rate-specific experiences of Rhodes. It is no surprise then that the student who wanted the change in curriculum was perhaps willing to compromise on the racial composition at campuses. The one who was vocal about racial composition was perhaps also aggrieved by perceived discrimination in the selection of beneficiaries for the Rhodes Scholarship. Those who had exams to write did not countenance the plan to burn down libraries and so on.

Rhodes lives on not just through the institutions that he put in place, but through the lives and livelihoods of people whose time is synced to those institutions. It is the ultimate entanglement. Their resentment of the Rhodes legacy does not preclude their, for the time being, “beneficial” interaction with Rhodesian institutions in one form or another. It should not surprise us, then, that students fought bitterly against the institutions Rhodes benefacted without even suggesting or imagining exiting the institutions. A UCT academic drew attention to this when she observed:

We are all part, to varying degrees, of the internationally circulating elite Rhodes envisaged. When I was a student in the 1980s I threw red paint on his statue (the precise motivation escapes me – I think Marxism and alcohol were involved). But I accepted the Rhodes scholarship, an opportunity that helped land me a job at UCT.⁷²

Luke Sheridan, writing for *The Spectator*, speaks of “a particular and guilty pang of gratitude” for Rhodes’ munificence which afforded him financial assistance during hardships while studying at Oriel College. While he acknowledges the “collective groan” that accompanies every mention of Rhodes at the college, he concludes: “It is, in fact, hard to find a student at Oriel who has not touched the dirty Rhodes money in one way or another.”⁷³

Apparently, the Rhodes of the statue, who must be shunned and reminds us of the evil of colonialism, is not the same Rhodes of the scholarship. This is why it does not appear ironic or even as a contradiction that in 2017, Joshua Nott, a #RMF activist, accepted the Rhodes Scholarship to study at Oxford.⁷⁴ Once upon a time, Rhodes was to be shunned. The time had come to embrace him. The #RhodesMustFall activist Joshua Nott who once compared the Rhodes statue to “a swastika in Jerusalem”⁷⁵ would now become a “Rhodes Scholar” or, to put it bluntly, a scholar funded by and trained in the spirit of Cecil Rhodes. Accepting the Rhodes Scholarship is more than a transition. It is a response to the abundance of Rhodes.

Conclusion

#RMF was work to dismantle apartheid. Students demonstrated that Rhodes was living on, as he himself had wished. The students therefore vowed to abolish him. However, the work to dismantle apartheid could not be conducted in isolation. It was a fractional and good neighbourly reaction which reaffirmed

that no one could be entirely in, of, or for protest. Protest does not exist in a vacuum. It exists alongside life which must go on. People must continue working, studying, grieving, celebrating, loving and indulging themselves even as they face injustice. Unable to be in two places at the same time, this continued living imposes a limit on protest. It creates a good neighbourly situation where protest and non-protest acts exist side by side to the benefit of apartheid. The moments devoted to non-protest acts translate to what I have called the days of #RhodesMustLiveOn.

Individuals do not consciously decide that injustice must persist. Rather, they participate in the persistence, even grudgingly, through the realities of the *same hands* and the protest queue. Here, the capacity of individuals to seamlessly move from protest to non-protest acts is acknowledged. The same individual can transition from sending a protest tweet to enjoying cricket in the absence of crisis. That is good neighbourliness. Secondly, various struggles are arranged in a queue such that as the individual moves from one struggle to the next, they allow time for apartheid to breathe and replenish. Finally, “Rhodes” is not a monolith. In demanding the fall of Rhodes, different students are focused on different aspects of apartheid. In the end, there is no real contradiction in condemning the statue while embracing the Rhodes Scholarship.

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5 An Encounter with Apartheid's Protest

Introduction

In order for us to understand “apartheid’s protest,” we must look at the content, meaning and ideological leanings of #PutSouthAfricaFirst. In doing so, we must ask some bold questions. For instance, how does #PutSouthAfricaFirst mirror apartheid? What lessons, principles and methods does it borrow from apartheid? While most protests explicitly target those in authority, #PutSouthAfricaFirst generally expresses itself horizontally, with victims targeting victims. What adverse action, then, did #PutSouthAfricaFirst react to in 2020 and what did it seek to preserve?¹ Was reaction appropriately equal and opposite?

In the study of #PutSouthAfricaFirst, we do well to trace its scope, iterations, manifestations and depths. Could the protest be made to bear on the Lonmin Massacre of 2012? Where does the “South Africa” of #PutSouthAfricaFirst begin and end, considering that South Africa is the ultimate expression of apartheid in its persistent inequalities, in its concentration of power in the white minority, in its continuities and in its metamorphosis? Does it also go all the way to 1977 when John Vorster campaigned for Prime Minister using the slogan “Put South Africa First”? Does it reach 1910? By asking and attempting to answer these questions, we enter into conversations about what apartheid’s protest looks like and how much of it is equal and opposite. This chapter therefore frames #PutSouthAfricaFirst as an encounter with apartheid’s protest. It traces direct ideological and empirical lines from primitive apartheid to 2020 when “Put South Africa First” reappeared on the scene as #PutSouthAfricaFirst.

The Return of “Put South Africa First”

There is something disconcertingly unoriginal about the phrase “Put South Africa First,” which can be traced back to November 1977. That year, Prime Minister John Vorster called for a 30 November snap election as an invitation to South Africa’s whites-only electorate “to say whether they agree with my standpoint and that of my ministers that no other country has the right to

interfere in our affairs or prescribe to us.”² The “affairs” Vorster referred to, which had triggered international condemnation, generally go by the term “apartheid.” Not many in South Africa or the world know or remember 1977 for the inauguration of “Put South Africa First,” a campaign in support of apartheid and against demands for its abolition and that, in announcing the election, Vorster was creating an opportunity “for the electorate too to add their voices to this protest” against “foreign meddlers” in the form of the United States and other Western countries.³ Contemporary “Put South Africa First” is known for the online campaign, re: #PutSouthAfricaFirst, which rallied black South Africans against unwanted “foreign nationals” (read African immigrants) in South Africa from 2020.

Underlying the November 30, 1977 snap election was the desire to preserve primitive group-area and Bantu-homeland apartheid, characterised racially by the experiences of violence, dispossession, forced removals, forced labour, crime, unemployment, lack of amenities, poor housing and inferior education among black people; and, significantly, the blanket qualification of all black people as foreign to South Africa. Vorster, who succeeded Verwoerd as Prime Minister in 1966, had explained in 1974, in response to a question about black citizenship in South Africa, that “black workers from Tswana land or Venda land or Zulu land,” or any other place for that matter, “*come to work in South Africa*” (emphasis added) the same way “the guest workers in Europe” go to work in Europe.⁴ Using ethnic-based referents for the Bantustans, as the homelands were also called, Vorster encapsulated the thinking of primitive apartheid on the subject of South Africanness already provisioned in numerous legislation all the way from the Glen Gray Act of 1894 to the Native (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act of 1923, the Bantu Trust and Land Act of 1936, the Group Areas Act of 1950 and the Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act of 1970. These laws had one thing in common: South Africa belonged to white people. Black people could only be in South Africa as good-neighbourly guests.

November 1977 was 17 months after the massacre of students and protesters in Soweto. The trauma from the Soweto Uprising still lingered when, on September 12, 1977, Steve Biko, a prominent leader of the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, was murdered in custody by state security agents. The United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 418 (1977), on November 4, 1977, which established a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa, recalling, among other matters, a previous resolution requesting the government of South Africa “to take urgent steps to eliminate apartheid.”⁵ There was also anticipation that an oil embargo would soon follow owing to aggressive lobbying by South Africa’s critics. Draconian acts, in the form of escalating repression, banning of independent press, the outlawing of anti-apartheid organisations and detentions without trial, were making primitive apartheid indefensible and a subject of international contention. Even erstwhile allies like the United States and Britain were becoming impatient with South Africa’s intransigence and were prepared to punish her.

It was under these conditions that Vorster ascended the podium in Heidelberg, outside Johannesburg, for his final rally on November 8, 1977. Chastising unnamed external foes seeking "to undermine us in every possible way," Vorster ominously warned: "Let the world know. Let the world know tonight. Let it know tomorrow. Let it know for all future time to come. Small as we are, situated as we are, we will fight to the end with what we've got!"⁶ Emblazoned behind Vorster, as he spoke, were posters with his image and inscriptions such as "Vote National," "Denkende mense soos u, stem Nasionaal (Thinking people like you vote National)" and "Vorster at the helm." The most conspicuous of these, underwriting the readiness to fight "to the end" in defence of primitive apartheid, read: "Put South Africa First". The white electorate harkened to the call by rewarding Vorster and the National Party with a record victory on November 30. *The Washington Post* of December 1, 1977, headlined "S. African Election: Apartheid Stays" before elaborating: "South Africa's white electorate has signaled its resolve not to alter the country's framework of racial separation."⁷ "Put South Africa First" may well have been "Put Apartheid First."

#PutSouthAfricaFirst⁸ belongs to a different era, post-1994, when South Africa is deemed to have transitioned from apartheid to constitutional democracy. South Africa is still the subject of interest and our starting premise is that, in the absence of a change of signifier, we are dealing with the same polity.⁹ To the extent that "South Africa" is the 1910 amity offspring of the British and the Afrikaners, logic dictates that whites can claim absolute ownership of, or incontrovertible belonging to, South Africa. Meanwhile, black people, like the negro in Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk*, can only strive from within the veil.¹⁰ 1994 must be remembered more for what did not happen than for what is said to have happened. The symbolic act of "granting" independence, a tradition in so-called transitions from colonialism to democracy when colonisers pull down their flags and leave, did not take place in South Africa. South Africa got to keep the name assigned to it by its colonial progenitors. This fact triggers the questions: "Did the coloniser ever leave South Africa? Was South Africa ever truly decolonised? [...] Will South Africa ever be independent?"¹¹ In the absence of this clear break, the docking of apartheid in order for black people to disembark and chart a new course in a different vessel, we can confidently say the apartheid ship sails on.

In 1977, Vorster and the National Party sought to preserve primitive apartheid. To "put South Africa first" was to endorse the framework of primitive apartheid, which Vorster, both as Minister of Justice and Prime Minister, had worked so hard to practically apply during his political career. It was to reinforce influx control laws enunciated by the Minister of Bantu Affairs:

It is accepted Government policy that the Bantu are only temporarily resident in the European areas of the Republic for as long as they offer their labour there. As soon as they become, for one reason or

another, no longer fit for work or superfluous in the labour market, they are expected to return to their country of origin or the territory of the national unit where they fit ethnically if they were not born and bred in their homeland.¹²

To “put South Africa first” was to keep South Africa divided along racial, ethnic and class lines, to restrict black people from urban centres, to preserve the homelands and to maintain the cheap migrant labour system. It was to affirm the pass laws, the Death Squads, the Sharpeville massacre, the Soweto massacres, the murder of Steve Biko and the tragic plight of the COSAS four. One could not practically “put South Africa First” without condoning that black people experience the abject conditions of poor housing, unfair labour practices, influx control, economic competition and bad governance. This is what the white electorate overwhelmingly voted for in 1977, thus certifying the endurance of apartheid.

Despite Vorster’s description of the 1977 election as a “protest,” “Put South Africa First” was the action of perpetrators. It was *concomitant action*. Perpetrators of apartheid were projecting themselves as victims in order to maintain their supremacist position at the expense of their victims. For this reason, Vorster’s Put South Africa First was not a protest. It was not a reaction. Apartheid is adverse action. It is self-referential. Validation is superfluous to its nature. When the apartheid police fired at protestors in Sharpeville and Soweto, no validation was sought. If, at all, there was prior lobbying before the massacres, such acts were merely superfluous. Apartheid went on in spite of internal and external condemnation. The good neighbourly relations of South Africa endured and subsist to this day. This distinction between 1977 and 2020 is key in how we should view #PutSouthAfricaFirst.

#PutSouthAfricaFirst is a complex socio-political movement that gained traction in 2020, primarily through social media. Its origins are deeply entwined with South Africa’s post-1994 economic challenges, including high unemployment, poverty, crime and economic stagnation disproportionately affecting black South Africans.¹³ This has led to frustrations, often directed at foreign nationals of African origin, who are perceived as economic rivals.¹⁴ #PutSouthAfricaFirst is one of the most recent and contemporary manifestations of this frustration, primarily driven by poor, unemployed or working-class South Africans who feel abandoned by the state. The movement is therefore seen as an expression of economic desperation exclusively targeting foreign nationals of African descent.¹⁵

Critics label #PutSouthAfricaFirst a xenophobic movement that scapegoats African migrants for the country’s economic challenges.¹⁶ It emerges at the back of intermittent anti-migrant campaigns which regularly lead to deaths, injuries and displacements of targeted foreign nationals.¹⁷ While the South African government routinely labels the pogroms “criminality,” some scholars define the problem as “Afrophobia” for its disproportionate targeting of African

migrants.¹⁸ There are indications that violence against African migrants has intensified post-1994 due to economic competition.¹⁹ #PutSouthAfricaFirst, considered an extension of “apartheid-era” exclusionary policies, which created a labour system that privileged white people at the expense of black South Africans and migrants from neighbouring African countries,²⁰ is a culmination of this intensification. Its rhetoric, reflecting historical anxieties about economic competition, echoes primitive apartheid racial segregation.²¹ Its segregationist logic structures contemporary nationalist thinking and promotes hostilities towards African migrants.

The movement immensely benefited from the transformation of nationalist activism in South Africa, with digital activism and social media discourse taking centre stage since the #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall protests in 2015. This migration to social media has nevertheless facilitated the circulation of “fake news” and populist rhetoric, which #PutSouthAfricaFirst often capitalises on to mobilise support.²² Twitter discourse related to the movement is seen to promote xenophobic sentiments, with users often calling for violence against foreign nationals amidst accusations of nativism.²³ The hashtag’s origins are attributed to an anonymous Twitter account, @uLerato_pillay, which skilfully corralled pervasive frustration and outrage into a single campaign and directed them at African immigrants.²⁴ An investigation by the Digital Forensic Research Lab (DFRLab) revealed the centrality of the account in what appeared to be a well-orchestrated and funded anti-migrant campaign.²⁵ Coordinated hashtag campaigns such as #PutSouthAfricansFirst, #ZimbabweansMustFall and #NigeriansMustGo contributed to the eventual growth of the campaign.²⁶

#PutSouthAfricaFirst evolved to influence national discourse and policy debates, even shaping public discussions on migration policy, with various politicians responding to the growing nationalist sentiment by proposing stricter immigration laws. There was also an uncanny convergence of the protest movement with opposition political parties that began to incorporate #PutSouthAfricaFirst rhetoric into their campaigns in order to capitalise on public frustrations.²⁷ Among these were The People’s Dialogue, the African Transformation Movement (ATM) and South Africa First (SAF), which emerged around the same time as the movement.²⁸ #PutSouthAfricaFirst would later develop links with other nationalist and xenophobic movements, such as Operation Dudula, which reinforced and spread anti-migrant ideologies beyond social media.²⁹

#PutSouthAfricaFirst is unlike other far-right movements, globally, which thrive on economic and political uncertainties.³⁰ Its ideological foundations are rooted in protectionism, populist nationalism and anti-globalisation. The primary grievances that condition its existence are not unique to the South African situation. However, they are traceable to a specific time period commonly referred to as “apartheid South Africa.” This creature is purported to have died in 1994, yet the grievances remain. The #PutSouthAfricaFirst

movement can therefore be said to result from the unresolved legacies of spatial and economic segregation, with economic frustrations redirected towards foreign nationals instead of structural inequalities.³¹ This points us to a much bigger paradox: continuities between primitive apartheid and contemporary South Africa feed the ideological base of #PutSouthAfricaFirst. As we will observe, this makes it a peculiarly apartheid protest in the tradition of Vorster.

Who/What Is South Africa?

On paper, “South Africa belongs to all who live in it.”³² Beyond that, South African identity is contested terrain, always unstable and in flux. Apartheid generally classified white people as citizens and black people as labouring sojourners in South Africa. This division of colonial societies into citizens and subjects has been heavily criticised, including how arbitrary borders between African societies create the conditions for present and future conflicts.³³ However, the evolution of South African legal instruments reveals the instability and contested nature of identity during this period.³⁴ The Freedom Charter of 1955 represents one attempt to remedy this situation by outlining a vision for an inclusive post-apartheid South Africa. Despite borrowing the principle of inclusivity from the Freedom Charter and proffering a definitive citizen-based explanation in Section 3 of the Constitution, the matter of who is South African remains unresolved. White people, for instance, must renegotiate their identities in line with socio-political changes after 1994.³⁵ The coloured identity is continuously reconstructed to suit a changing landscape.³⁶ Meanwhile, migrants of African descent must continually justify their presence in South Africa.

#PutSouthAfricaFirst represents an alternative discourse on what South Africa is and who belongs to the country. What is clear from the majority of tweets is that South Africa is the exclusive homeland for “South Africans.” African migrants are reminded that “they are foreigners in South Africa,” while the preamble to South Africa’s Constitution is recast as “South Africa belongs to South South Africans” (sic).³⁷ But who is South African? Mboti believes “the contestation of citizenship in South Africa symbolically began with the planting of Jan van Riebeeck’s wild almond fence in 1660,” with the fence being “a symbol of exclusion, specifically of who could and could not belong to the project of owning South Africa.”³⁸ Unlike in the Constitution’s preamble, where no reference is made concerning those who do not belong, #PutSouthAfricaFirst takes up this exclusivist stance demanding that foreign nationals from other countries be deported to their home countries. #PutSouthAfricaFirst is therefore framed as both reclamation³⁹ and restoration⁴⁰ of South Africa from the foreign threat. The exclusivist stance resonates with Section 3 for its definition of “South Africans” in terms of “citizenship” and an inconspicuous silence on non-citizens. “Illegal immigrants,” which is often used in reference to all African migrants, are singled out for exclusion in the same way primitive apartheid legislated national identity on the basis of

race. The Group Areas Act (1950) and Bantu Citizenship Act (1959) forced black people into “homelands,” from where they could come to “South Africa” as documented “native foreigners.”⁴¹ #PutSouthAfricaFirst substitutes race for citizenship, using apartheid’s logic of exclusion.

The inclusivity, hinted at in the Constitution, exists in good neighbourly odds with #PutSouthAfricaFirst, demonstrating to us that segregation is compatible with democracy. Section 3 citizenship is singled out as the sole basis for national identity. Demands are made for a strong nation where citizens come first and stricter immigration laws and control are necessary to manage those who are not South African citizens. In this, #PutSouthAfricaFirst recalls apartheid’s influx control, codified through the Pass Laws of 1952 and the Aliens Control Act of 1937, which controlled the entire existence of Africans in South Africa. Pass Laws demanded that Africans be documented and carry their passes on their persons at all times. We see, then, in #PutSouthAfricaFirst, the longing for influx control. The government is charged with proactively instituting primitive apartheid. That is, African migrants are to be sorted and classified with the express intention of keeping them outside mainstream South African society.

The Preamble’s position on belonging is not entirely rejected. Other advocates of #PutSouthAfricaFirst appear to agree with the spirit of South Africa belonging to “all who live in it” but believe that belonging should be subject to vetting. Calls are made for travel restrictions against some countries based on the value they bring to South Africa.⁴² So, it is not enough that one lives in South Africa; one must also be prized or, at least, sufferable. This question of who can be lived with creates fractures in the #PutSouthAfricaFirst movement, with some participants preferring Zimbabweans over Nigerians, while others prefer Mozambicans over Zimbabweans and so on. The fight against foreigners is therefore not monolithic. It is fragmented. Anony42644349, for instance, believes the problems associated with foreigners start with the arrival of Zimbabweans and Nigerians from 2005. Before then, South Africans had co-existed amicably with Malawians and Mozambicans.⁴³ @JoelMMalope concurs: “Foreigners who irritate us the most with their bad conduct are Nigerians & Zimbabweans hence when we say foreigners must go, we emphasise these criminal nationals.”⁴⁴ Deporting foreigners, “especially Zimbabweans,” is, for instance, seen to reduce the problem of illegal power connections in South Africa “by 80%.”⁴⁵ There is fear that the Mozambican immigrant, coming from a country with a war background, poses a security threat to South Africa,⁴⁶ accusations that Somalis monopolise the township economy,⁴⁷ and indignation towards Nigerians’ alleged involvement in criminal activities.⁴⁸ “Foreigners” are not a homogenous group, owing to the fragmentation of #PutSouthAfricaFirst activists. While there is general agreement that “foreigners” refer to non-white migrants and pose a threat to South Africa, there are nuanced variations in how protestors see these migrants or the nature of threats which each group poses.

How the question of which foreigners must be restricted can be settled remains arbitrary, just as, in 2008, xenophobes killed 21 South African citizens mistakenly identified as foreigners.⁴⁹ @Stevovo49529385's self-assured claim, "we know exactly whom we are talking abt/referring to (Those Rotten and Undocumented ones)"⁵⁰ is not very convincing and is contradicted by some who charge "all foreigners documented or not tsek go home."⁵¹ The test of who can belong to South Africa, even temporarily, thus relies on subjective criteria and is fraught with problems. Even primitive apartheid, which sought rigid classifications, would not settle the question of where individuals racially belonged:

Sometimes colored people became Indian. Sometimes Indian people became colored. Sometimes blacks were promoted to colored and sometimes coloreds were demoted to black. And of course whites could be demoted to colored as well.⁵²

The reason for this was the reliance on subjective criteria such as one's physical appearance or the behaviour of a pencil in one's hair. Regardless of this fluidity, "true" South Africans referred to the white minority, with the rest occasionally required to "prove" their belonging or justify their presence in segregated "white" areas. Today, the matter is further complicated by the fact that "real" South Africans and those deemed phony share physiological and cultural similarities being equally "African."

Yet, in 2020, the Africanness of South Africa is a contentious subject. #PutSouthAfricaFirst protestors challenge "this pan africanism nonsense,"⁵³ arguing that South Africa is not "another failed African state."⁵⁴ Others boldly counsel: "Let us be first and foremost South African. Let us be a proud people and we will do the right things for our country. Being African is too general."⁵⁵ That South Africa is not "another failed state" and the use of terms such as "jungle"⁵⁶ and "shit hole" to denote other African countries,⁵⁷ mirroring Donald Trump's racist slur in 2018,⁵⁸ echoes the long tradition of exceptionalism which dates back to the 1830s and 1840s narratives of the "Great Trek" and the "Chosen People." The self-perception among colonising Afrikaners of being a special creed destined to inhabit and civilise Africa, the Calvinism of the 1900s, the Afrikaner Broederbond of 1920 and the legal institutionalisation of apartheid between 1948 and 1994 all created, reproduced and reinforced South Africa's sense of exceptionalism. On the contrary, the struggle against apartheid sought networks within Africa and received moral, humanitarian, military and logistical support from a number of African countries. This fact is always disputed in anti-migrant rhetoric in favour of a narrative that projects South Africa as a successful lone ranger. African migrants are therefore encouraged to stay in their countries and fight whatever ills they flee from. This lingering sense of exceptionalism, which rejects South Africa's historical and

cultural ties to Africa, permeates #PutSouthAfricaFirst discourse and mirrors apartheid's ideological efforts to isolate South Africa from the rest of Africa.

In rejecting foreign influence, #PutSouthAfricaFirst uses the language of Vorster: "SOUTH AFRICA FOR SOUTH AFRICANS!!! To hell with everyone that believes otherwise! #ForeignersGoHome we need space to address our internal issues without your interference, always commenting in our discussion. We need privacy no need for nosey visitors. #PutSouthAfricaFirst."⁵⁹ That night in 1977, Vorster thundered: "Let the world know [...] small as we are, situated as we are, we will fight to the end with what we've got." 1977 "Put South Africa First" and #PutSouthAfricaFirst mirror each other in framing South Africa as a defiant victim prepared to resist, reclaim sovereignty and stand firm against adversity against all odds. While 1977 responded to international isolation and the United Nations arms embargo, the 2020 enemy is within, taking advantage of the hospitality South Africa has provided by undermining the country's independence. #PutSouthAfricaFirst therefore hints at the internal reclamation of political, economic and social power.

In the struggle to reclaim South Africa from foreign nationals, the realignment of race relationships in post-1994 South Africa is promoted. Versions of #PutSouthAfricaFirst represent a shift by depicting South Africa as a post-racial, colour-blind society. @IThepowerrace refers to "a new brotherhood formed on common interest, white and black"⁶⁰ and vows "We would sooner and without fear stand by our white compatriots and call for mass expulsion of Nigerians, Zimbabweans, Mozambicans, Malawians and Somalis."⁶¹ This racial brotherhood is projected as a bulwark against "false brothers who look at their watches wondering when [South Africans] are falling."⁶² The problem is therefore characterised as non-racial, but one which demands the foregoing of racial differences for national solidarity against the African "false brothers." This diagnosis reflects an ideological evolution; from racial nationalism to economic and political nationalism. Racial divisions are disregarded in defence of a perceived threat from "foreigners." It is no wonder, then, that calls such as "FELLOW BLACK AND WHITE SOUTH AFRICANS UNITED WE CAN ACHIEVE PEACE AND TRANQUILLITY IN ALL SECTIONS OF SOCIETIES"⁶³ exist. Whereas other protest movements like #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall continue to challenge white supremacy and economic inequality, some factions of #PutSouthAfricaFirst do not consider race an issue. So, instead of being held accountable for historical injustices, white people are depoliticised and recast as divorced from black people's current struggles. In some cases, they are overtly shielded from blame.⁶⁴ Attention shifts towards African migrants, allowing white people in South Africa to evade responsibility for historical injustices while retaining economic privilege.

The post-racial approach to South Africa's problems feeds into what critics define as "afrophobia," that is, a "new racism" which pits black South Africans against black people from other African countries.⁶⁵ Resultantly, white foreigners are exempted from the ills associated with the presence of foreigners in

South Africa. This discrepancy is reflected in @Matome_Kay's tweet expressing disappointment that "the #PutSouthAfricaFirst #PutSouthAfricansFirst movement seems like it's specifically targeted at foreign nationals from only African countries and not also Whites, Chinese, Americans, Indians"⁶⁶ and @Sbo_the_3rd who broadens the application of #PutSouthAfricaFirst to include European nationals from Germany, Italy, France and Portugal.⁶⁷ An underlying distrust of white economic power and supremacy is therefore evident in #PutSouthAfricaFirst tweets. However, the contrary voices are crowded out by the disproportionate focus on black migrants from Africa. The movement recognises economic exploitation but sees these migrants as the immediate threat rather than white business elites. This demonstrates a lingering awareness of white economic power but a reluctance to directly challenge it. By not giving prominence to the enduring racial inequalities, the movement unwittingly aligns with white business interests which disproportionately benefit from South African wealth at the expense of poor Africans, whether citizen or foreigner. Apartheid therefore continues to divide victims, setting one group apart from another, to destroy any semblance of solidarity. This means that, despite its nationalist rhetoric, #PutSouthAfricaFirst ultimately reinforces, rather than dismantles, apartheid's divisive legacy.

The movement does not bother itself with the question of South Africa's apartheid origins. For instance, who called it South Africa? What qualified them for that task? Was it intentional or purely accidental? There is actually a "South Africa is a direction" joke which is confirmed in an address by Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) leader Julius Malema when he explains that "South Africa is a geographical concept which seeks to give you direction. It's not a name of a place."⁶⁸ Nyamnjoh inverts the mainstream xenophobic characterisation of African migrants as "makwerekwere" by calling Englishman Cecil Rhodes "The Makwerekwere with a Missionary Zeal" on the basis that, like migrants from neighbouring African countries, he migrated to Southern Africa in pursuit of economic prosperity and ended up playing a crucial role in British imperialism.⁶⁹ Are we ready for such an inversion or is it just too soon? University students thought it was time in 2015 when they demanded #RhodesMustFall.

To put an end to Rhodes is to end South Africa and rid it of the Rhodesian infestation. South Africa is the Glen Grey Act of 1894; it is the van Riebeeck's hedge; it is Cecil John Rhodes all over again, a contradiction of #RhodesMustFall. A fallen Rhodes and a South Africa which is first are an oxymoron. A contradiction. #PutSouthAfricaFirst is a fragment of the days of #RhodesMustLiveOn.⁷⁰ Today, Rhodes' place is intact. It may not be an exaggeration to suggest that no one is more South African than Cecil Rhodes! The man's body is safely interred on a sacred mountain in Zimbabwe, and he lives on in our language, traditions, education, infrastructure, economy and politics. The #PutSouthAfricaFirst campaign does not seek to put "Azania"

first.⁷¹ No. The fight is to put “South Africa” first. The apartheid invention is privileged above the decolonial alternatives.

The reliance on apartheid’s sorting and classifying template leaves #PutSouthAfricaFirst in the odd situation where concomitant action and reaction, that is, harm and the struggle against harm, mirror each other. Like the pigs and men at the table in Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, the distinction is blurred and it has become “impossible to say which [is] which.”⁷² All that is required is a shift from race-based exclusion to citizenship-based exclusion. Instead of white South Africans deciding who “belongs,” nationalist activists now take on this role. The rejection of Pan-Africanism mirrors apartheid-era isolationist rhetoric. #PutSouthAfricaFirst reinforces the idea that identity is something that must be protected from outsiders. South Africa has not fully transitioned away from apartheid-era exclusionary thinking; only the definitions of “insiders” and “outsiders” have changed.

The Apartheid Queue

#PutSouthAfricaFirst is the most vivid expression of how apartheid divides victims and exploits difference to perpetuate itself. It is a protest built from difference, from the separating and sorting of apartheid, which seeks to reaffirm apartheid’s separating and sorting. In this sense, #PutSouthAfricaFirst is apartheid’s protest. It begins with apartheid, uses apartheid’s methods and achieves apartheid’s goals. Its battleground is the dead zone, where resources are scarce and South Africans are in direct competition with migrants for limited resources.⁷³ The #PutSouthAfricaFirst tweets are an expression of the desire to be ahead of one’s neighbour in the competition for jobs, houses, food and so on. Unlike the rest of the protests discussed in this book, which target those in authority, it is oriented against another category of the marginalised. To desire to put something “first” is to acknowledge the apartheid queue.⁷⁴ It is to acquiesce to the ROp.

#PutSouthAfricaFirst redefines the monster. The problem is not apartheid which creates scarcity. Hence, perspectives reflect a shift from an anti-colonial focus towards an anti-migrant focus. Colonialism, as it were, belongs to the past. There is a subdued recognition that the economic challenges faced by black South Africans emanate from colonialism but, being “past,” colonialism cannot be summoned to answer for the problem. The monster, then, is not an “apartheid,” which, to the protestors, has since ended and is no longer relevant, nor is it white people who continue to enjoy economic privileges at the expense of black people. The problem is the African migrant who exerts pressure on scarce resources in the dead zone. It is this person who must be outrun in the competition for jobs or houses, even if it means destroying them:

If I can outrun my neighbour, I am safe. I am safe in proportion to my neighbour being unsafe. My neighbour is unsafe to the extent that I am safe. This is because the monster will catch my neighbour instead of

me [...] If my neighbour catches up with me and draws level, it means that both of us are equally in danger. Our chances are 50/50. But if my neighbour is faster than I am, then I will be the one in mortal danger.⁷⁵

The broader “South Africa First” (read South Africans First) position is that citizens should have exclusive or priority access to resources. Companies must “Stop employing foreign nationals over South Africans,”⁷⁶ and the government should make South Africans “the first priority” at all times.⁷⁷ To be “first priority” or “putting our very nationals first”⁷⁸ means ensuring there is a buffer protecting South Africans from risk. The Zimbabwean must be denied access to employment so that a South African can gain access. The child from Lesotho must not get access to health until a South African child does. The “foreigner” must be at the back of the line in order for the South African to be first in line.

In his dream, where his mother and sister are drowning in a sinking ship while he observes from above, 1984's Winston comes to the realisation that “they were down there because he was up here” and that “they must die in order that he might remain alive [...] was part of the unavoidable order of things.”⁷⁹ In the apartheid queue, victims fight to keep ahead of their neighbours so that, even as they remain victims, they have a human shield against the real monster. This is the logic of the Rate of Oppression (ROp). It is about “the gap and the maintenance of the gap. One inch of being ahead is as good as a mile [...] I am at risk if and only if my neighbour outruns me and risk reappears in proportion to the distance between my neighbour and me.”⁸⁰ This implies that there are no external, colonial threats or monsters chasing #PutSouthAfricaFirst activists. There is no Cecil Rhodes to be afraid of. Instead, it is the Zimbabwean, the Mozambican, the Nigerian and the Zambian who pose a challenge. They are the ones who stand in the way of the South African's upward trajectory. It is this artificial scarcity, the Denial-of-Human-Service, which lends weight to *Nervous Conditions*' protagonist when she callously confesses, “I was not sorry when my brother died.”⁸¹ You see, Tambudzai could not go to school because her brother Nhamo did. It took his death for Tambudzai's turn to come. It was a queue! So, the most significant threat to the well-being of the South African victim comes from those who are within close proximity because they are the ones they see ahead of them in the queue. The emphasis shifts from an abstract monster to a tangible neighbour.

Apartheid creates the conditions that make it inevitable for people to be in different places at all times. Under the circumstances, one must continuously leverage any advantage they can muster, be it race, class, gender, ethnicity, nationality or the mere possession of an extra shilling against one's neighbour. As long as the gap with the neighbour can be maintained, the victim can be certain the monster has at least a layer to go past before it reaches him. The logic of #PutSouthAfricaFirst is that: if there is only one job opening for a South African and a Zimbabwean, the latter will become a human shield

against which the South Africans will evade unemployment. If there is one house for a South African and a Nigerian, the latter becomes a human shield against the South African's homelessness.

The struggle is not against unemployment or homelessness, which require answers located in distant places, but against the neighbour who must be out-run to get the one job or house. The battle with a fellow victim means the oppressor can now go on holiday. Oppression can continue in the oppressor's absence at the cost of the victims themselves. As long as this battle persists, harmful life can go on. That is, homelessness and unemployment cease to be of major concern as long as they can be made to occur elsewhere. The trick is to "find another person to sacrifice [and] postpone my own demise indefinitely."⁸²

The Slave Ship Sails On

If apartheid were a flu, then it would be the first and only illness whose symptoms remain in more or less the same state even after being declared dead. Its victims report with a running nose, cough and fever long after they have been declared free of flu. The fever, running nose and cough, which were supposed to be temporary and subsequently disappear with the flu, linger on in a steady permanent state until no one really cares about the flu anymore. This is the condition victims of apartheid find themselves in. It is from such circumstances that we find ourselves face to face with #PutSouthAfricaFirst. The grievances it confronts are not new and do not emerge post-1994. Nothing that it raises can be divorced from the experiences of primitive apartheid. In this regard, #PutSouthAfricaFirst is a struggle against eternalities, that is, "a permanent state of temporary things."⁸³

Eternalities explain the continued use of the "refreshment station" of the Cape by Riebeeck's creed all the way from 1652 and counting. It explains how Cecil Rhodes lives on after his death in 1902. That Soweto, the cluster of townships, set apart for black workers and miners southwest of Johannesburg, still exists to this day is proof of apartheid eternalities. There is no expectation at all that apartheid go with all its traces. Where do *hata* go when apartheid "ends"? Even as students called for Rhodes to fall in 2015, no one remembered that the entire configuration of South Africa, with its mines, farms, townships, domestic workers, boundaries, population and so on reflected the persistence of apartheid. Indeed, it does not seem ironic at all that one may speak of the end of apartheid from Soweto or Alexandra with all its sneezing, coughing and fever. If apartheid created the spatial inequalities in South Africa today, does it not follow that an end to apartheid must also bring an end to spatial inequalities? An end to *hata*?

Going through #PutSouthAfricaFirst grievances creates a sense of *deja vu*. The injustices flagged by the movement, which mostly relate to South Africa's socio-economic struggles, all evoke memories of primitive apartheid. The complaints of unemployment, soaring crime, poverty and economic competition

are all reminiscent of primitive apartheid. Fanon paints a vivid image of economic stagnation and precarity in the colonised space:

The town belonging to the colonized people, or at least the native town, the Negro village, the medina, the reservation, is a place of ill fame, peopled by men of evil repute. They are born there, it matters little where or how; they die there, it matters not where, nor how. It is a world without spaciousness; men live there on top of each other and their huts are built one on top of the other. The native town is a hungry town, starved of bread, of meat, of shoes, of coal, of light. The native town is a crouching village, a town on its knees, a town wallowing in the mire. It is a town of niggers and dirty Arabs.⁸⁴

The world described by Fanon, where “huts are built on top of the other,” cannot avoid conflict. It is a world designed with the intense competition for scarce resources and not solidarity in mind. We see the cluster of houses, some on top of each other, and see a “class”, but the reality is that in this world, people will kill to be one inch ahead of their neighbour. *Kaffir Boy* records the harrowing experience of black people as they repeatedly go through a redundant cycle of looking for jobs, finding jobs, losing their jobs, getting arrested for unemployment and getting back on the hunt again in order to justify their stay in the white man’s city. The narrator’s father, whose pass book is not in order, explains to the policeman why he is in the city despite faulty documentation: “I’m working, nkosi [...] There are no jobs in the Bantustan.”⁸⁵ It is the same spaces where we find victims today clamouring #PutSouthAfricaFirst. The conditions remain and often worsen, drawing in more and more victims.

While there are immediate causes of high unemployment, crime, overcrowding and economic competition in South Africa, the problem is primordial, taking various shapes and forms along the way. It is a lingering problem that is linked to primitive apartheid policies in the areas of education, housing, jobs, immigration and so on. So, although the ANC government should be rightly criticised for failing to provide basic services like housing and health-care, we must understand that this is exactly where undetectable apartheid wants us. Apartheid wants to be able to cause things without being blamed. It wants the cough to go on in the absence of a flu. That is how apartheid goes on holiday. It is able to do precisely that when it has reached the point where no one really remembers or cares that the persistent running nose or fever is impossible without the flu.

Apartheid Studies is the study of eternalities. It is the framework that enables us to trace hidden causes and confidently decline the view of smoke without fire. Fever is the evidence of ongoing flu. A persistent cough is proof that flu is still present. Apartheid is what created an economy of immigrants. It should not surprise us that South Africa is still a migrant destination. Today, protestors lament the collapse of the South African economy owing to the

“influx” of foreign businesses and competition for jobs from African migrants. Primitive apartheid housing policies dumped Africans into overcrowded townships and informal settlements. Today, the majority of the African poor reside in plastic shacks located in the overcrowded townships of South Africa. Group-area spatial planning set apart black communities into townships with inadequate housing. We can go on and on, listing the #PutSouthAfricaFirst grievances, but the fact remains: #PutSouthAfricaFirst is undeniably a reaction to apartheid continuing. The apartheid ship sails on, but #PutSouthAfricaFirst cannot, or chooses not to, see it for what it is. Instead, it targets the foreign neighbour, seeking only to be an inch ahead.

We have explained that the struggles for economic emancipation occur in the dead zone or fractional side of South Africa where abjection, poverty, lack, disease, homelessness and hunger prevail. This is true both in the physical and metaphorical senses. “Operation Dudula,” a splinter group from the #PutSouthAfricaFirst movement whose Zulu name translates to “force out” or “knock down,” launched anti-immigrant campaigns in the black township of Soweto, a former hotbed for the anti-apartheid struggle. The campaigns spread to other working-class communities such as Alexandra. It is in these communities, set apart for the impoverished majority, that violent pogroms against migrants take place. There is no Operation Dudula in Sandton or Hout Bay. Harm can occur in Alexandra, Soweto, Isipingo, KwaMashu or Primrose while Clifton, Camps Bay, Sandton and Hout Bay go on holiday. Similarly, there is no deafening #PutSouthAfricaFirst against white South African farmers of European descent who murder two black women and feed their corpses to pigs,⁸⁶ but there is one when a South African of Nigerian descent tries to contest in the Miss Universe 2024 as a representative of South Africa.⁸⁷

Fundamentally, then, #PutSouthAfricaFirst repackages historical patterns of exclusion. The movement operates within the enduring framework of classifying and sorting out. Those who subscribe to the end of apartheid and believe in a “new” or “post” apartheid differentiate between apartheid’s legally sanctioned exclusion and the contemporary movement’s emphasis on economic protectionism, explaining that, while problematic, #PutSouthAfricaFirst operates within a democratic framework that allows for political debate rather than state-enforced racial segregation.⁸⁸ But this is precisely the issue! Apartheid is compatible with democracy. All that is required is a paint job and a terror squad terraforms into a police squad, Verwoerdburg becomes Centurion,⁸⁹ Jan Smuts International Airport becomes Johannesburg International Airport in 1994, then O. R. Tambo International Airport in 2006 and the Pass Office at 80 Albert Street becomes a women’s shelter. While a lot can change outwardly, the fundamentals of good neighbourliness remain. The victims of apartheid persist, locked up in “the age of human sacrifice”⁹⁰ where some must not eat so that others can eat or some must be at the back of the queue so that others are first in line. This South Africa, proclaimed in #PutSouthAfricaFirst, is a rebranded slave ship. The slave ship, I am afraid, sails on.

How do we know this for certain? #PutSouthAfricaFirst continues in the tradition of Vorster's 1977 "Put South Africa First" campaign and the philosophy of his predecessors. It is a tradition and philosophy of good neighbourliness where white and black, rich and poor, oppressor and victim can live side by side in the absence of foreign interference. Vorster wanted it unequivocally known that "no other country has the right to interfere in our affairs or prescribe to us." So, South Africa wanted isolationism, to be set apart from Africa, especially as the international community gradually disapproved of apartheid, in general. The self-referent "us" meant white people in South Africa. "Our affairs" included the policy of setting apart black people and fragmenting them into distinct antagonistic groups competing for finite resources within the larger, crowded and impoverished African community.

The economic precarity of black South Africans today is a continuation of primitive apartheid exclusion.⁹¹ Segregationist policies were designed to prioritise white South Africans in employment, housing and business opportunities while explicitly excluding black South Africans. #PutSouthAfricaFirst mimics these exclusionary practices towards African migrants instead of black South Africans. The economic grievances fuelling #PutSouthAfricaFirst mirror the same anxieties that the apartheid government cultivated among poor white South Africans, who were also told that their economic troubles stemmed from competition with other racial groups rather than systemic inequality. Economic hardship was framed as a result of "outsiders" rather than state policies. While apartheid defined "outsiders" in racial terms, #PutSouthAfricaFirst replaces racial exclusion with national exclusion, particularly against African migrants.⁹²

So when #PutSouthAfricaFirst supporters complain that foreigners are stealing South African jobs and demand their deportation,⁹³ they are merely expressing the 1973 Foreign Worker Restrictions and the Aliens Control Acts of 1937 and 1953. When they insist that "unemployment is hitting young [South Africans] hard" because their country does not put its "very own nationals first like all other countries,"⁹⁴ they are expressing the same.⁹⁵ The Group Areas Act of 1950 reflects in the push to ban or regulate foreign traders, particularly in informal trading spaces on the allegation that "Foreigners own all the spaza shops in our townships!" The Bantu Citizenship Act of 1959, which designated black South Africans as "foreigners," is reenacted in #PutSouthAfricaFirst's calls for stricter border controls and immigrant documentation, with vigilante groups like Dudula forcing people to produce documentation to prove that they are South Africa.⁹⁶ The recurrence of words like "our country," "citizens" and "South Africans" reflects an exclusive national identity which rejects the idea of South Africa as multi-ethnic and Pan-Africanist. That is, South Africa is simultaneously part of and apart from Africa.

Vigilante operations and calls for foreigners to be arrested and deported represent continuity with apartheid policing and criminalisation of "foreigners." Demands to "clean up our country" of "foreigners" echo apartheid

police raids on black neighbourhoods under pass laws. These demands are accompanied by the belief that “Foreigners are responsible for all the crime in SA!” Reports from the South African police do not support this view, but that is clearly beside the point, isn’t it? The inaccurate statistics create an ugly picture of African migrants, thus justifying the demand for police crackdowns on undocumented migrants. Primitive apartheid deployed arrests and deportations against Africans. #PutSouthAfricaFirst calls for the same controls to keep undocumented migrants away. We see the same scenario play out through #PutSouthAfricaFirst. What is consistent in the tweets is the view that “apartheid ended” and that foreigners are either the immediate cause of current problems or worsen the situation. Here, apartheid is celebrated and its methods appropriated for use against African migrants. We see, in the shift from racial exclusion to nationalist exclusion, for instance, the evolution, rather than disappearance, of apartheid. Apartheid terraforms. The movement is subdued in its references to apartheid but it embraces apartheid’s core principles of segregation, exclusion and nationalism. Apartheid is used as rationale for border and immigration control, economic exclusion and draconian policing. Rather than breaking from South Africa’s past, #PutSouthAfricaFirst represents a good neighbourly and demoted response to harm.

Conclusion

The discussion of #PutSouthAfricaFirst demonstrated the good neighbourly relationship between concomitant action and reaction. Instead of being equal and oppositional, #PutSouthAfricaFirst mimics apartheid. It echoes apartheid’s foundational principles and argues for apartheid sorting and classifying despite often appearing to denounce apartheid as an injustice. Apartheid’s racial oppression is rejected while its border control, economic policies and policing against foreigners are praised. Apartheid’s core ideology of denying service to some people is deeply embedded in the movement. Where apartheid once said, “White South Africans first,” #PutSouthAfricaFirst now says, “South Africans first.” The mechanisms of exclusion remain the same. Instead of racial exclusion, #PutSouthAfricaFirst promotes national exclusion, but the structure is the same, suggesting that apartheid’s sorting and classifying has evolved rather than ended. This suggests that #PutSouthAfricaFirst is not a break from primitive apartheid-era thinking, but rather its evolution. So, the apartheid slave ship sails on and will not dock any time soon.

Notes

- 1 “First” movements are generally preservation movements.
- 2 *The New York Times*, “Mr. Vorster Rallies the Faithful,” September 23, 1977, <https://www.nytimes.com/1977/09/23/archives/long-island-opinion-mr-vorster-rallies-the-faithful.html> (accessed December 31, 2024).
- 3 *British Pathé*, “Mr. Vorster Speaks – South Africa,” <https://www.britishpathe.com/asset/16072/> (accessed January 1, 2025).

- 4 Vorster made the distinction between South Africa and the “independent” homelands during an interview recorded on March 13, 1974. The interview can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVWh01yCoIQ> (accessed December 31, 2024).
- 5 United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 392*, adopted June 19, 1976, in the aftermath of the Soweto Uprising, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/72454>.
- 6 *Apartheid in South Africa – UN Condemnation*, YouTube, posted by *AP Archive*, October 30, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cki0Ridnr8c> (accessed December 31, 2024).
- 7 *The Washington Post*, “S. African Election: Apartheid Stays,” December 2, 1977, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1977/12/02/s-african-election-apartheid-stays/97df5d88-d4d0-4d00-8216-6d76951aeca4/> (accessed January 1, 2025).
- 8 I use the hashtag to refer to the 2020 protest.
- 9 Of course, the same signifier can be used to mean different things, as is superficially the case with “South Africa.” South Africa from 1948 to 1994 is usually referred to as “Apartheid South Africa,” whereas post-1994 loses the prefix “apartheid” to denote a democratic South Africa.
- 10 W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago, IL: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1903).
- 11 Nyasha Mboti, *Apartheid Studies: A Manifesto*, vol. 1 (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2022), 424.
- 12 *Official Government Circular*, no. 25 (1972).
- 13 Bram Dratwa, “Put South Africans First’: Making Sense of an Emerging South African Xenophobic (Online-) Community,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 49, no. 1 (2023): 85–103, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070.2023.2170126>.
- 14 Dratwa, “Put South Africans First.’”
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Conclusion

An Invitation to Apartheid Studies Work

Mapping Protest Fragmentation

The central thesis of this book can be summarised as follows: to every apartheid action, there is a good neighbourly and demoted reaction. The chapters in this book demonstrate this in several ways. Firstly, the protest universe is a constellation of heterogeneously separate struggles which all seek to be ahead of the rest. It is a contested landscape. Secondly, the individual protest is phased and must content with pre-existent fragmentation owing to apartheid's separationist logic. The individual protest actors are embodiments of multiple fragments which they bring to the protest. Resultantly, their participation is contingent on their ROP, or household experience, which they must constantly negotiate and renegotiate. Thirdly, solidarity and cohesion, though ideal in protest, are impossible. In the group-area division of society, apartheid ensures that groups within the same protest are going in different directions. Fourthly, apartheid fragments time, ensuring that protests occur alongside other commitments. Individuals must balance protest time with time to eat, travel, visit relatives, write examinations, watch cricket and so on. Finally, protest belongs to apartheid. Its origins, evolution, methods and outcomes mirror and reproduce apartheid.

Such is the character of protest in Southern Africa. It is fractured, rated and shaped by apartheid. Unlike Newton's third law of motion which suggests an equal and opposite reaction, protest does not match injustice with symmetry. It mirrors it in fragments, beginning, evolving and ending as a fraction, unable to escape apartheid's fragmentation of human beings, time and space. What binds apartheid's fragments is not coherence, but good neighbourliness: the side-by-side existence of multiple and disparate experiences in the absence of crisis. Apartheid, acting on a victim set apart, never offers the same experience to all people and always expresses itself in the form of fragments, producing reactions which are multiple, diverse and fractional. Resultantly, the study of protest in Southern Africa and the world has less to do with evaluating the success or failure of protest as a paradigm, as much as it is a reckoning with life going on in a world where the human being ought to be proportional, but presents and is delivered in fragments.

Apartheid and Fragmented Protest demonstrates how apartheid persists, how protest is partial and compatible with apartheid, how it reproduces the very divisions that are integral to apartheid and how life goes on alongside apartheid. Protest derives from apartheid's spatial, ideological and epistemic frameworks. In Southern Africa, it testifies to the continuing logic of apartheid, where individuals and communities are sorted, classified and set apart from selves, others, needs, wants and desires. This is the lesson we get from the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter, #ThisFlag, #FeesMustFall, #RhodesMustFall and #PutSouthAfricaFirst. It studies the online fragment of protest, which has become predominantly hybrid, with the online and offline fragments in search of their missing other for envisaged unity.

Fragmentation is a persistent feature of protest, occurring between and within movements. Protest movements compete for visibility, resources and legitimacy in the face of apartheid triage. Apartheid triage, the basis upon which decisions about who must live and who must die, makes the protest landscape a battleground of competing struggles. Movements are forced into competitive frameworks where fragmentation becomes the requirement and price of visibility, with each protest aiming to project itself as uniquely set apart and special. It is not surprising, then, that sometimes protest pits the oppressed against each other owing to scarcity of attention, funding, media visibility or institutional support. Apartheid exclusionary logics are then inadvertently reproduced in their fight to be seen or heard. Resultantly, apartheid never needs to worry about a globally coherent movement as long as its group-area divisions of society are intact.

Apartheid does not end by sorting and classifying people into groups but follows through by further fragmenting the groups into smaller clusters and all the way to the individual. For instance, apartheid bunched Africans into tribal homelands before further magnifying and manipulating differences of class, education, employment status, nature of employment, gender, age and so on within the homelands. Throughout the chapters, we have seen how individual protests are fragmented through the deeply personal and uneven experiences of apartheid. The working mother, the unemployed youth, the student at a historically black university, the long-distance learner and the university academic each experience apartheid differently and thus react differently.

Protestors do not therefore act as a unified bloc, being assemblages of divergent actors, interests and strategies. These lived realities shape how people protest, when they protest and indeed, whether they can afford to protest at all. The ROP means protest, even when collective, involves unequal distributions of risk. It is, to some extent, a drawing of lots. Some take to the streets while others remain in the shadows out of fear, fatigue or family duty. At the appointed time, it is Oliver Twist who steps forward in a dark, overcrowded workhouse, with a bowl of porridge, feebly saying, "please, sir, I want some more."¹ It is Oliver Twist, whose ROP, signified by the lots which fall on him,

who will be punished. In the beginning, in its evolution and at the end, the individual is a fragment.

By targeting the individual, apartheid ensures that protest becomes intermittent and layered with contradiction. It is not always an act of total rebellion, but a practice negotiated alongside the individual's multiple fragments. During #FeesMustFall, students had to navigate assignments, classes and examinations, while engaged in protest, often under threat of arrest and expulsion. The same situation subsisted during the #RhodesMustFall and #ThisFlag movements. The energy to protest competes with the energy to survive. A good neighbourly balance between the two is found and nurtured. So, even as protest erupts, life goes on. People live through protest, not just in, for or of protest. This continuity reflects human beings' capacity to demote suffering or injustice.

It is not that apartheid has disappeared as much as it means victims have discovered a loophole: one can live with apartheid as if they were not. Apartheid, like the telescreen in Orwell's 1984, "could be dimmed, but there was no way of shutting it off completely."² The rhythms of labour, parenting, schooling and joy do not stop when injustice becomes intolerable. Students will still go to school, activists will still support Chelsea Football Club, participants will watch the Cricket World Cup and the protest leader will celebrate the birth of his daughter. Protest is not one continuous monolith. It is phased and consists of cycles which allow for life to go on. The 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence demonstrates that protest cannot occur without ceasing. There is a time to protest and a time to watch cricket. Protest and non-protest are compatible.

In the *apartheid present*, protest is a temporal rhythm that surges and recedes according to the rated demands of life. This duality reflects a profound truth: people cannot live in, for or of protest. They live *through* protest in the sense that protest comes and goes while life goes on. Human beings must eat, laugh, work, heal and dream. This tension inflects the nature of mobilisation, which is often intermittent, negotiated and marked by pre-existing fragmentation. Individuals must protest while parenting, working, studying, commuting and healing. Protest happens between shifts, between funerals, between exams, between hospital visits and hustling in the streets. This good neighbourliness limits the reach of protest. It is not that people have not suffered enough, are selfish or do not care; movements ebb and flow because life goes on. These competing demands, which perfectly illustrate that human beings cannot be in two places at the same time, limit the capacity of protest to be an equal and opposite reaction to apartheid.

While this book centres on Southern Africa, it would be a mistake to treat protest fragmentation as unique to the region. Around the world, protest is increasingly demoted and good neighbourly. Movements like Occupy Wall Street, the Arab Spring, Black Lives Matter and #MeToo all reveal similar patterns: the persistence of apartheid; pre-existing fragmentation; the ROP

regulating individual reaction and making participation varied and uneven; protests competing and leveraging their various rates in pursuit of scarce visibility, resources and legitimacy; individual protests taking on a dual online-offline character; protest actors struggling with the conflict between protest and mundane activities and life going on in spite of protest. What the Southern African cases offer is a magnified version of these global dynamics. The form, content and trajectory of protest in the region mirror global patterns of fragmentation. Protest in Southern Africa, like protest elsewhere, is yet to dismantle apartheid. Movements rise and fall. Fractional and good neighbourly demands are met. It is just enough that my neighbour plays the radio at a lower volume but, God forbid, he must keep playing his radio lest I become a bad neighbour. That is good neighbourliness. That is also good old dimming the telescreen. Meanwhile, the slave ship of apartheid sails on, sometimes reshaped, sometimes rebranded, but never dismantled. The persistence of apartheid, even after protest, confirms to us that reaction is fractional and, often, in good books with apartheid.

The Work of Apartheid Studies

One of the questions I repeatedly encountered during seminars and public lectures where I presented preliminary findings was: so is there no point to protest? I was always cautious to point out that everything depended on what we sought to achieve. If all people want is for roads to be fixed, bins to be collected, fees to be scrapped or policy changes, then yes, protest has a point. There are several cases where protest has achieved these goals. In the cases discussed in this book, protest can be said to have achieved its stated goals to varying degrees. The stated claims of #ThisFlag included an end to corruption, government accountability, restoration of basic services, respect for human rights and civic education. While allegations of corruption remained, the economy continued to decline and the arrest of protestors continued (Mawarire himself was arrested multiple times in 2016, 2017 and 2019), the movement succeeded in forcing public discourse on government accountability. Several officials were put under pressure and corruption scandals gained more public traction. Civic education and empowerment were perhaps #ThisFlag's biggest wins. Despite the subsequent decline of the protest, citizens began speaking out more through smaller breakaway movements such as #ThisGown and #Tajamuka.

#ZimbabweanLivesMatter which emerged during COVID-19 lockdowns sought to raise global awareness of rights abuses (which was a common global phenomenon due to COVID-19 lockdown restrictions), push for accountability of public health funds during COVID-19 and demand the release of political activists arrested for exposing corruption or calling for protests and amplifying citizen voices. Although some activists remained under detention and no one was convicted of corruption, the movement did succeed in raising international alarm, going viral on X (formerly Twitter) in August 2020 with support from celebrities like Ice Cube, Cardi B and Trevor Noah, as

well as South African opposition politicians such as Julius Malema and Mmusi Maimane. Zimbabwe was put back on the global rights agenda, with the US and UK renewing controversial and unilateral sanctions. Furthermore, the campaign amplified protest voices through anonymous storytelling, X threads and digital posters.

In South Africa, the situation was relatively different. The #FeesMustFall central demand for free, quality and decolonised higher education for all, especially for working-class and black students, was partially achieved. Then president, Jacob Zuma, announced a free higher education regime for first-time students from low-earning households via the National Student Financial Aid Scheme.³ Despite education not being universally free and being marred by administrative issues, delays and exclusions, NSFAS came as a relief to some. Still, the government significantly increased allocations to NSFAS and university subsidies. The campaign to end the outsourcing of cleaning, security and maintenance staff in universities succeeded in some universities, including Wits, UCT and UNISA. Demands to decolonise the university, which drew inspiration from #RhodesMustFall, which had started some seven months earlier and overlapped with #FeesMustFall, resulted in curriculum transformation dialogues, the greater visibility of more black academics, the renaming of some colonial buildings, a review of symbols tied to colonialism and greater awareness (as well as critique) of colonial legacies in education. Besides these gains, #RhodesMustFall, which started as a campaign to remove Cecil Rhodes' statue from UCT, scored a major symbolic victory on April 9, 2015, when the UCT Council conceded to the demand.

Finally, #PutSouthAfricaFirst's demands for the prioritisation of South Africans in employment and economic opportunities, advocacy for tighter immigration laws and border security, eradication of illegal immigration, calls for the dismantling of foreign-linked crime networks, demands for the regulation of informal and foreign-owned businesses, promotion of national and cultural sovereignty and reclamation of public services for South African citizens also scored significant points. For instance, on 25 January 2022, the Department of Employment and Labour stated that it would "introduce maximum quota/s on the total number of documented foreign nationals with work visas that can be employed in major economic sectors."⁴ Tougher visa rules and delayed permit renewals, the launch of the Border Management Authority (BMA) in 2022 and mass deportations and raids of "illegal foreigners" can be partly credited to the persistence of #PutSouthAfricaFirst. Despite deepening xenophobia, racism and violence against African migrants, the movement created a wave of nationalist and cultural pride.

So, yes, protest as it is conventionally understood does matter. It has its uses despite the fact that even as nominal gains are made, the situation tends to regress further. What I have deliberately omitted are the losses made, the persistence (if not worsening) of the adverse conditions the various protests sought to address. Or even the emergence of new problems. I deliberately

omit the details lest this becomes a debate on whether protests succeeded or failed. Such questions are beside the point. If we keep in mind that during the anti-war protests in 2003 there appeared to be a decade-long dalliance, a good neighbourliness, between protest and war, then the question of wins and losses ceases to matter. What this book nevertheless contributes is a new way of thinking about the problem and, consequently, a re-evaluation of protest as a paradigm. This new way is called *Apartheid Studies*. The problem that we currently face is apartheid, seen in stages all the way from pre-primitive apartheid to the apartheid present or undetectable apartheid. *Apartheid Studies* invites us to reopen the case of apartheid which South Africa and the world declared closed. We can now speak of apartheid in the present tense and the times we are living in as *the apartheid present*.

Apartheid is what sets people apart from others, from their needs, wants and desires. Apartheid creates artificial scarcity and disproportion by determining that some people, the majority of people, must live on less and less and fight it out among themselves in order to stay alive. Apartheid also does something else. It unfolds in fragments, in bits and pieces, like sheets of tissue paper on a roll. School fees here. Unemployment there. Hunger here. Destitution there. The fragments are so varied and numerous that individuals must hop from one problem to another in circles and, in their multiplicity, victims are ever focused on disparate fragments at any given time. They are never going in the same direction at the same time. So the demand for a job and the job concession do not solve the problem. Tomorrow it will be a lack of school fees. Then a lack of treatment. Then hunger. Then homelessness. Then poor roads. And so on eternally. Furthermore, at that moment one is getting their job, another is retrenched. All these problems will induce all sorts of protest actions, actors, strategies, losses, “gains” and so on. This is why protest has proliferated and become a permanent fixture of contemporary life. Like injustice, protest is so frequent that it has ceased to shock or awe. It is now part of the furniture that everyone knows exists, but no longer really notices. To rephrase Orwell’s take on war, “when [protest] becomes literally continuous, it also ceases to be dangerous.”⁵ Once this stage is reached, we arrive at a state of good neighbourliness:

when perfect victims – the beautiful ones – live in a world of oppression, harm, evil, corruption, dispossession, landlessness, constant theft and injustice as if this is how it has always been, how it should always be and perhaps will always be.⁶

Life goes on.

There is a piercing account of the eternal conflict between wood and polish in Ayi Kwei Armah’s *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, which provides a succinct view of the good neighbourly and demoted relationship between protest and apartheid. The banister, property of the staircase the unnamed

protagonist of the novel traverses on his way up to the office, is the site of this battle. We see, in Armah's depiction of the banister, apartheid in its glory. For starters, the banister "had *originally* been a wooden one" such that one could still see "in the deepest cracks between the swellings of other matter, a dubious piece of deeply aged brown wood." The cracks themselves had lost their rough edges: "They were no longer sharp, the cracks, but all rounded out and smoothed, consumed by soft, gentle, process of decay." We notice that the banister survives and undergoes transformation. The wood has somewhat disappeared underneath a film of paint, polish and other matter, including after-piss, sweat, mucus, shit, soup and remnants of dough. This is why it takes effort to see the woodiness of the banister. Apartheid Studies speaks of the disappearance of apartheid. This is an apt metaphor for that kind of disappearance.

It is nevertheless the eternal conflict between wood and polish that provides insights into the unending duel between protest and apartheid. The wood that must naturally decay survives. The wood maintains a steady state of decadence, which gives the whole banister the appearance of "a very long piece of diseased skin." The wood, even in its state of decay, remains secure in its degeneracy and is in no visible danger of faltering any day soon. This is despite, and in spite of, the repeated efforts to arrest the decay. The passage below details the conflict between wood and polish:

It would be impossible to calculate how much polish on how many rags the wood on the stair banister had seen, but there was certainly enough Ronuk and Mansion splashed there to give the place its now indelible reek of putrid turpentine. What had been going on there and was going on now and would go on and on through all the years ahead was a species of war carried on in the silence of long ages, a struggle in which only the keen, uncanny eyes and ears of lunatic seers could detect the deceiving, easy breathing of the strugglers. The wood underneath would win and win till the end of time. Of that there was no doubt possible, only the pain of hope perennially doomed to disappointment. It was so clear. Of course it was in the nature of the wood to rot with age. The polish, it was supposed, would catch the rot. But of course in the end it was the rot which imprisoned everything in its effortless embrace. It did not really have to fight. Being was enough. In the natural course of things it would always take the newness of the different kinds of polish and the vaunted cleansing power of the chemicals in them and it would convert all to victorious filth, awaiting yet more polish again and again and again.⁷

The dilemma that we face in the fight for justice, in whatever form, is quite simple in its complexity. Apartheid is a contaminant. It is rotten to the core, and all efforts that seek to cleanse it only serve to give it renewed life. Hence,

life goes on. Here is the crux of the matter. As long as there is apartheid, there will be injustice. As long as there is injustice, there will be protest. We now know that apartheid has been with us for a long time. It is a fact that people have lived under apartheid more than they have ever lived under any other condition. It would be impossible to calculate how many protests apartheid has seen, but there are certainly enough picketing, boycotts, hunger strikes, furious tweets, press statements, marches, gatherings and hashtags splashed there to give apartheid an indelible reek of dishonour. Yet, we also need to understand that unlike the banister whose rot can be targeted in toto, apartheid is so huge and so frequent that we no longer seem to notice it outside the eruptions of injustice that ignite in us a sudden sense of revulsion.

The reason why life goes on is that our conceptualisation of the problem is fragmentary. We do not see apartheid, but the absence of school fees. Later on, we will see plastic shacks. It does not occur to us that when we see the absence of school fees, we have also seen hunger, homelessness, destitution, unemployment, poor wages, overcrowding, barren land and lack of medicines. Apartheid is the same event experienced at different intervals. Because we do not see apartheid, we do not protest against it. In fact, protest mimics apartheid fragmentation and unfolds in fragments, in bits and pieces. Protest that mimics the problem it seeks to destroy is therefore good neighbourly and demoted. It is compatible with apartheid and does not therefore exert equal force. *Apartheid and Fragmented Protest* have shown that apartheid did not die. It is the scaffolding of the present, shaping who protests, how they protest and how life goes on regardless. So what now? While the problem is definite, the solution is tentative. It begins with the work of Apartheid Studies: “a new understanding, a new grasp, new forensics and a *new standard*.” This book is but an invitation.

Notes

- 1 Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (London: Penguin Books, 2003).
- 2 George Orwell, *1984 (Essential Orwell Classics)* (New Delhi and Mumbai, India: Grapevine India Publishers Pvt Ltd, Kindle edition, 2022), chap. 1.
- 3 Ahmed Areff and Derrick Spies, “BREAKING: Zuma Announces Free Higher Education for Poor and Working Class Students,” *News24*, December 16, 2017, <https://www.news24.com/news24/zuma-announces-free-higher-education-for-poor-and-working-class-students-20171216>.
- 4 South African Government, “Employment and Labour on Employment of Foreign Nationals in South Africa,” *GovernmentZA*, January 25, 2022, <https://www.gov.za/news/media-statements/employment-and-labour-employment-foreign-nationals-south-africa-25-jan-2022>.
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- 6 Nyasha Mboti, *Apartheid Studies: A Manifesto*, vol. 1 (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2022), 21.
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