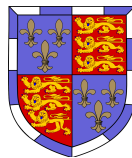




UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE

Politics, Education and the
Imagination in South African and
Brazilian student-led mobilisations
(2015-16)

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St. John's College

December, 2019

This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Declaration

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or am concurrently submitting, for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or is being concurrently submitted, for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. This dissertation does not exceed the prescribed limit of 80 000 words.

Joshua James Platzky Miller

April 1, 2020

Abstract

When students contest an education system they experience as oppressive, what do they imagine could exist instead? This dissertation explores the intersection of politics, education, and the imagination amongst students who mobilised in Brazil and South Africa during the 2015-2016 protest waves. The study focuses on how students learnt from their activism, reimagining both education and society more widely.

In Brazil, it focuses on the activity of high school students in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro during the *Primavera Secundarista* (Student Spring). Here, primarily through school occupations, students fought to keep their schools open, supported their striking teachers, and called attention to a crumbling public school system. Simultaneously, they challenged various forms of oppression and questioned the purpose of schooling in an unequal, exploitative society. In South Africa, it focuses on university students in Johannesburg and Cape Town during *#FeesMustFall* and affiliated campaigns. These students exposed problems of university access and funding, decolonising education, and exploitative labour practices in universities, particularly outsourcing workers. They questioned the ‘post-Apartheid’ social order, continued racism and racialised capitalism, and how universities reproduce these conditions.

The dissertation draws on 9 months of fieldwork across four cities, primarily encompassing interviews with student participants and staff working in solidarity, documents and statements produced by participants, and both journalistic and academic articles that have reflected on these processes. It tracks the precursors to and eruption of the mobilisations, how the students involved reconfigured existing coalitions and groups, ran their own educational projects, and in the process challenged ideas and practices of education, thereby shaping their own perspectives.

Drawing on literature about the imagination and social movement learning, I argue that students reimagined education conceptually and practically. They challenged the existing education systems, while addressing their experiences of alienation, marginalisation, and exclusion. In doing so, they constructed dialogical, thoughtful spaces of teaching and learning, interrogating the educational system in which they were embedded. Students who took part in politicised collective action over 2015-16 were thus shaped by their experiences, emerging with different perspectives on education and society.

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For Giulio, and all those who have faced repression and brutality, with the courage that knows a better world is possible.

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Glossary

#FMF #FeesMustFall.

#Oct6 #October6.

#RMF #RhodesMustFall.

Grêmio High School Student Council.

Juntos! *Juntos! Movimento Juvenil Anticapitalista* - Youth Anticapitalist Movement.

Levante *Levante Popular da Juventude* - Popular Youth Uprising.

secundarista high school student.

ANC African National Congress.

ANCYL African National Congress Youth League.

APEOESP *Sindicato dos Professores do Ensino Oficial do Estado de São Paulo* - São Paulo State Teachers' Union.

AZASO Azanian Students Organisation.

BCM Black Consciousness Movement.

BLF Black First Land First.

BSM Black Student Movement.

C.E. *Colégio Estadual* - State School.

COSATU Congress of South African Trade Unions.

CPII *Colégio Pedro II* - Pedro II College.

CPUT the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

CUT *Central Única dos Trabalhadores* - Unified Workers' Centre.

DHET Department of Higher Education and Training.

E.E. *Escola Estadual* - State School.

EFF Economic Freedom Fighters.

EFFSC Economic Freedom Fighters Student Command.

ENEM *Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio* - National High School Exam.

ESP *Escola Sem Partido* - School Without Party.

ETEC *Escola Técnica Estadual* - State Technical School.

FAETEC *Fundação de Apoio à Escola Técnica* - Foundation of Support for Technical Schools.

GEAR Growth, Employment, and Redistribution.

HBU Historically Black University.

HWU Historically White University.

IMF International Monetary Fund.

ISERJ *Instituto Superior de Educação do Rio de Janeiro* - Higher Education Institute of Rio de Janeiro.

IWW Industrial Workers of the World.

MNU *Movimento Negro Unificado* - Unified Black Movement.

MPL *Movimento Passe Livre* - Free Fare Movement.

MSA Muslim Students' Association.

MST *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* - Landless Rural Workers' Movement.

NEHAWU National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union.

NSFAS National Student Financial Aid Scheme.

NUSAS National Union of South African Students.

PAC Pan-Africanist Congress.

PASMA Pan Africanist Student Movement of Azania.

PCB *Partido Comunista Brasileiro* - Brazilian Communist Party.

PCdoB *Partido Comunista do Brasil* - Communist Party of Brazil.

PMDB *Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro* - Brazilian Democratic Movement Party.

PSDB *Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira* - Brazilian Social Democracy Party.

PSOL *Partido Socialismo e Liberdade* - Socialism and Liberty Party.

PT *Partido dos Trabalhadores* - Workers' Party.

PYA Progressive Youth Alliance.

RDP Reconstruction and Development Programme.

SACHED South African Committee for Higher Education.

SACP South African Communist Party.

SAP Structural Adjustment Programme.

SASCO South African Students Congress.

SASO South African Students' Organisation.

SEEDUC *Secretaria de Estado de Educação* - State Education Secretariat.

SEPE-RJ *Sindicato Estadual dos Profissionais de Educação do RJ* - Rio State Union of Education Professionals.

SRC Students' Representative Council.

STEM Science, Technology, Engineering, Maths.

TUT the Tshwane University of Technology.

UBES *União Brasileira dos Estudantes Secundaristas* - Union of Brazilian Secondary Students.

UCKAR the University Currently Known As Rhodes.

UCT the University of Cape Town.

UFABC the Universidade Federal do ABC (Metropolitan São Paulo).

UFRJ the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro.

UJ the University of Johannesburg.

UJC *União da Juventude Comunista* - Union of Communist Youth.

UJS *União da Juventude Socialista* - Union of the Socialist Youth.

UKZN the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal.

UNE *União Nacional dos Estudantes* - National Union of Students.

UNIRIO the Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro.

UNISA the University of South Africa.

UP the University of Pretoria.

USP the Universidade de São Paulo.

UWC the University of the Western Cape.

WASP Workers and Socialist Party.

WB World Bank.

Wits the University of the Witwatersrand.

WSF World Social Forum.

YCL Young Communist League.

My freedom, in order to fulfil itself, requires that it emerge into an open future. Others open the future to me; setting up the world of tomorrow, they define my future

Beauvoir ([1948] 1976)

To educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn

hooks (1994)

The materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing forgets that circumstances are changed by people and that it is essential to educate the educator

Thesis III, Marx ([1845] 1969)

Chapter 1

Introduction

We learnt more about politics and community in three months of occupation than we learnt in twelve years of school.

A gente aprendeu mais sobre política e comunidade em três meses da ocupação do que a gente aprendeu em doze anos de escola.

Fernanda, Student, Rio de Janeiro, 24 August 2017

This is the most important student movement since the 1970s. It has firmly placed the question of the university crisis on the national agenda. It's succeeded in ensuring that most workers will be insourced. It challenged authority inside and outside the university

Isaac, Lecturer, Johannesburg, 23 March 2017

1.1 #FeesMustFall and a Primavera Secundarista

From 2015 to 2016, tens of thousands of students in Brazil and South Africa shut down and occupied their schools and universities, forming alliances with teachers and workers to challenge their institutions and the state, while enacting alternative educational practices.¹ In the process, they learnt about themselves, the character of their education and society, and transformed their relationships with one another.

These mobilisations were dramatic in their scale and duration,² the radicalism of student activists, and the wide range of participants. In Brazil, students in São Paulo mobilised in late 2015 against the state's threat of permanently closing an indeterminate

¹Throughout this dissertation, I have adopted the description 'student' for clarity. As I discuss later, however, some students only felt an affinity to it as an identity because of their collective struggles framed around being students, and in numerous cases, students were also working while studying, blurring the distinction between student and worker

²Although there are few accurate estimates of the number of students involved

number of high schools. Students across the state undertook over 160 protests in at least 60 municipalities from October to November 2015 (Campos, Medeiros, and Ribeiro 2016, p. 41). Each protest ranged from a few hundred to thousands of students, against what the government called the ‘reorganisation’ of schools, which would have affected an estimated 300,000 students (Miranda 2017, p. 284). On the 9th of November 2015, students at *Escola Estadual* - State School (E.E.) Diadema occupied their working-class school in São Paulo’s *Zona Sul*. Barely a day later, on the 10th of November, students occupied E.E. Fernão Dias Paes, a relatively well-off public school in the privileged neighbourhood of Pinheiros. Over the course of November and December, thousands of students occupied over 200 schools across the state (Campos, Medeiros, and Ribeiro 2016, p. 334).³ Based on my own estimates, it is likely that at least 10% of the São Paulo metropolitan high schools were occupied in a few months.⁴

The wave of occupations expanded across Brazil in 2016, as students occupied over 1,000 schools and other institutions in struggles against a diverse range of concerns. In Rio de Janeiro in March 2016, students formed alliances with their striking teachers and their trade unions to demand that the state pay their teachers, as well as demanding a reversal to the dramatic cuts to school infrastructure investment.⁵ Across the state, students occupied roughly 70 schools, although this was also concentrated in the city of Rio, where a likely 15% of metropolitan schools were occupied.⁶ Across the country, students locked the school gates, letting students and sometimes teachers or supporters inside, preventing the school’s directorate (administration) and police from entering the campus. As the occupations continued, students ran the schools themselves: cooking, cleaning, structuring the days with activities and classes, organising security and media coverage.

In South Africa, university students mobilised against a tuition fee increase, coalescing around the hashtag #FeesMustFall (#FMF)⁷ and demanding the abolition of university fees, the decolonisation of education, and, in alliance with campus workers, demanding an end to exploitative labour conditions on campuses under the banner of #EndOutsourcing (Naidoo 2016a, p. 186). Following patterns of mobilisations globally since the 2000s, students created new pedagogical spaces both digitally and offline (Thigo 2013), coordinating

³There are no accurate numbers that I am aware of. The smallest occupations were at least 15 people, the largest grew over time to comprise hundreds of students and supporters. The spread, however, was rapid: in the ten days between 9 and 19 November 2015, students occupied 75 new schools across the state

⁴The 200+ occupations were concentrated in the metropolitan area, which had 1200 public state-run high schools in 2015. Data from Brazilian statistics agency INEP, <https://inepdata.inep.gov.br/>

⁵Interview, José, teacher who had visited over 20 occupations across Rio. 20 September 2016

⁶Estimates my own, based on the City of Rio de Janeiro’s 350 state- and federal-run schools. See <https://inepdata.inep.gov.br/>

⁷The specific hashtag #FMF seems to have first been used during the #RhodesMustFall (#RMF) protests at UCT, with twitter account @SkhumbuzoTuswa tweeting “Priorities?? #FeesMustFall” in response to a report about RMF (Wessels 2017, p. 68). However, a variety of hashtag names for the mobilisations were used from 2015 onward, including #FreeDecolonisedEducation and variations of #FeesWillFall. For simplicity’s sake I will refer to all these as #FMF

across university campuses both through existing organisations and via new channels using digital tools.

The #FMF cycle of contention became visible on the 14th of October 2015, with students blockading the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) campus to protest the announcement of the fee increase for the following year (Naidoo 2016a; Sibanyoni 2015; Ndlovu 2017a, p. 30), quickly grew under the banner of a *#NationalShutdown*,⁸ until students blockaded, occupied, and disrupted “all major universities” across the country (Naicker 2015). Between 14-20 October, after protests at several universities, management teams had met with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), which announced a national maximum of a 6% fee increase (Naidoo 2016a, p. 184). As a result, students shifted from challenging only their university management towards a large-scale rebellion across the sector that directly confronted the state. Over a single week in October 2015, 5,000 students marched to Parliament in Cape Town (21 October), thousands more to the ruling party African National Congress (ANC) Headquarters, Luthuli House, in Johannesburg (22 October), and over 10,000 students, education workers and supporters to the Union Buildings, the seat of the state executive in Pretoria (23 October).⁹ These protests reflected a different dynamic, from campus-based activism to making education a question of national concern.

From the 11th to the 13th of November 2015, students undertook a “national student movement workshop” in Johannesburg, resolving to pursue a set of 6 demands targeting both educational institutions and society more widely (ibid., p. 188). These consisted of:

1. Free, quality, decolonised education from the cradle to the grave;
2. An end to outsourcing and labour brokering;
3. The decriminalisation of protest and protesters;
4. An end to debt;
5. A reformulation of governance structures to promote participatory rather than representative democracy; and
6. An end to all oppressive systems including racism, exploitation, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, and ableism.

Towards these demands, students occupied several university campuses, organised discussion groups and reading circles, and hosted speakers to discuss key themes. Much of the intellectual work of the movements was framed under the banner of decolonisation and decoloniality. The key reference points for students became anti-colonial and anti-apartheid authors like Frantz Fanon, Steve Biko, and Robert Sobukwe (Gibson 2016; Xaba 2017a), as well as black feminists like Angela Davis, Audrey Lorde, bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, and Kimberlé Crenshaw.

⁸A slogan created by students at the University Currently Known As Rhodes (UCKAR) to indicate the kind of action students perceived would be required to achieve their demands

⁹Estimates drawn from Booyesen (2016a) and Davis, Swingler, and Merwe (2015) in Cape Town, Wakefield (2015) in Johannesburg, and Hamilton (2017) and Naicker (2015) in Pretoria

According to Lockett and Mzobe (2016, p. 94), “by the end of 2015, students and workers in at least eighteen [of 26] tertiary institutions in different parts of South Africa had participated in protest action”. A minimum of 2% of South Africa’s total university student population thus took part in some form of direct confrontational protest activity during 2015 alone.¹⁰ Many more would have been involved in less visible ways, or indirectly, from planning and logistics support to taking part in surrounding activities like discussions. At this scale, students captured the public imagination and their mobilisations resonated across the country. They were the largest mass student protests since the end of Apartheid and were a “high point of political activism in the public sphere” (Ndlovu 2017c, p. 44).

Since the 1980s and 1990s, the expansion of public education at both secondary and tertiary level has been a significant aspect of democratising social and economic relations in South Africa and Brazil (Libâneo 2016; Vally 2007). However, this expansion remained inequalitarian, with markedly divided opportunities for each generation of students. Since 2008, students in both countries have also faced constricting opportunities as the aftershocks of the global financial crisis sent the countries towards recession. Students were also frustrated with authoritarian education systems, their rising costs and the poor quality of facilities. These factors provided a catalyst for mass mobilisations in late 2015 that would create a moment of rupture and provide students with the possibility of imagining and experimenting with new educational practices.

Both regions have extensive histories of student resistance to authoritarian rule, reaching their zenith in the mid-1900s when the state expanded mass public education and larger numbers of young people were drawn into deeply unequal and unjust education systems. In many cases, students in the 2015 mobilisations were aware of these histories of struggle, drawing on them alongside other, broader traditions of anti-colonial liberation movements, anarchism, communism, intersectional and black feminisms, Pan-Africanism and Black Consciousness. The 2015-16 student mobilisations in South Africa and Brazil, however, should also be understood as part of a global resurgence of student protests and occupations, which have erupted at schools and universities in Chile (2006, 2008, 2011-13), the UK (2010-11, 2015, 2018), Canada (2012), the Netherlands (2015), India (2016), as well as Germany, Denmark, Poland, Ethiopia, Mexico, and elsewhere (See, inter alia, Adamu and Balsvik 2017; Bégin-Caouette and Jones 2014; Chaudhuri 2018; Cini and Guzmán-Concha 2017; Ibrahim 2013; Talachian and Koutsogiannis 2015).

Students alone have limited power in challenging wider power structures, however. Both historically and in the 2015 mobilisations, students have had the most significant impact when working alongside workers. Because institutions rely on ongoing labour to

¹⁰Estimate my own, combining the marches with a very low estimate of campus-based protests at 250 students per campus, out of the country’s 1 million students. This understates the scale of the protests, however: Naicker (2015), for instance, notes that #RMF in early 2015 “drew thousands of students from the UCT campuses to its meetings”

sustain themselves, the interruption or withdrawal of that labour threatens to undermine their functioning (Connell 2019). By virtue of their labour, workers can magnify the impact of student movements when the two work together. Student movements are also never homogenous (Altbach 1989b; Naidoo 2006). Internal disagreements and divergent tendencies influence the character of a movement as a whole, shaping its strategies, tactics, and demands, its longevity and what ideas percolate and are widely disseminated.

This dissertation explores the broader conditions in South Africa and Brazil that gave rise to mass student mobilisations and the eruption of student-worker protest in late 2015. It also examines how these mobilisations changed over the course of 2015-16, and what kind of alternative education students imagined and put into practice within their mobilisations.

1.2 Research Questions

Students' experiences, and their efforts to collectively organise and act as a movement, are conditioned by a host of factors, from local institutional arrangements, to state policies and policing, to global pressures on mid-tier, semi-peripheral, post-colonial countries in the Global South. This dissertation explores three key facets of the South African and Brazilian student mobilisations: their underlying conditions and catalysts, their dynamics as movements, and their imaginaries and practices of education. The main research question is therefore, *how is education reimagined and practised in student-led mobilisations in times of rupture?*

The 'how' in the research question is partially directed towards the mechanisms and processes by which students come to engage with ideas and practices of education. To answer this, the dissertation unpacks the conditions which gave rise to the mass mobilisations. The first sub-question is thus, how did the mobilisations emerge and how did these conditions shape their practices and imaginaries? Drawing on the history of education and political economy (Alexander [1990] 2013a; Freitag 1986; Jansen 1990; Saviani [1983] 1999; Skidmore 2010), I look to the conditions which shaped the educational systems that students experienced in 2015, as well as the recent historical processes which shaped students' political subjectivities, to argue that the way that students reimagined education often related to the conditions they experienced. The second sub-question is, how did the dynamics of the mobilisations affect the way in which students imagined and practised education? Here, the experiences of students during mobilisations both reflected and shaped their imaginaries. Drawing on Social Movement Theory, particularly the sub-field of Social Movement Learning (Choudry and Kapoor 2010; Cox and Flesher Fominaya 2009; Harley 2014a) as well as social epistemology (Dotson 2014; Haslanger 2017), I argue that the mobilisations' internal composition and processes, dynamics with external

actors like the state and institutional authorities, and the form of decomposition of the mobilisation each affected the way in which education could be conducted and imagined. ‘How’ education is reimaged also speaks the outcome of those processes. Thus, focusing on the third facet, I look to students’ practices as well as their reflective considerations during the mobilisations to ask, what kind of imagined education system did students envision? Drawing especially on Freirean Critical Pedagogy (Freire [1970] 2006, 2018), I argue that students worked out an inchoate but powerful vision of a liberatory, caring education system that was grounded in their realities, rather than reproducing an unequal, exploitative, racialised and gendered capitalist order.

1.2.1 Case Studies

My focus on Brazil and South Africa emanated from the simultaneous emergence of the mass student mobilisations in both regions in late 2015, in Brazilian high schools and South African universities. Within the two contexts, my research focuses on four cities where protests were most prominent: Cape Town, Johannesburg, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. The density of protest activity and the way in which these mobilisations captured the popular imagination makes them worth investigating. I was also most familiar with these cities, with some pre-existing networks in each. Without this, I would not have been able to do research in all four.

These fieldwork sites offer important points of comparison. Historically, the regions of South Africa and Brazil played an important role in the development of the ‘modern’ world, through global colonialism and capitalism. The extraction and export of raw materials and agricultural products from Latin America, particularly Brazil, was a key factor for European profit, enabling Europe’s dominance of global trade (Blaut 1989, pp. 285–6).¹¹ The discovery of minerals like gold and diamonds in the 19th century were also crucial for the consolidation of British global hegemony (*ibid.*, pp. 282–4), and became a key resource in their further conquest of Africa (Luxemburg [1913] 2003). The form of European mass immigration at the turn of the 20th century also shaped the racialised class dynamics (Hamilton et al. 2001; Marx 1998; Padayachee and Bordiss 2016, p. 674).

As I discuss in the Historical Context (Chapter 3), the two countries have gone through similar phases of urbanisation and industrialisation, authoritarian rule and liberation struggles. Since the late 20th century, they have also functioned as regional sub-imperialist powers, albeit not hegemonically (Bond 2013; Bond and Garcia 2015; Marini 1972; Martin 2013; Moldovan 2017; Taylor 2011a; Tenorio-Trillo 2017). As such, although the countries are subordinate in the global political economy, they are semi-peripheral and important nodes for global capitalism in Latin America and Africa. Since the 2000s, they have turned

¹¹Marx ([1871] 2000g, p. 285) observed that this “was one of the circumstances which furthered the growth of capital and the rise of the bourgeoisie in the sixteenth century”

towards “social-democratic neoliberalisation” under class-conciliatory, centre-left ANC and *Partido dos Trabalhadores* - Workers’ Party (PT) governments.¹² Despite this, they remain regions with high levels of inequality and labour militancy (Palma 2011). The World Bank’s measure of “labour-employer relations” ranked Brazil and South Africa as 129th and 140th globally in terms of “conciliation” between capital and labour, inversely suggesting high levels of class antagonism and confrontation.¹³

Finally, these contexts have had several historical interconnections, from mid-colonial trade routes (Osada 2002), to radicals from the 1960s learning from each other’s contexts – particularly the importance of Freire and Biko in South Africa and Brazil respectively (Augusto 2018; Means 2018; Naidoo 2015b). Within the 2015-16 mobilisations, students recognised the similarities. Multiple fact-finding groups travelled from South Africa to understand Brazil’s higher education system in the wake of #FMF (Brotman and Pollack 2017; Mabizela 2017; Pathways to Free Education Collective 2017b).¹⁴

Although the scale of the cities and countries differs significantly, the four cities share the contours of a similar history and have served similar functions in the respective countries. Cape Town and Rio were capitals of the colonial period, while Johannesburg and São Paulo grew later into the seat of industrial and finance capitalism (Hart and Padayachee 2013; Lo and Yeung 1998; Schiffer 2002). The regions of the Western Cape and Gauteng, and Rio and São Paulo state, were among wealthiest and most infrastructurally-developed, drawing people to urbanise, but with deeply unequal divisions along race and class.¹⁵ Since their founding, they have been as connected to local environments as they have been deeply embedded in global networks of trade and migration, with strong links to European cities. By focusing on these highly unequal nexus points of global and local dynamics, this study moves away from over-reliance on the nation-state as the central unit of analysis, towards the real conditions that shape people’s lives in these extraverted, interconnected cities.

Within each of the four cities, I aimed to select institutions of similar character and social role. Both regions have had similarly stratified education systems for elites and masses. In South Africa, Wits and the University of Cape Town (UCT) are Historically White Universities (HWUs), in an “upper band” of elite research universities (Cooper 2015, pp. 250–1). On the other hand, the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and the University of Johannesburg (UJ) are “middle band” teaching universities, catering largely

¹²Drawing on Cerny (2010) and Saad-Filho (2013)

¹³The figures, tracked since 2007, suggest similar dynamics, with divergence in the period around South Africa’s Marikana crisis (2012), converging again from the *Jornadas de Junho* (2013). See <https://bit.ly/2XIUtDR>

¹⁴As I understand, there were at least two groups that went. One was between March-April 2017, managed by South African university authorities, comprising institutional student representatives. The other was by activists who went to learn from Brazilian social/student movements

¹⁵Within SA, see Southall (1994, p. 652) and Christie (2008, p. 98); within BR, see Hanchard (1994, p. 28) and Tolosa (2003, p. 485). See also UN-Habitat (2016)

to black, working-class students.¹⁶ In Brazil, I focus on a similar cross-section of public schools, from the elite Fernão Dias (SP) and the CPH network (RJ), to Diadema (SP) and Mendes de Moraes (RJ) which cater primarily to working-class students.¹⁷ Although students have protested at South Africa’s “lower-band” Historically Black Universities (HBUs) and TVET colleges for decades (ibid.), they were less visible in this wave of student mobilisations. Similarly, news reports rarely mentioned marginalised, *favela*-based schools in Brazil, and these were often shut down more quickly by police repression when occupied. Because of the relative importance of mid-range to elite institutions in this wave of mobilisations, as well as logistical challenges in extending the study, I have focused on what happens when student-led movements disrupt institutions that reproduce the middle-to-high end of society.

The dissertation thus speaks to layers of marginalisation within elite spaces, where those elite spaces are often nevertheless relatively marginal within global networks of power. Where Sousa Santos (2016, p. 19) describes the “South that also exists in the geographic North”, he adopts geographical terms to describe relations of power, domination, and exploitation. This framework can be extended; with the implication that there can be a marginalised South, in Northern institutions, located in the geographic and global South. However, even those in such ambivalently marginalised positions can still have a significant impact, rupturing the reproduction of those elites spaces.¹⁸

1.3 Research Contribution

This dissertation explores how student-led mobilisations contest and shape educational imaginaries. As a result, the analysis differs from most mainstream analyses of social and institutional change, which prioritise apolitical, technocratic changes imposed from above by a state, development agency, or private entity (Escobar 1992, 2015; Ferguson 1994; Sachs 2010; Selwyn 2014). Instead, I draw primarily on two scholarly fields which help explain conflictual and politicised processes of social change. The first is a synthesis of the *sociology and history of education* and *critical pedagogy*, with an emphasis on the political economic conditions of education, as well as institutional change and social struggle. The second is *social movement studies*, particularly looking at social movement learning, student movements, and movements in the Global South. Drawing these fields together, while prioritising the views of students and workers themselves, enables this dissertation to analyse and explain how education is reimagined in periods of rupture,

¹⁶See Chapter 3 for more detail on the genesis and composition of these institutions

¹⁷These schools were named, respectively, after Fernão Dias Pais Leme, a Portuguese *bandeirante* (roughly pillager-colonist-slaver) in the 17th century; Dom Pedro II, the Emperor of Brazil in the 19th century; and Luís Mendes de Moraes, a soldier and military general who became the Brazilian War Minister in the early 20th century. See Appendix A for other institutions

¹⁸This impact can also extend beyond their borders, as this dissertation attests to

generated by student movements in South Africa and Brazil. This contributes to the dissertation's analysis of conflictual educational and social change in highly unequal, late capitalist, post-colonial regions in the Global South.

When societies change, their educational systems adjust in response, and changes within education systems can ripple out into broader society. To get a sense of the relationship between education and broader social processes, I draw on the *history of education* and *critical pedagogy* in the Global South, specifically in South Africa (Choudry and Vally 2018; Christie 1985, 2008; Kallaway 2002; Kallaway and Swartz 2016; Kallaway et al. 1997; Soudien and Nekhwevha 2002; Vally 2007; Vally and Motala 2014) and Brazil (Ahagon 2015; Araujo 2007; Bittar and Ferreira Jr. 2016; Duarte and Santos 2017; Gonçalves e Silva 2007; Kuenzer 2007; Louro 2004; Snider 2017; Sousa 2009).¹⁹ These authors speak to the way in which education has been central in reproducing societal stratification and inequality, with conflict in educational spaces as a key aspect of institutional and pedagogical change. As a result, they give a sense of the contexts which shape students' political struggles.

Although they recognise the important role that social movements play within those changes, they tend to focus on the institutional level, without delving into the internal political dynamics of the movements themselves. In this study, I thus draw on a second field, *social movement studies*, particularly movement-relevant theory (Barker and Cox 2002; Bevington and Dixon 2005; Cox and Nilsen 2014; Ntseng 2014), to explore why particular forms of challenge and conflict emerge, and thus how the movements' own dynamics result in certain institutional tensions and changes. My research is situated at the intersection of two recent sub-literatures of social movement theory: studies of student movements, and of social movement learning.

MacSheoin (2016, pp. 189–90) calculates that of roughly 1,000 social movement journal publications across major journals, student movements account for 24, only 8 of which are in the Global South. Studies of student movements thus tend to look at the Global North, particularly the 1960s uprisings, or formal student organisations (Araujo 2007; Cox, Nilsen, and Pleyers 2017; MacSheoin 2016; Zeilig 2009b). Contemporary, loosely affiliated student mobilisations in the Global South are rarely analysed, although there are notable exceptions across Africa and Latin America (Bellei, Cabalin, and Orellana 2014; Bülow and Ponte 2015; Donoso 2017; Guzmán-Concha 2012; Zeilig 2007). However, the role of students has shifted across the Global South since the 1950s, and particularly since the 1990s. Students are no longer a narrow elite, fighting only to maintain their privileges (Zeilig 2007, 2009a,b). This warrants investigation, as it complicates the picture of social reproduction in stratified Global South/non-core countries.

¹⁹Early theorists of social reproduction in education, although insightful, focused primarily on the Global North (Althusser [1969] 1971; Gintis and Bowles 1981; Passeron and Bourdieu [1970] 2000; Willis 1977)

Until recently, Social Movement theorists have also tended to overlook the epistemic life of movements (Chesters 2012; Choudry and Vally 2018; Cox and Flesher Fominaya 2009; Hall et al. 2012; Harley 2014a). The literature on social movement learning, while globally oriented, tends to focus on workers' movements and trade unions (Bleakney and Choudry 2013; Choudry and Kapoor 2010; Cooper 1998), peasant, environmental, and indigenous movements (Choudry and Kapoor 2010; Meek 2011; Tarlau 2015), anti-globalisation and anti-privatisation (Choudry and Kapoor 2010; Maeckelbergh 2011), and feminist movements (Carpenter and Mojab 2017; Miles 1989).

However, there are few studies engaging with knowledge production within *student* movements and mobilisations (Choudry and Vally 2018; Pusey 2016; Zielińska, Kowzan, and Prusinowska 2011). One reason for this may be that scholars assume a separation or even hierarchy between knowledge “from the academy” and knowledge “from the movement”, which would be blurred in the case of student movements as “it is more difficult to distinguish an extraordinary dimension of learning (not included in the curricula) from the formal one (e.g. university courses)” (Zielińska, Kowzan, and Prusinowska 2011). Where social movement learning has tended to focus on informal education, student movements are unusual in blending formal and informal education. This is important, however, because student-led movements operate at a nexus of subaltern knowledge-from-below, and formal-institutional knowledge.

The second contribution of this dissertation is the comparative dimension that it adopts. This analysis enhances our understanding of global social dynamics by making visible localised and marginalised social stratification and conflict, which have an important bearing on broader processes of globalisation and capitalism, state control and insurgent movements.

The comparative literature that does exist between South Africa and Brazil focuses on economic processes such as globalisation and inequality (Leibbrandt and Finn 2012; Leubolt 2015; Lieberman 2001, 2003; Palma 2011), racism (Guillebeau 1999; Hamilton et al. 2001; Marx 1998; Vargas 2005), state formation and policy (Tillin and Duckett 2017; Webster and Hurt 2014; Westhuizen 2012, 2016b), or themes in international relations like the countries' regional roles in (Southern) Africa and Latin America, or in multilateral organisations like BRICS or IBSA (Flemes 2009; Guimarães 1996; Roelofse-Campbell 2006; Vilalva and Gala 2003; Wagner 2013; Westhuizen 2016a; Westhuizen and Milani 2019).²⁰ Educational comparisons are rarer, although several authors argue that similar systemic inequality results in education reproducing social inequality (Lam 1999; Lam, Finn, and Leibbrandt 2015; Majee and Ress 2018; Schwartzman, Pinheiro, and Pillay 2015).

However, existing comparative studies between South Africa and Brazil are mostly about state or elite relations. Few speak to social struggles from below, with exceptions

²⁰Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa (BRICS); India, Brazil, South Africa (IBSA)

like Seidman (1994) on 1970-80s workers' movements, and anti-capitalist critiques of BRICS in Bond and Garcia (2015). This matters because movements from below shape human history and social organisation (Cox and Nilsen 2014), and Brazil and South Africa are themselves argued to be "protest nations" with forms of "insurgent citizenship", characterised by high levels of protest activity and social conflict (Brown 2015; Duncan 2016; Holston 2009).

In recent literature on student struggles in the Global South, and specifically student movements in South Africa and Brazil, few authors situate their analyses in their historical contexts, or conditions and processes of late capitalist, post-2008 crises for the Global South (Barnes 2019; Booysen 2016a; Ray 2016). Even fewer offer comparative analyses between South Africa, Brazil, or other contexts such as Chile, despite their similarities (Cini and Guzmán-Concha 2017). Comparative publications on such student mobilisations largely take up questions raised by the South African student movements in former colonial metropolises (Bhambra, Gebrial, and Nişancioğlu 2018; Omarjee 2018; Rhodes Must Fall Oxford 2018). This study is one of the first to compare student movements, and to focus on their political-educational aspects (Alegria 2017a, 2018; Goulart, Cássio, and Ximenes 2019). It therefore contributes to a comparative understanding of Southern student movements in the contemporary period, to think beyond the immediate conditions of each and better understand global processes of education and social reproduction.²¹

1.4 Methodology

A key challenge in this research is that the student mobilisations were *ongoing processes*, which makes assessments and analysis difficult. The initial period of rupture, for instance, only took place after I had started the PhD programme in 2015. Capturing these processes is challenging, as it involves writing about history as it unfolds. Writing around the Egyptian Revolution, Abdelrahman (2015a, p. 3) argues that we attempt to make "sense of the revolutionary process as it unfolds" by tracing a moment of rupture's "historical lineage and the political economy", as well as how it develops in entanglements between its protagonists and their "regional and international context". Thus, while I primarily focus on the 2015-16 period of #FMM in South Africa and the Brazilian student mobilisations, to understand these entails looking also at important precursors, like #RMM and the Black Student Movement (BSM) in early 2015, as well as key discussions and actions that took place after the mobilisations that I explore in this thesis had subsided. The mobilisations were not merely dynamic, but were specifically *conflictual* processes. The people involved dealt with intensely personal and highly emotionally charged issues, including interpersonal violence. At a minimum, this necessitates particular care and sensitivity to those with

²¹Thanks to I. van Kessel for this understanding of comparative research

whom research is undertaken. Moreover, a key site of conflict was the *politics of knowledge production*. The student-led mobilisations challenged not only knowledge production, including about social movements, but also existing epistemic frameworks (Goulart and Calvet 2017; Publica[c]tion Collective 2017). On several occasions, for instance, I heard South African students critiquing “old white academics who make a career out of black pain”, coupled with calls to decolonise academic knowledge.²² The act of writing a doctoral dissertation about these movements therefore was implicated in the critiques they were raising.

Recognising the challenges of fluidity, conflict, and epistemology, I drew on insights from Participatory Action Research (PAR), particularly that “knowledge is derived from practice, and practice informed by knowledge, in an ongoing process” (O’Brien 2001). The research was therefore not merely uncovering some fact about the world. Viewing research as “a practical attitude toward people” rather than merely a “mirror of reality” (Catalano 1986), I endeavoured to make the research process one of shared concern for the problems faced by those with whom I worked, while recognising the heterogeneity of their views and experiences. I have thus tried to build the theoretical framework used in this dissertation through conversations with students and workers, grounding my understanding in a way that relates to their experiences. For practical reasons within the constraints of the doctoral project, the central methodological approach for the thesis specifically was qualitative data gathering to answer the question of how education was reimagined during the mobilisations. I combined this with methods developed in social movement research (Della Porta 2014; Della Porta and Keating 2008), discussed further in the following section. However, the broader research process was nevertheless influenced by a politically committed, contextually sensitive, and youth-oriented PAR approach (Bookchin et al. 2013; Dawson and Sinwell 2012; Fals Borda 2008; Morell 2009; Swartz and Nyamnjoh 2018; Vargas 2017). This was further informed by Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire ([1970] 2006)’s pedagogy of co-investigation, with my understanding later deepened by the PAR approach pioneered by Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda (2008).²³

Additionally, I attempted to draw on indigenous and decolonial research methodologies (Chilisa 2012; Mutua and Swadener 2004; Ndimande 2012; Smith [1999] 2008), which highlight how Eurocentric university-based research may re-inscribe patterns of colonial power relations, for instance by denigrating the knowledge of research participants. Similarly, drawing on critiques of participation and self-critical reflexivity in the context of highly unequal power relations (Hickey and Mohan 2005; Pillow 2003; Sriprakash and Mukhopadhyay 2015; Tikly and Bond 2013), there is a risk that a superficial inclusion into the research process is taken as sufficient, or that acknowledging the limitations of

²²This is not a new phenomenon; see e.g. Dawson and Sinwell (2012)

²³Thanks to those at the Action Research Network of the Americas (ARNA) for deeper conversations on these issues

research in itself reduces any harm the research may cause. Thus, as much as I could, I prioritised the perspectives of those who have been historically colonised, subjugated, or marginalised, rather than elite perspectives in those contexts. In doing so, I attempted to remain accountable to them (Pillow 2003), largely by incorporating critiques they were raising of academic knowledge production. Finally, I attempted to shape the research in a way that would be valuable for my interlocutors, as a process which aided in their own free activity (Swartz and Nyamnjoh 2018; Tikly and Bond 2013). This was both in terms of the process: for instance, shaping interviews in a way that offered interviewees a space for reflection and reimagination on their own terms. It was also in terms of the product, in that the dissertation might serve as a record of some of the debates and ideas that emerged in the process.

Generally, these approaches serve to “take seriously what students themselves said and did”, a central requirement for an “adequate account of student movements” (Barker 2008, p. 48). I focus particularly on what kinds of educational processes students advocated and undertook, while drawing on Burawoy (1998)’s Extended Case Method to locate these findings in their “extralocal and historical context”, connecting students’ actions to underlying social structures (Rutzou 2016, p. 334). I have used this blended, interdisciplinary methodology to focus on the salient questions raised by the student-led mobilisations, rather than attempting to answer questions constructed within a given discipline. In doing so, I also aim to avoid the limitations of what Gordon (2014) calls “disciplinary decadence”, and instead pursue a decolonial strategy involving the “suspension of disciplinarity” so as to grapple more closely with reality.

However, there were three main limitations to this approach, which blur the distinctions between methodology, ethics, and positionality. Firstly, my work has been shaped and limited by the structure of the PhD programme and its dissertation requirements. For instance, the expectations and funding available for fieldwork meant that I was constrained in my ability to take the time to build deeper relationships or develop ongoing practices of support or solidarity with my interlocutors. As a result, the research may resemble the ‘parasite’ or ‘academic-tourist’ model that involves brief sojourns into conflict sites to extract data for distant academic publication and personal career advancement (Bond 2015; Desai 2008; Federici 2009). Secondly, I was limited by personal factors. These ranging from mental health challenges to being unable to do research in languages other than English or Portuguese.²⁴ As a result, I have been less able than I would have liked to incorporate decolonial methodologies, whether linguistic or collaborative. I hope to account for this in the longer term, after the PhD. The third, related, issue was my position as a situated researcher, and the relationship between my positionality and the

²⁴It rarely highlighted in official settings how difficult research can be at a personal level, and how important (collective) self-care is (Creek 2012)

dissertation as an academic product. For instance, dissertation requirements, alongside my position as a (white, male, English-speaking) outsider, limited the original portrayal of my interviewees' voices, requiring that I translate their spoken words into academically legible English, and selected parts that I found relevant for advancing an academic argument (Gillan and Pickerill 2012). In doing so, I risked moving away from the important debates within the mobilisations themselves, and towards what would be acceptable within an academic context. This risks 'substitutionism', replacing "local understanding with the researcher's understanding" (Bond 2015, p. 120), thereby reproducing many of the very imperial academic structures being critiqued within the mobilisations.²⁵ Given these limitations, the dissertation should not be taken as a definitive account of the ways in which education was reimagined in these mobilisations. It is, nevertheless, a record of some important facets, drawn from original fieldwork alongside secondary sources.

1.4.1 Data Collection

My fieldwork was predominantly conducted between January and September 2017, split roughly equally between two cities in South Africa (Cape Town and Johannesburg), and two in Brazil (São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro).

Using a mixed-methods approach, I prioritised semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, lasting 1.5 hours on average and conducted in English (South Africa) and Portuguese (Brazil).²⁶ I conducted over 30 of these face-to-face conversations across all four of my fieldwork sites, in locations decided by my respondents, as well as several precursory and follow-up discussions via digital tools. The questions asked for respondents' views of history in education, open-ended self-description, understanding of current education system and own experience, participation in collective action and what they learnt from that, views on the role of education in society, desires for future education, both personally and systematically, and views of what was likely to happen in the future. I concluded each interview by asking whether there was something the respondent felt was important, that hadn't already been discussed.²⁷ This involved roughly 50 students and teachers, all of whom have been pseudonymised, as summarised in Appendix B. While students were better suited to discussing the internal dynamics of the movements and their aspirations, teachers were often crucial for drawing links between different movements and situating

²⁵See similarly, for example, the 2008 discussion between Shannon Walsh, Patrick Bond, and Ashwin Desai in the *Review of African Political Economy*, 35(116)

²⁶I do not strongly differentiate between the interviews and focus groups, as they often blurred into one another. When interviewing a teacher, for instance, they would occasionally call in students to contribute to the discussions; in other cases, where I had expected to speak to a group, only a few students arrived. The length of interviews depended on the number of respondents and their availability and interest, ranging from the shortest at half an hour to the longest of over 3 hours

²⁷A version of this, in questionnaire form, is available at <https://tinyurl.com/EduFuturo>. Thanks to T. Tiriba for assistance translating into Portuguese

the mobilisations in broader historical or institutional conditions. A significant limitation of this study was that I was unable to reach workers beyond the teaching staff, and thus my discussions of operations work is drawn from secondary accounts.

In addition to interviews, I visited most of my interlocutors' institutions, summarised in Appendix A. Although I had intended to undertake participant-observation, the mobilisations had almost entirely subsided by the time I arrived in each site. Thus, while visiting these institutions, I instead looked for living, material memory of the mobilisations embedded in local conditions. In some cases, this was overtly visible, for instance the plinth at UCT where the statue of Rhodes had been removed, or artwork at the entrance to E.E. Mendes de Moraes commemorating the students' struggles.²⁸ In other cases, students or teachers took me on narrative walks to demonstrate, for example, where crumbling infrastructure had posed a hazard that students campaigned against, or where students had barricaded entrances, set up sleeping arrangements, and held classes. Through this, I was also able to observe my hosts interacting with other members of the local community, and thereby had a sense of how differently staff and students interacted with one another when they had gone through a period of struggle together – particularly in comparison to interactions between students and management or teachers who had opposed the occupations.

I also looked for documentation and publications that students had compiled as part of the mobilisations. At *Instituto Superior de Educação do Rio de Janeiro* - Higher Education Institute of Rio de Janeiro (ISERJ), for example, students gave me their dossier on the poor infrastructural conditions in their school. Much of this, however, was merely mentioned, and only in some cases could I subsequently find traces online, suggesting a limited lifespan and longevity for digitally-focused campaigns with implications for subsequent generations of struggle. The ephemeral nature of such publications means that even key documents, like the Wits FeesMustFall manifesto (Wits #FeesMustFall 2015), are no longer accessible online, except through archival backups.²⁹ However, others, like the *Jornalistas Livres* map of São Paulo school occupations, I was able to find and are still online.³⁰

I contacted my interviewees in a variety of ways. In South Africa, this was primarily through snowballing from personal connections,³¹ as I had studied at UCT until 2014. Similarly, I generally drew on contacts from Brazilian friends in Cambridge, along with Brazilian activists I had met over the last years in various contexts. Once I was in each city, I tried to attend events and meet students or educators who had been involved in the mobilisations. I was also fortunate over the research period to attend several events,

²⁸See Platzky Miller (2018)

²⁹The archival site, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160509194321/http://www.feesmustfall.joburg:80/manifestos/>, offers links to five other universities' manifestos, but these are not accessible, and I cannot tell whether they were ever uploaded

³⁰With over 32,000 views as of 17 Aug 2019. See <https://tinyurl.com/SP0cup>

³¹Including several helpfully introduced by L. Hamilton

which put me in contact with numerous activists who either were willing to be interviewed or introduce me to other potential interviewees. They also shaped my understanding of the political and educational dynamics of the student mobilisations. In Cape Town, this included a discussion with Lewis Gordon hosted by the #RMF campaign,³² and several events hosted by the Institute for African Alternatives (IFAA) on *Black Consciousness and Feminism*³³ and *Economics and Consciousness*.³⁴ In Johannesburg, I attended Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's talk at Wits,³⁵ as well as the Higher Education National Convention,³⁶ which was disrupted by various student factions affiliated to national political parties. In São Paulo, the book launch for Campos, Medeiros, and Ribeiro (2016),³⁷ conference on *Teaching Reforms and Resistance Movements* at UFABC,³⁸ and talks at the Universidade de São Paulo (USP) like *Student Occupations and the Reforms of Schooling*³⁹ and the *Greve Geral*⁴⁰ were invaluable for developing my understanding and connecting to activists in Brazil. So too were events in Rio, notably on *Education, Conflict, and Self-management: Experiences of Student Occupations*⁴¹ and the indigenous festival which highlighted what decolonisation could mean in Brazil.⁴²

Moreover, such events, from protests to discussions and debates to book launches, were key sites of knowledge production and dissemination for the mobilisations. Thus, even when they took place outside of the 2015-16 period, events like the Decolonial Winter School (2018) at UCT⁴³ were important spaces for the mobilisations to share what they had learnt and generate new knowledge, experimenting with collaborative learning and teaching.

Finally, I drew on various resources that emerged from and in response to the student mobilisations. This included news articles and editorials,⁴⁴ video footage of occupations and documentaries about the mobilisations,⁴⁵ social media discussions,⁴⁶ and secondary

³²26 Sept 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/events/1635706973371160/>

³³9 Aug 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/events/704106836378973/>

³⁴4 Feb 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/events/1814279922123183/>

³⁵2 March 2017, <https://www.wits.ac.za/news/latest-news/general-news/2017/2017-03/language-at-the-centre-of-decolonisation-.html>

³⁶18 March 2017

³⁷24 Sept 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/events/298839720477054/>

³⁸16-17 May 2017, Primeiro Encontro Internacional da Rede Escola Pública e Universidade on the theme *Reformas de Ensino e Movimentos de Resistência*, <https://doity.com.br/iii-encontro-repu>

³⁹25 May 2017, *As Ocupações Estudantis e a Reforma do Ensino Médio*, <http://www4.fe.usp.br/eventos/evento?evento=3265>

⁴⁰28 April 2017

⁴¹16 Aug 2017, <https://tinyurl.com/CPII0ccEvent>

⁴²21-23 Apr 2017, *Semana do Índio*, <https://www.facebook.com/events/759885344187485/>

⁴³24-30 June, 2018

⁴⁴Sources in South Africa: Daily Maverick, Daily Vox, Cape Times, Mail and Guardian. In Brazil: Jornalistas Livres, Mídia Ninja, Passa Palavra, Carta Capital, Globo/G1

⁴⁵In South Africa, particularly by Leila Dougan and Rehad Desai; In Brazil, by Flávio Colombini, Beatriz Alonso, and Carlos Pronzato

⁴⁶See Appendix C

literature that included academic publications, some produced by students themselves.

I attempted several other approaches, including cold-call messaging activist groups' Facebook pages, and creating an anonymous web-based survey that I tried to distribute amongst those who had been involved.⁴⁷ However, these efforts were limited, and I received few responses to my digital requests. The survey, for instance, only had one respondent, and none of the pages responded.⁴⁸

1.4.2 Ethics and Positionality

There are three major kinds of ethical considerations in this study. The first is covered by the university's ethical assessment process, including conflicts of interest and payment to research participants, of which there were none in this study.⁴⁹ All research participants gave informed consent prior to being interviewed, and all have been anonymised in the dissertation. I have also taken care to meet data security obligations for all research materials.⁵⁰

However, the university's ethical procedures were inadequate for the ethical considerations necessary here. They tended to treat research participants as subjects requiring authorisation to speak, particularly in their capacity as youth or students, rather than autonomous agents that are competent to speak about their experiences (Morgan et al. 2002). However, a central aspect of these students' mobilisations was that they exhibited the agency of running their own lives and their own schools, often in conflict with local authorities. Moreover, bureaucratic university ethics processes tend to mask tangled layers of power and exploitation in ethically fraught research (Denzin 2005; Gillan and Pickerill 2012; Posel and Ross 2015; Robinson-Pant and Singal 2013; Sikes 2013; Sultana 2007; Swartz 2011; Tikly and Bond 2013).

The question of positionality is of paramount importance for this type of research, particularly given the political dynamics of South Africa and Brazil, where I had to attend to complex historical intricacies and power inequalities, while recognising how this interplayed with global processes of knowledge extraction and production (Tikly and Bond 2013). This involved addressing intersectional positionality, ranging from class, race, gender and nationality to language and education, which shaped how I interacted with participants and their perception of me as a researcher (Bond 2015; Faria and Mollett 2014; Gherardi and Turner 1987; Merriam et al. 2001; Pullen 2006; Sultana 2007). In South Africa, for instance, the question of race was the primary concern, although this was often

⁴⁷www.tinyurl.com/EduFuturo

⁴⁸There may have been complex reasons for this, including the impression of the account from which I sent the requests, and the time lag between their activity and my requests

⁴⁹With minor exceptions, such as paying for coffee if we met in a café

⁵⁰Guided by the UK's Data Protection Act (1998), Brazil's Marco Civil da Internet (2014), and South Africa's Protection of Personal Information Act (2013)

bound up in class position. Some students, for example, were sceptical of what a white man “from Cambridge”, with its colonial history, wanted to know about decolonisation.⁵¹ Students tended to perceive me as being in a powerful position, read through race, class, and elite university affiliation. While I suspect that this shaped the way in which my interviewees spoke to me to some extent, it most importantly affected the decision of refusing to speak to me in the first place. In one specific instance, I was told that a potential participant did not want to speak to me, “because [I am] white”.

In Brazil, the power dynamics were largely channelled through age, as there was more of a gap than with South African students. However, because my Portuguese was weak, I got the sense that I was perceived as curious but bumbling. This helped me in ‘disempowering’ myself in relation to interviewees and in building trust.⁵² Additionally, being a foreigner from South Africa did not easily fit with their preconceptions of how race and class shapes political outlook, and it seemed to me that students perceived my class and ‘race’ less deterministically than in South Africa – particularly when I was asking questions about racism and economic inequality.⁵³ In one case, Brazilian students were thrilled that a South African had heard of their occupation of a school in peripheral Rio de Janeiro. However, precisely because of my positionality as a linguistic and cultural outsider, I cannot be certain that I read all of these cues accurately. In terms of the quality of the data, however, I compensated for this by contracting trusted Brazilian students to accurately transcribe the interview recordings. My institutional affiliation did not seem to matter as much in Brazil, as several university researchers had already spoken to them before, and most students were unfamiliar with Cambridge specifically.⁵⁴ In general, students were largely concerned with my political views in relation to the mobilisations. Although I was openly broadly supportive of them, I also tried to articulate that this was critical support, recognising internal heterogeneity, rather than an attempt to “romanticise” (Bond 2015, p. 120).

Gender was another important facet of my positionality. Most of my interviewees were women,⁵⁵ and a few seemed initially wary of particularly individual interviews with an

⁵¹In one memorable instance, students at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal did not believe that decolonisation was something relevant for Cambridge or the UK, on account of it having been the preeminent colonial power

⁵²One student had a momentary concern, asking if I was with the police, before realising my poor Portuguese and long hair would likely discount the possibility

⁵³This changed somewhat when it was mapped onto local patterns: when I told students in a poorer school in Rio de Janeiro at the end of a group discussion that I needed to leave before sunset, as I needed to take a bus back home, they asked where I was going, and reacted in surprise (‘Que chique!’) when I told them I was staying with friends in the middle-to-upper-class Copacabana

⁵⁴One student in São Paulo, however, asked for help in applying for undergrad at Cambridge, but did not subsequently contact me. Another thought that Cambridge was a local language school, due to Cambridge Assessment’s English exams, and was somewhat confused about how that related to my research

⁵⁵Although it is unclear why, as the mobilisations themselves were not necessarily predominantly comprised of women. One possibility is that women may have been more inclined towards longer-term

unfamiliar man. I attempted to allay concerns by meeting in groups and in locations of their choosing. I cannot tell how the interviews themselves might have proceeded otherwise, but I do not believe that there were topics about how they imagined education that they did not speak about because of the gendered dynamics within the interview space. The dynamics of positionality shaped my research in multiple ways, opening some avenues for discussion while narrowing others. However, they did not change the underlying ethics that I practiced in relation to the people who participated. Central to this is treating each person as a person in a network of others, whose freedom is entwined with others and shaped by their socially-conditioned relationships (Beauvoir [1948] 1976; Dladla 2017; Praeg 2017a), and with whom I share a foundational equality, acknowledging our differences (Lorde 2009; Neocosmos 2017b,c). The research process was thus not merely an attempt to extract information, but to respect the other and understand through our mutual interactions what possible pathways towards a different world we had each seen and tread (Bookchin et al. 2013; Freire [1970] 2006; Nash 2009; Shukaitis, Graeber, and Biddle 2007).

Finally, the third kind of consideration was for the broader research ethics of what this study is used for, and whose interests it serves. In this sense, ethics is broader than an individualised relation. Thus, while in practice my “ethics of immediate reciprocation”, a direct enhancement of the lives of my interlocutors, was limited, the work may nevertheless form part of an ethic of “general reciprocity”, contributing more widely towards some of the goals set within the mobilisations themselves (Gillan and Pickerill 2012, pp. 136–7). In this light, I also attempted to share what I was learning in each fieldwork city with students/activists, talking to those who attended about the comparative and distinctive aspects of the mobilisations. In Cape Town, this was hosted by the Education Fishtank;⁵⁶ in Johannesburg, the Wits History Workshop;⁵⁷ in São Paulo, at the the Universidade Federal do ABC (Metropolitan São Paulo) (UFABC) conference;⁵⁸ and in Rio at a discussion with students at *Colégio Pedro II* - Pedro II College (CPII).⁵⁹

1.5 Dissertation Structure

This dissertation addresses how education was reimagined during student-led mobilisations in South Africa and Brazil. Including this introduction, it is divided into eight chapters.

mobilisation once their immediate demands had been met because they faced continuous challenges living in patriarchal societies

⁵⁶21 Sept 2017, *Democratic Alternatives in Education: From Syria to Brazil*, <https://www.facebook.com/events/180831835794970/>

⁵⁷24 March 2017. Informal presentation, no online presence

⁵⁸See Platzky Miller (2017a)

⁵⁹11 Aug 2017, *Do Brasil à África do Sul: as ocupações estudantis pelo mundo*. Co-hosted with P. Alegria. <https://www.facebook.com/events/107924886572517/>

Chapters 2 and 3 provide conceptual and historical foundations for the thesis. Chapters 4 and 5 address the political conditions of the mobilisations. Chapters 6 and 7 speak to the educational components of the mobilisations, while chapter 8 concludes.

Throughout, I argue that it was because students and workers undertook collective action that they learnt about themselves, each other, and the social structures around them. Moreover, by creating alternative pedagogical spaces in the mobilisations, they also reimagined how education could and should take place that would support their liberation.

Following this introduction, in the second chapter I draw together several literatures to develop a *conceptual framework* relevant to and appropriate for making sense of the student-led mobilisations. Here, I argue that education is a unique site of contestation and social reproduction, both shaped by and shaping broader social processes. I also discuss the characteristics and dynamics of social movements and mobilisations, arguing that they have the capacity to disrupt and reshape institutions. Finally, I discuss the epistemic life of movements, arguing that they enable participants and wider publics to revise existing beliefs and imagine new possibilities, focusing particularly on decolonial imaginaries.

In chapter three, I present the *historical context* in which the mobilisations emerged and which structured their demands. Here, I argue that the colonial-capitalist foundations of the education systems in South Africa and Brazil profoundly shaped contemporary institutions. Despite democratisation since the 1990s, the expanding education system remained deeply inegalitarian and stratified. Combined with the neoliberalisation of society and the education sector, this has led to the problems which catalysed the student mobilisations in 2015-16.

The fourth chapter turns to the eruption of these mobilisations in 2015, and the way in which they *ruptured* the status quo. Here, I argue that because the mobilisations comprised and recruited a diverse cross-section of students from across a range of class positions and identities, they were powerful enough to break with existing patterns of education and social organisation on campuses. Moreover, this was also made possible because students formed alliances with education workers, and adopted a set of disruptive tactics, most notably campus shutdowns and occupations. This conscientised students to what their realities were like, revealing, denaturalising and denormalising existing structures, but did not provide a clear alternative.

Chapter five discusses how the mobilisations *reconfigured* themselves, changing over time and exploring the alternatives made possible by the moment of rupture. I argue that they largely experimented with horizontal and autonomous forms of organising that were unusual for South African and Brazilian movements, while maintaining themselves through popular assemblies and taking on the responsibility for the reproduction of their movements. I also discuss how the movements eventually decomposed, largely due to factionalism, violence and repression, and exhaustion. Nevertheless, the mobilisations

themselves created the space for new imaginaries of education and social relations to emerge and be put into practice.

These educational and social imaginaries related significantly to questions of *agency and disalienation*, as I discuss in chapter six. Here, students developed in practice a sense of their own collective capacity to shape the world around them, and imagined an education system that would encourage and enable them to do so. They also envisioned new forms of institutional power relations, in which students and workers would be able to make and implement decisions that affected their lives, on issues ranging from institutional culture to physical infrastructure and campus safety. Finally, they created and imagined new social relations, overcoming interpersonal alienation to create campus communities that brought students and workers together, as well as connecting with broader off-campus communities.

In chapter seven, I discuss what students reimaged that enhanced *epistemic justice* by enabling them to comprehend and critique the world around them, as well as contribute to shared human knowledge. Pedagogically, they created alternative non-hierarchical, dialogical spaces that prioritised culturally relevant ways of learning. Beyond adopting these approaches to learning their existing curricula, students also prioritised content that was ordinarily marginalised in their institutions, particularly questions of gender and sexuality; history, political economy and power; and decolonisation and indigenous knowledge.

Chapter eight concludes the thesis, summarising the arguments and situating them in broader literatures. It discusses the limitations of this research, as well as the political context in Brazil and South Africa since the decomposition of the mobilisations and hence their significance for future movements and learning.

Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework

People make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past.

(Marx [1852] 2000d, p. 329)⁶⁰

Understanding history is never an easy task. However, studying and attempting to make sense of history as it unfolds is fraught with numerous difficulties, as scholars attest to in writing about the Arab Spring, Occupy, and similar movements (See e.g. Abdelrahman 2015a, p. 3). In this dissertation, I try to “look and see” what events were unfolding during the mass student mobilisations in South Africa and Brazil, rather than adhering to a preconceived theoretical framework “to which reality must correspond” (Mafeje 1971; Wittgenstein [1953] 1986). This involved engaging with the actors who shaped these events and their self-understandings directly, searching for and drawing on theory that could help make sense of what they were saying and doing, and challenging my own impressions through engaging my interlocutors, thus working towards a kind of “critical subjectivity” (Maxwell 2005a; Mills [1959] 2000; Putnam 1992, [1988] 2001; Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis 2002).

Because the mobilisations themselves were heterogeneous, ambiguous, contradictory, and variable over time, they cannot be explained through the narrow prism of a single theory or received frameworks. Existing frameworks do not adequately capture the complex dynamics of students and workers in educational institutions under neoliberalised global capitalism, interwoven with legacies and processes of colonialism, racism, and gendered discrimination in the Global South. This chapter therefore draws on elements of various approaches to examine the interplay between macro-conditions, institutional contexts,

⁶⁰Marx ([1852] 2000d)’s word here is the German *Menschen*, which in most translations of Marx is styled as ‘men’, including the McLellan edition used here. However, as McGregor (2018, fn84) notes, it should be translated in a non-gendered way, as ‘people’ or ‘human beings’. Thanks to L. Cox for clarification on this point

forms of organisation, individuals' direct experiences and their political and educational imagination. Tracing these dynamics helps explain how and why students reimagine education in particular ways. This chapter therefore attempts to locate historically a process as it unfolds, working towards a systematic-structural understanding of macro-conditions, political opportunity, and students' agency (Flacks 2004, p. 139). I have thus attempted to develop a synthesis of a variety of literatures.⁶¹ It thus acknowledges a "plurality" of knowledge formations within a diverse "ecology of knowledges", placing these formations into conversation with one another (Boidin, Cohen, and Grosfoguel 2012; Sousa Santos 2007, 2014).

This dissertation draws on Marxist analysis, particularly on questions of class structure, formation, and struggle, as well as how global political-economic conditions shape the conditions for action. It also engages with feminist critiques of social reproduction, gendered domination and exploitation, as well as situated knowledge. Insights from anarchism and autonomism helped guide my research, particularly on the relationship between political action, imagination and learning, as well as extra-institutional politics and politics as everyday life. Anti-colonialism and decoloniality, particularly on questions of global power relations, racism, historical legacies, alternative histories and knowledge formations, have been at the heart of the student mobilisations, particularly in South Africa, and thus inspire my research. Similarly, social movement literature has helped guide this study, particularly its focus on how collective action emerges beyond individual actions, what the dynamics of such collective action are, and how collectives may fragment and return to disconnected individuals. These political aspects are in turn informed by epistemic questions, particularly pertaining to epistemic injustice and ignorance, as well as belief revision and the philosophy of the imagination.

Outline The chapter starts with an examination of educational systems and institutions as *sites of contestation* and social reproduction. It sheds light on their key epistemic role in the production and maintenance of forms of knowledge and ignorance. Understanding educational institutions as sites of labour, as well as sites of knowledge production and social reproduction, is essential to understand why they are particularly significant as sites of social struggle. The second section argues that *student-led collective action* can play a significant role in shaping educational institutions through internal mobilisation, notably by disrupting their normal functioning. Drawing on social movement theory, I also discuss how broader social conditions shape the individuals and collectives in this process. In the third section, I discuss the relationship between *education and the imagination*, arguing that it is in the process of undertaking collective action that students came to reimagine how education could be different. In doing so, they create new possibilities for changing

⁶¹However, as Maxwell (2005b, p. 40) cautions, this may be "tentative and incomplete", with some strands even being in tension or mutually incompatible

institutions, and even broader social relations.

2.1 Education Contested

2.1.1 Critical Theories of Social Reproduction and Education

Education has been a key field of interest for those looking at *social reproduction* globally (Acker 1987; Ferguson 2017a; Gintis and Bowles 1981; Giroux 1983; Gramsci [1937] 1975; Passeron and Bourdieu [1970] 2000).⁶² Social Reproduction Theory emerges primarily from readings of Engels ([1884] 1972) and Marx ([1867] 1990) by Socialist Feminists such as Benston (1969), Gimenez (2018), and Vogel (2013). Social reproduction looks not only to the forms of relations between people and the material world that produce objects, but also to the way in which those relations are themselves constituted on an ongoing basis.⁶³ That is, social reproduction is a mode of analysis of the forms of organisation that enable a society continually to order and renew itself around certain forms of social relations, both in a daily and inter-generational sense (Bhattacharya 2017; Ferguson 2017b).

Early theorists of social reproduction in education argued that education systems were used to reproduce capitalist and class relations, entrenching privilege and disadvantage through stratified education institutions that differentially taught skills, imparted values, created networks, and enforced discipline (Althusser [1969] 1971; Apple [1979] 2004; Bowles and Gintis [1976] 2011; Passeron and Bourdieu [1970] 2000; Willis 1977). “Class structures” shape the ways in which people are positioned in relation to the resources and means by which they produce and reproduce themselves (Chibber 2008, p. 355).⁶⁴ This class structure affects the basic opportunities and life-paths that people have available, resulting in a working class of people whose capacity to survive is reliant on the sale of their only ‘asset’, their bodies and labour, and an elite class who are able to survive and sustain themselves on inheritance, rents or other forms of passive income based on the ownership of assets (Marx [1875] 2010). The avenues open to people to survive depend on the social structure: the way in which resources are distributed, for instance, and the forms of coercion and violence that underwrite the distribution and possession of goods (Graeber 2015b, pp. 31–4). Thus, a given class structure is shaped by complex, often localised, conditions. This includes, crucially, patterns of gendering and racialisation, but extends

⁶²Even if authors do not always explicitly use the term “social reproduction”

⁶³Alongside education, SR theorists have focused particularly on the family unit, as well as questions of sexuality and biological reproduction, and domestic labour such as cleaning and food provision. See, inter alia, (Barker 2017; Bezuidenhout and Fakier 2006; Costa 1995; Costa and Costa 1999; Federici 2012; Ferguson 2008, 2016; Jeffries 2017; Lebowitz 1997; Lefebvre 1991; Mies 2014; Vogel 2013; Zechner and Hansen 2015)

⁶⁴There are, however, contesting and contrasting views of class, class structure and class formation. See e.g. (Balashova, Karatepe, and Namukasa 2017; Bourdieu 1987; Chibber 2014, 2017b; Eidlin 2014; Murray 2017; Roediger 2017; Taylor 2011b; Wright 1985, [2000] 2004, 2015b)

to cultural norms regarding, for instance, authority, violence, reciprocity, and kinship (Antunes 2016b, 2017; Antunes and Alves 2004; Coninck 2018; Klein, Mitchell, and Junge 2018; Lebowitz 2003; Long 2016b; Murray 2017; Webster and Pampallis 2017). In former colonies specifically, such as South Africa and Brazil, classes are formed through nested divisions, most notably racialised coloniser-colonised distinctions (Chibber 2013; Davis 1983; Fanon [1963] 2004; Grosfoguel, Oso, and Christou 2015; Lorde [1980] 1993a; Roediger 2017; Roediger et al. 2017). The longer-term impact of this is continued confluence of racialisation and racism that structures the lives of people in places like South Africa⁶⁵ and Brazil⁶⁶ (Hamilton et al. 2001). Moreover, this coincides with a racialised-gendered division of labour, reinforced through discriminatory laws, attitudes, and forms of violence and coercion (Ferguson 2016; Foley 2018; Mies 2014; Smith 2013, 2017b; Sutch 2017; Vogel 2018).⁶⁷ This is particularly noticeable in contexts like South Africa and Brazil, where black and indigenous women have historically been relegated primarily to reproducing the labour-power of an exploited workforce, and to this day tend to be amongst the most marginalised in social institutions (Burawoy 1976; Cousins et al. 2018; Gaitskell et al. 1983; Sousa 2009; Wolpe 1972).⁶⁸ Regardless of the particular form it takes, and whether they realise it or not, people are effectively categorised and their life-possibilities shaped by macro-structural patterns of classification (Bourdieu 1986, 1987).

These social structures play a significant role within education systems, which have in turn been a primary channel for class formation globally (Chisholm 2004; Naidoo 2006; Rootes 1995; Venco and Carneiro 2018). Students are thus shaped by broader social conditions, particularly class relations. In the case of working-class students, being excluded from formal educational systems is generally tantamount to being consigned to a permanent ‘underclass’, while educational attainment within established institutions is often a key determinant of whether one remains in low-income, often precarious labour, or whether one can find secure employment in a professional middle-class job. Working-class students’ educational trajectories are thus strongly affected by labour market conditions and economic precarity, as well as ideologies of ‘meritocratic’, individualised careerism or schooled discipline that creates a docile, obedient workforce (Foucault [1975] 1977; Willis 1977). Since the mid-20th century, however, increasing numbers of working-class students have entered educational institutions, contributing to a burgeoning middle class, whose class positions are “contradictory” and whose interests and support depend on prevailing

⁶⁵See e.g. (Alexander 2005; Bozzoli 1995; Breckenridge 2007)

⁶⁶See e.g. (Da Costa 2014; Guimarães 2001, 2016a,b; Twine 1998)

⁶⁷Indeed, authors such as Öcalan (2013, 2015) suggest that the *originary* form of domination and exploitation is that of women and women’s labour, developed in the adoption of urbanised agriculture, from which all other forms of domination derive

⁶⁸The specific relations between categories of class, race, gender, nation, ability, ethnicity, and the like are rarely static or clearly delineated, however. In many cases, these are entangled, intersecting relations that often defy neat classification (Collins [1990] 2000; Collins and Bilge 2016; Crenshaw 1991; hooks 1982; King 1988; Nash 2008; Puar 2012)

political conditions (Chibber 2008, pp. 358–9; Wright 2015b). At the same time, exclusive educational institutions have continued to offer spaces for reproducing ruling elites through private networks of socialisation and training (Bowles and Gintis [1976] 2011; Mangset, Maxwell, and Zanten 2017; Passeron and Bourdieu [1970] 2000).

In South Africa, the public university system has, since its inception, catered to the reproduction of a white domestic elite, while providing opportunities for relatively-skilled white professionals. Since the 1990s in Brazil, the public schooling system has reoriented towards training cheap labour and middle-class professionals, with private schools largely the reserve of elites (Ramos 2000, pp. 9–10).⁶⁹ Education thus has functioned in part as a sorting mechanism into a class structure.⁷⁰

Education institutions are also key sites of knowledge production and transmission. This knowledge has a social basis: institutions shaped by powerful interests and actors tend to reproduce *hegemonic knowledge* (Gramsci 1971; Marx [1846] 2000e), particularly in the service of capitalism (Browne 1981; Moura Castro and Giuntini 2010; Ploeg 1993; Vally 2006) and colonialism (Connell 2016a; Grosfoguel 2007, 2013; Narayan 2004; Nyamnjoh 2012; Oyewumi 2002; Zeleza 1996). This knowledge is “powerful”, in that it is valorised, endorsed, and useful for dominant social relations, and thus enables students familiar with such knowledge access to opportunities within those social structures (Beck 2013; Rudolph, Sriprakash, and Gerrard 2018; Sebidi and Morreira 2017; Young and Muller 2013). Conversely, those who do not have access to this powerful knowledge, often because of class, race, and gender, are cast as ignorant and are marginalised from valorised social positions (Bernal 2002; Bleakney and Choudry 2013; Cooper et al. 2002; Wheelahan 2007).

While producing knowledge, these institutions simultaneously produce *ignorance* of certain fields and aspects of people’s experiences. Although a relatively recent academic field, scholars of ignorance since the 2000s have argued that ignorance is not necessarily the mere absence of knowledge, but rather can be actively produced to obscure potential knowledge (Kuokkanen 2008; McIntyre 2000; Peels and Blaauw 2016; Popkewitz, Diaz, and Kirchgasler 2017; Proctor and Schiebinger 2008). Early theorists highlighted how ignorance functions as an important part of racism and sexism, because maintaining social conditions of social marginalisation, oppression, and exploitation requires generalised unawareness of how people live under those conditions, as well as ignorance about the role of those who benefit from such injustices, and the relationship between people situated in these antagonistic positions (Fricker 2007, 2016; hooks 1994; Mills 2007; Ortega 2006; Sullivan and Tuana 2007). A crucial kind of produced ignorance occurs when the existing social order is presented as *naturalised*, inherently immutable (Barker 2008, p. 84; Beauvoir [1948] 1976, p. 83), as well as *normalised*, presented as both common and desirable

⁶⁹Brazilian universities, however, are historically more like those in South Africa. See Chapter 3

⁷⁰These class dynamics are crucial for understanding the student uprisings of 2015-16, as I discuss in Chapter 4

(Davis 1995; Foucault [1975] 1977, 2004; Pillay 2015). By presenting the status quo as a natural, normative “limit-situation” (Freire [1970] 2006), powerful actors create ignorance about how social relations could be organised differently, thereby artificially limiting our imaginative potential and making it difficult to think beyond that status quo (Fisher 2009; Foucault 1972; Jameson 2003). This, in turn, makes acting to change the world more difficult (Leeuwen 2016).

Institutions that transmit partial knowledge or produce ignorance shape students’ lives, subjecting them to several kinds of *epistemic injustice* (Kidd, Medina, and Pohlhaus 2017). As developed by Dotson (2011, 2012, 2014), Fricker (2007, 2016), and Medina (2013), this means that students’ experiences are ignored and their knowledge rendered illegitimate, thereby making it more difficult for them to change their own circumstances, as well as being unable to contribute to common social knowledge.

2.1.2 Neoliberal Education

Colonial powers have historically shaped educational systems in the Global South (Adam 2019; Taiwo 1993; Venco and Carneiro 2018). Similarly, over the 20th century, international institutions like the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) began to play a major role in funding and designing education policies in so-called “developing countries” (Mamdani 2007; Naidoo 2011; Tikly 2004). The 1968 MEC-USAID Accords, for example, entrenched a technocratic human capital approach in Brazilian education policy and subordinated schools to the demands of a capitalist labour market (Araujo 2007; Figueiredo and Cowen 2004).

Particularly since the 1990s and 2000s, these global influences have promoted neoliberalisation through the commodification and privatisation of education in both regions (Callaghan 2018; Magrão and Sala 2016; Motta 2016; Ndimande and Lubienski 2017; Passa Palavra 2016; Salto 2017; Walt et al. 2002). This created pressure to further subordinate education to the needs of capital, while presenting such changes as neutral and value-free through technocratic and bureaucratic manoeuvres (Graeber 2015b; Moura Castro and Giuntini 2010; Nash 2006; Pendlebury and Walt 2006).⁷¹ During the transition out of Apartheid in the 1990s, for instance, WB prescriptions for education led to South Africa introducing tuition fees in public schools (Bond 2003; Vally 2006). Neoliberalisation reshaped existing institutions, while also encouraging the emergence of new education “service providers”: for-profit businesses in the form of private universities and schools

⁷¹These neoliberal pressures have been particularly impactful in ‘shock therapy’ and Structural Adjustment Programmes across Latin America and Africa since the 1970s, but have pressured states across the world to privatise public services and commodify everyday life in the service of profit maximisation and corporate power (Feigenbaum, Hamnett, and Henig 1998; Harvey 2005; Mamdani 2007, 2016; Zeilig 2009a). Indeed, since 2008, austerity in Euro-America can be read as the North “catching up” to the South (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012; Powers and Rakopoulos 2019; Rakopoulos 2018)

(Fennell 2010; Motta 2016; Moura Castro and Giuntini 2010; Ndimande and Lubienski 2017; Salto 2017). Such institutions generate profit from treating education as a commodity, where students pay for credentials, build their “human capital”, and gain access to labour markets.

Neoliberal and economistic educational theories have significant discursive power and are part of the pressure that institutions are under to align themselves with the labour market. However, these often conflict with alternative imaginaries of education as a public good and a basic, Constitutionally guaranteed right in both South Africa (Christie 1985, 2008; Howell, Unterhalter, and Allais 2017) and Brazil (Chaui 2000; Cury 2008; Ribeiro, Lânes, and Carrano 2005). As a result, education is a contested space in which social actors like student movements and education unions often come into conflict with encroaching private-sector interests.

2.1.3 Education as a Unique Space of Struggle

While facing the same marketising pressures as other public institutions, educational institutions are unique because they embody multiple types of social relations. Unlike most other institutions, they are primarily oriented towards knowledge production and transmission. At the same time, they are sites of labour, bringing together multiple kinds of workers alongside students. As a result, educational institutions are sites of social struggle that encompass both material and epistemic concerns, that speak to immediate issues as well as longer-term questions of social reproduction (Burawoy 2018, p. 84).

2.1.3.1 Institutions as Sites of Labour

The knowledge that is produced and circulates in educational institutions is the result of human labour. It is, however, unusual for scholars to be explicit about the labour necessary for the functioning and reproduction of these institutions. In an important exception to this, Connell (2019) highlights the necessary, collective work that is performed by research workers in knowledge production, teaching workers in knowledge transmission, and “operations workers” (a wide category, ranging from cleaners to cooks, librarians to transport workers) in meeting the conditions for the functioning of the educational project.⁷²

Class relations underpin this division of labour. While teaching and research staff are sometimes recognised as workers, these activities are nevertheless valued as “mental” labour, segregated from devalued “manual” labour (Browne 1981; Gorz 1976; Marx [1875] 2010; Sohn-Rethel 1977). While boundaries between jobs are often blurred, ‘academic’ jobs tend to be reserved for elites, while operations work, particularly manual work, tends

⁷²Operations workers are often referred to as *funcionários* in Brazil, and in some South African universities as “PASS” (Professional, Administrative & Support Staff)

to be relegated to marginalised groups (Connell 2019, p. 56). This institutional division of labour is also racialised, gendered, and highly stratified (*ibid.*, p. 61). In South Africa and Brazil, different categories of workers receive differentiated benefits and wages which reproduce broader patterns of social stratification and intergenerational inequality.

Such worker differentiation is most obvious in outsourcing, whereby external companies are contracted to have workers perform the same functions in institutions that had previously been done internally (Marais 2011, p. 118). This particularly neoliberal mode of labour management pursues profit-maximisation by reducing labour costs, externalising those costs and minimising the principal organisation's responsibilities to workers, rendering their lives precarious (Antunes 2016b; Braga 2018; Millar 2017). By 2015, this had become prevalent at South African universities and Brazilian schools. South African university management justified outsourcing by distinguishing 'core' work (teaching and research) from supposedly 'non-core' work (reproductive/operations work) (Bardill 2008; Bezuidenhout and Fakier 2006). With this distinction, universities outsourced 'non-core' work: effectively firing their own workers and re-hiring them through private companies for lower wages, fewer benefits, less job security, while alienating them from the university community (Grossman 2006; Johnson 2001; Lockett and Mzobe 2016; Ntshingila, Ndebele, and Monageng 2016; Walt et al. 2003). Black women are significantly more likely to be working as outsourced cleaners in South African universities, for instance, where they are paid significantly less and are more precarious in relation to white men, who are more likely to be permanent-contract academics. While outsourcing has disproportionately targeted the most vulnerable workers, similar processes have extended even to traditionally secure teaching and research jobs globally (Dominelli and Hoogvelt 1996; Morgan and Wood 2017). Junior academic workers are increasingly casualised and precarious, with significant amounts of teaching being done by temporary, insecure workers (Callaghan 2018; Connell 2019; Ivancheva 2015).⁷³

Educational institutions are not simply spaces in which broader society is mechanically replicated, nor are they mere reflections of social hegemony or discipline imposed from above. Nash (2006, p. 2), for instance, argues that "although educational institutions change in response to their political and economic context, they also have historical trajectories of their own". The South African higher education sector, for example, has been shaped not only by the state and private interests, but also by institutional elites, such as university managers, alongside institutional forums, academics, trade unions, and student collectives (Lolwana 2015).

⁷³This coincides with the feminisation of labour, both in terms of women entering the labour market in low-paid and undervalued work, such as cleaning; as well as professions, such as teaching, that come to be deemed 'feminine' being denigrated, deskilled, and underpaid, but are nevertheless essential for societal reproduction (Braga 2014; Casale and Posel 2002; Drudy 2008; Figueiredo and Cowen 2004; Healy-Clancy 2014; Louro 2004; Shah et al. 1994)

Education institutions are thus sites of contestation, in which struggles between different social groups take place (Bruno-Jofré and Zaldívar 2012; Castoriadis [1963] 1993; Giroux 1983; Gramsci 1971; O'Halloran 2016; Willis 1977). Institutional trajectories, as much as the broader context in which they function, are shaped by the actions of those who contest them. The composition and social role of education systems have long been shaped by struggles for domination or liberation, particularly in the Global South including South Africa (Alexander 2005, [1990] 2013a; Christie 1985; Christie and Collins 1982; Kallaway 1984, 2002; Soudien and Nekhwevha 2002) and Brazil (Figueiredo and Cowen 2004; Freitag 1986; Heimer 1975; Kuenzer 2007, 2017).

Educational workers are essential to institutions' internal self-reproduction and generally constitute the university on a long-term basis. Their working lives, however, are conditioned by a broad set of factors, including the international division of labour and their institution's position within global networks of knowledge production and transmission, which shape the kind of knowledge that is valorised and remunerated (Biesta 2012; Canagarajah 2002; Halvorsen and Nossum 2016; Mignolo 2002; Ssentongo 2019; Taiwo 1993; Zeleza 1996). These factors also shape educational workers' forms of collective action. Although educational workers are under pressure, for instance from managers trying to drive down their wages, their necessity in those institutions and broader society creates tensions that opens the space for workers' struggles (Ferguson 2017b). Education workers can demonstrate that they are essential for their institutions by disrupting their functioning, for instance by withdrawing their labour in a strike (Finn 2018). However, practices like outsourcing makes unionisation more difficult, and the national political environment affects whether unions are respected and effective (Barker 2016; Connell 2019). As a result, campus-based struggles are not constrained to educational issues, but speak to and can shape broader social conditions.

Education thus cannot be understood in isolation. It forms a part of broader social relations, and education institutions are shaped by broader political, economic and social forces, while playing an important role in social reproduction, shaping social continuity and change (Burawoy 2018; Kuenzer 2007). Disrupting institutions can therefore loosen the constraints on what knowledge is valid and valorised, and on some imaginative acts (Haslanger 2017; Knox and McGregor 2013; Leibowitz 2016; Lewis and Hendricks 2016; Motimele 2019).⁷⁴

⁷⁴For example, if, as Fisher (2009, p. 2) argues, under "capitalist realism", it is "now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative" to capitalism, undermining the material basis of the capitalist system would inhibit capitalist social relations from being presented as the only possible form of human socio-economic organisation

2.1.3.2 Student Movements: Ambiguity and Collective Action

Students and education workers are fluid categories which are conditioned by numerous factors. Individuals hold multiple social positions with multiple identities, for instance being a graduate student while simultaneously working to teach undergraduates or as a librarian (Barker 2008, p. 87). As a result, specific analysis is required to explore how and why students or workers prioritise particular campaigns and develop particular analyses of education.

Students, as a social group, are unusual actors in contemporary societies. They have a uniquely ambiguous structural position and hence a significant capacity for collective action. Like factory workers,⁷⁵ they are often concentrated in specific spaces on campuses at similar times, making organisation, discussion, and collective identity formation easier (Barker 2008; Ndlovu 2017c). Unlike factory workers, they often have relatively fewer responsibilities, and in this relative freedom, they are more able to undertake riskier but more impactful acts, such as campus demonstrations or occupying buildings (Barker 2008; Ndlovu 2017c). They are often internationally and regionally connected, learning quickly from other contexts and uprisings elsewhere, and in some cases are exposed to radical ideas and conscientised directly through their studies (Barker 2008; Ndlovu 2017c). Nevertheless, being a student is a transitional phase, and their struggles are often difficult to sustain over time as students eventually graduate (Altbach 1989b; Callinicos and Turner 1975; Jansen 2017, p. 155). Moreover, students rarely have sustained control over crucial resources or hold significant power, either on their campuses or in broader society, and are thus alienated from control of the mechanisms by which their own experiences are produced (Barker 2008).

Like many other actors, students may initially respond to specific issues in their immediate lives, from poor quality campus food and accommodation, to authoritarian institutions. Such concerns have historically emerged in tandem with the mass expansion of educational access, without the commensurate investment and expansion of facilities and services (*ibid.*, p. 44). However, students' interests often go beyond their immediate conditions, and they can challenge or reproduce the existing social order (Ferguson 2017a; Munene 2003). While they are 'in' institutions, they are not 'of' them, in that they have not as strictly internalised or normalised institutional hegemony (Gramsci 1971). Students and workers may thus organise at times in broad-scale counter-hegemonic movements, or in more constrained and localised ways (Larmer 2010, p. 260).⁷⁶

At the same time, students are specifically engaged in a knowledge project, and hence are likely to think extensively about their conditions and generate new knowledge. Not

⁷⁵See Chibber (2017a) and Engels and Marx ([1848] 2000)

⁷⁶In both South Africa and Brazil, the mobilisations in question wavered between these two scales, although were ultimately unable to turn themselves fully towards becoming generalised counter-hegemonic movements

bound as strictly to academic norms as academic workers, students are also likely to experiment with a wide variety of ideas and pedagogies, many of which would be under-recognised in formal educational structures (Diouf 1996; Ketzner 2018; O'Halloran 2016). Moreover, because they are positioned within socially-sanctioned institutions of knowledge, their struggles can shape broader social patterns of knowledge production and transmission, challenging or reaffirming educational hegemonies.

The rise of student mobilisations has often been explained as a result of “youthful confusion” or innate rebelliousness (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001a; Matza 1970; Ndlovu 2017c; Stanley 2018; Touraine 1971). Although long-critiqued, there is one important element of this assessment, namely that students and youth are relatively *less* constrained by what older generations may see as the limits of political activity because they are less burdened by “the tradition of all the dead generations [that] weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living” (Marx [1852] 2000d, p. 329). However, this does not explain the historical contingency of student activism, or why it emerges at particular points in history in particular places, rather than others (Barker 2008, p. 44). In Brazil, for instance, student protests have been relatively *less* common than elsewhere in Latin America relative to total student population (Pavlic 2017, pp. 54–55). Students are not inherently revolutionary actors, in part because they are a heterogeneous group (Lenin [1903] 1977). They may be trained as the next generation of ruling elites, or as a disenfranchised, indebted underclass. This specificity depends on both the societal-educational configuration, as well as on an individualised uncertainty (Barker 2008; Callinicos and Turner 1975; Flacks 1970; Zeilig 2007, 2009a).⁷⁷

The global wave of student activism in the 1960s generated an academic subfield focusing on theorising student movements. Many authors argued that changing political-economic conditions brought masses of new students into previously elitist educational institutions (Castoriadis [1963] 1993; Rootes 1980), while others focused on student movements’ internal conditions and dynamics of interaction (Feuer 1969; Hirsch 1990; Keniston 1968), the conditions within institutions (Bourdieu 1988), and the significance of the uprisings (Flacks 1970). More recent assessments have explored the class basis for the uprisings (Barker 2008; Horn 2004).⁷⁸ This theorising often characterised student movements as one of the new ‘identity-based’ movements characterising a ‘post-materialist’ world, isolated from broader political movements. Much of this scholarship, however, focused on how it was middle-class students in a “consumer society” in the post-WWII

⁷⁷Indeed, students themselves may recognise their unstable, contradictory, or temporary social position, acting in relation thereto (Ndlovu 2017c, p. 46)

⁷⁸There are a great number of other works on specific contexts, such as the US (Arthur 2011; Dyke 1998; Habermas 1986; Lipset 1972; Miller 1994; Rootes 1980; Stepenoff 2014), UK (Barker 2008; Callinicos and Turner 1975; Rootes 1995; Stedman Jones 1969; Webster 2015), France (Bracke 2009; Castoriadis [1963] 1993; Cohn-Bendit [1968] n.d.; Lefort 1968; Ross 2002; Touraine 1971), Germany (Della Porta 1999; Dirke 1997), and Italy (Della Porta 1999; Hardt 1996; Statera 1975, 1979)

economic boom period, which at most speaks to a historically and spatially contingent set of experiences (Hodgkinson 2018, p. 46).

In contrast to this focus on the United States and Western Europe, the literature on global student movements, from Mexico (Vaughan 2018) and Brazil (Siqueira 2014), to Senegal (Gueye 2018) and South Africa (Badat 1999), captures a more complex set of issues. In the Global South, student movements have largely acted against colonial or post-colonial, deeply authoritarian and militarised regimes, rather than liberal democracies, and have been heavily shaped by class relations, overlaid by entrenched racism and sexism, with a strong relationship between student movements and nationalist politics (Altbach 1984, 1989b; Bhambra and Demir 2009; Jian et al. 2018; Luescher-Mamashela 2015; Majee and Ress 2018; Munene 2003; Pavlic 2017; Zeilig 2009a). Moreover, students' futures were constrained by the countries' subordinated, dependent positions in a global economic division of labour (Guimarães 1996; Hamilton et al. 2001; Marx 1998; Wagner 2013; Webster and Hurt 2014; Westhuizen 2016b). Similarly, against the methodological nationalism of mainstream student movement literature, authors like Bracke (2009), Langland (2018), and Zeilig (2009b) argue that student movements are inextricably transnational, with mutual constitution of movements between French colonial Africa and metropolitan France, or aspirational solidarities and direct connections between Brazilian students and others globally. Since the 1960s, students' primary struggles in South Africa and Brazil have been against the general social order, particularly embodied in the apartheid or military dictatorship state (Cancian 2007; Heffernan and Nieftagodien 2016; Müller 2010; Saes 1978; Siqueira 2014). However, this extended to a wider range of concerns, including unemployment (Hyslop 1990), as well as more specifically educational issues, such as access to and exclusion from universities (Araujo 2007; Koen, Cele, and Libhaber 2006). Significantly, such student movements have also been influenced by ideologies that are less common in the Global North, such as Pan-Africanism and Black Consciousness (Magaziner 2010; Mngxitama, Alexander, and Gibson 2008), to Black Feminism and Womanism (Gqola 2001; Magaziner 2011), and anti-colonial Communism and Anarchism (Moss 2014; Silva 2018).⁷⁹

Since the 2008 financial crisis, however, there has been a convergence in student movements in the Global North and Global South (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012). The adoption of austerity and further neoliberalisation and commodification of education, which had been targeted largely at countries in the Global South over the 1970s-1990s, has been extended to the Global North. As a result, a generation of indebted students face *contracting* opportunities once they leave universities. This has sparked large-scale student movements ranging from the UK (Cheeseman 2011; Hensby 2013; Ibrahim 2013;

⁷⁹Recently, scholars have looked at the legacies of the 1960s student movements for contemporary activism, both in its resonances and discontinuities (Bringel 2009; Klemenčič, Luescher, and Mugume 2016; Mngxitama, Alexander, and Gibson 2008)

McCarthy 2012; Palmieri and Solomon 2011), to Denmark (Risager and Thorup 2016), the Netherlands (Benneworth 2015; Reekum 2015; Talachian and Koutsogiannis 2015), to Canada (Al-Saji 2012; Spiegel 2016).

2.2 Social Mobilisation, Rupture and Agency

Educational spaces are contentious sites of both material and epistemic injustice. However, grievances and institutional injustices alone cannot explain why individuals turn to collective action (Wright, Taylor, and Moghaddam 1990). Indeed, Chibber (2017b) argues that it is historically *unusual* for people to organise collectively and overtly contest institutional power, whether because they feel isolated and powerless, do not believe that collective action will affect desirable change, or fear repercussions of their actions. Nevertheless, students in South Africa and Brazil, like countless others in social movements globally, have organised collectively. In this section, I address two ways of understanding how and why this was viable; firstly, by presenting a theory of rupture against theories of everyday resistance; secondly, through a wider engagement with Social Movement Theory.

2.2.1 Everyday Resistance and Ruptures

Because contentious collective action is largely unusual and difficult to accomplish, some theorists have turned towards the notion of “everyday resistance” to explain how “uneventful” actions, which are usually invisible to outsiders or deemed unworthy of commentary, can constitute significant political activity (Johansson and Vinthagen 2014; Scott 1985, 1989). This approach has generated important insights, notably in trying to understand what happens ‘behind the scenes’ rather than merely taking protest as the only form of action by those marginalised. However, this approach risks not only redefining acquiescence as resistance, but also downplaying the significance and even possibility of overtly politicised collective action (Gutmann 1993; Majumdar 2017). While ‘everyday resistance’ is a useful approach to understand people’s survival strategies, this dissertation focuses on what happens when people go beyond such ‘quiet’ tactics, such as petitioning authorities, and challenge the status quo (Ndlovu 2017c, p. 58; Aitchison 2011; Wright 2010, 2015a).

This *disruption* of the status quo and *confrontation* with the existing patterns of power shifts an everyday ‘action’ into a significant ‘event’, or moment of rupture (Badiou [1988] 2007; Barker 2013, p. 16). In South Africa and Brazil, student mobilisations of 2015-16 created a spectacular disruption of their “everyday education”, raising challenges and imagining alternatives to the status quo. Such “transformative events” are crucial “turning points in structural change, concentrated moments of political and cultural creativity when the logic of historical development is reconfigured by human action” (McAdam and Sewell 2001, pp. 100–102). From Lenin ([1920] 1940) and Lukács ([1924] 2009), to

Althusser ([1969] 2005), Fanon ([1959] 1965, [1963] 2004) and Badiou ([1988] 2007), and more recently McAdam and Sewell (2001), Sitrin and Azzellini (2014), and Tarrow (1993a), ruptures have been theorised as moments of rapid destabilisation of existing structures, which have the potential to open possibilities to think anew about prevailing ideas, to undertake new practices and reconfigure existing relations. In social movements, ruptures are “moments of madness” when “all is possible” (Tarrow 1993a, p. 281). Tarrow (*ibid.*, p. 281) describes them as,

turbulent points of history... [when] politics bursts its bounds to invade all of life
... Such moments are unsettling and often leave even participants disillusioned -
not to mention elites and political authorities.

Crucially, ruptures offer the possibility to change both people’s practices and ideas (Haslanger 2017, p. 19). The significance of a rupture is thus not only that it challenges and disarticulates hegemonic discourses and underlying practices of knowledge production, but that it does so in a way that can go beyond the boundaries of acceptable critique and hence creates the conditions for something new to emerge (Naidoo 2016b; Pennington 2015).

These moments shake institutions, but their significance often resonates beyond campus walls: a rupture within an institution “signals wider social upheaval” (Lukhele 2015) and can ripple towards larger-scale impact (Barker 2013, p. 11). Beyond “everyday” politics and resistance, moments of rupture are therefore periods in which social arrangements are liable to shift dramatically (Gutmann 1993, p. 86). In their most dramatic form, ruptures are periods in which “revolution is ‘the task of the day’” (Althusser [1969] 2005, p. 100).

These tumultuous periods of rupture break apart existing social relationships and are characterised by masses of new entrants into political activity, and hence widespread collective action (Trotsky [1932] 2008, p. xv). Indeed, these new actors may be “necessary for the political transformation of societies” because they are able to “break through the crust of convention” (Tarrow 1993a, p. 281). At the same time, periods of rupture enable participants to reshape themselves through their action (Lebowitz 2003; Engels [1850] 2010, p. 275), as “established practices, relationships and identities” all change in the face of a “rising movement’s innovative impulses” (Barker 2016). These personal and interpersonal changes are often deeply emotionally charged (Dinerstein 2014; Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2000, 2001b; Jasper 1998). These periods also generate new forms of collective identity and new alliances between groups as participants of struggles try to make sense of their new experiences and re-evaluate the world around them. In doing so, they reinterpret and remould their affective relationships, coming to see each other in new lights and interacting and identifying with one another in new ways, often as a cohesive group around a common project (Melucci 1995; More 2009; Polletta and Jasper 2001; Sartre [1960] 2004a).

One of the key changes in periods of rupture is that participants rapidly call into question calcified and normalised forms of interaction, which are ordinarily habituated and taken for granted. Existing social configurations are *denaturalised*, becoming more widely understood as the product of human activity, rather than an inherent part of the world, and hence subject to change (Beauvoir [1948] 1976; Freire [1974] 2005, [1970] 2006; Hart 2006; Scholte 2014; Wolpe 1970). They are also *denormalised*, called into question as a normative ideal towards which people ought to act (Ahmed 2006a,b; Haslanger 2017). By contesting existing institutions, students and workers call into question the necessity and desirability of existing institutional arrangements, demonstrating them to be a *particular* and *mutable* social-political configuration rather than a static situation (Fanon [1963] 2004; Marx [1852] 2000d).⁸⁰ This is essential for processes of social change because they direct participants to a new sense of their own agency. This self-realisation can quickly change one's own sense of self and affective relations. As Barker (2008, p. 84) argues,

The sense of relative powerlessness, which infects the politics of everyday life, can be transmuted, quite quickly, into a more active and cheerful apprehension of new horizons of hope.

Furthermore, ruptures entail an important epistemic component, namely that new knowledge emerges “against previous knowledge” (Bachelard [1938] 2002, p. 24). Because ideas have a material basis in social practices, disrupting the reproduction of an institution in a material sense is also a symbolic and epistemic disruption (Debray 2007; Haslanger 2017; Lewis and Hendricks 2016). One facet of this is that moments of rupture reveal the social conditions and structures that they disrupt (Althusser [1969] 2005; Lamoureux 2012). Alexander (2013b, p. 607), for instance, argues that ruptures “create special vantage points, ones that have the potential to reveal the deeper frictions and fractures that produce and shape social transformation”.

However, moments of rupture do not necessarily offer a clear alternative, nor is an alternative necessarily what motivates people to mobilise. Trotsky ([1932] 2008, p. xvi), for instance, reflecting on the 1917 Russian Revolution, argued that “the masses go into a revolution not with a prepared plan of social reconstruction, but with a sharp feeling that they cannot endure the old regime”. Similarly, in relation to the early South African Fallist mobilisations, Mbembe (2015, p. 2) argues that the period of rupture marked a “negative moment”, where “new antagonisms emerge while old ones remain unresolved”. In these early stages, “contradictory forces - inchoate, fractured, fragmented – are at work but what might come out of their interaction is anything but certain”. Over time, ruptures are rarely significant enough to fully “disarticulate the previous structural network... [or make] novel rearticulation possible” (Sewell 1996, p. 844). Nonetheless, moments of

⁸⁰Seeing social arrangements in this way is, as Fanon ([1952] 2008, p. 176) argues, a form of “disalienation” that emerges “through [the] refusal to accept the present as definitive”

rupture still possess power to influence the way that subsequent, longer-term mobilisations evolve, and from which new imaginaries and articulations of power relations emerge.

2.2.2 Social Movement Theory: Cycles of Collective Organising

Moments of rupture can lead to periods of sustained contestation, where actors manage to mobilise widely and to create movements. In this regard, Social Movement Theory provides analysis of patterns of collective action, offering general frameworks for understanding contentious politics (Della Porta and Tarrow 2005; McAdam and Tarrow 2011; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2004; Tarrow 2011; Tilly 1978). They offer a cyclical view of movements which generally tend to pass a number of phases including initiation, peak, and decline or transformation (Diani 1992; Holland and Cable 2002; Tarrow 1993a; Traugott 1994). They also offer a view of movements as constituted in similar ways in different contexts, and Social Movement Theory can therefore speak to recurring questions they raise. For example, movements are shaped by similar micro-dynamics, such as how new members are recruited (Barkan and Cohn 2013; Cable 1992; Hirsch 1990; McAdam 1986; Snow, Zurcher Jr., and Ekland-Olson 1980; Somma 2009) or how they frame their demands and messages, particularly in relation to the media (Benford 1997; Benford and Snow 2000; Gamson 2013; Snow 2013). Movements often face similar strategic choices, such as whether to organise as outsider pressure groups versus attempting to change structures from within (Donoso 2017; Merriam et al. 2001; Pettinicchio 2012), accompanied by tensions between hierarchical and formalised, representative organisations and horizontal, decentralised, autonomous organising (Abdelrahman 2015b; Flesher Fominaya 2014, 2015; Melucci 1989). The question of how leadership and decision-making is constituted within movements is also at the heart of the literature on social movements (Aitchison 2011; Bülow 2018; Duncan 2005; Maeckelbergh 2011, 2012). Because these questions were repeatedly raised in the South African and Brazilian student-led mobilisations, Social Movement Theory can help make sense of why and how they organised as they did in 2015-16.

While it is helpful in answering some specific questions, there are three key limitations to mainstream Social Movement Theory. Firstly, most of the literature tends to focus on Euro-America (Cox, Nilsen, and Pleyers 2017; Engels and Müller 2019; MacSheoin 2016; McAdam and Tarrow 2011; Swartz and Cooper 2014). Theories about how movements work have been grounded in the conditions of Global North capitalist liberal democracies, which often diverge sharply from conditions in the Global South. Social movements in the United States, for instance, rarely face interference from foreign states, unlike more frequent intervention in countries like South Africa and Brazil.⁸¹

⁸¹Implicit within this is a “methodological nationalism” (Anievas and Matin 2016), in which analysts take nation-states as self-contained units, rather than recognising the deeply entwined, “hybrid”, international constitution of local conditions (Pommerolle 2010)

A related central critique of this body of literature is how New Social Movement (NSM) theory, particularly as discussed in the US from the 1970s, was grounded in a distinction between the “old”, material and class-based, forms of collective action, and “new”, identity and issue-based forms (Buechler 2013).⁸² Social movements were theorised as relatively independent entities, largely unaffiliated with political parties, the state, and trade unions, working for issue-based changes or recognition, often without analysis of the broader conditions in which they emerged and acted (Barker 2016; Barker and Dale 1998; Hetland and Goodwin 2013). Although the popularity of NSM theory has since waned, Euro-American-centric approaches to understanding social movements remain globally influential (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2004; Tarrow 2011). Indeed, despite significant contextual and historical differences, these patterns of theorising were imported to the Global South and used to try explain local conditions. It is only recently that more contextually sensitive approaches have been pioneered by scholars in Africa (Habib and Opoku-Mensah 2009; Lodge 2013; Mamdani and Dia-Wamba 1995) and Latin America (Alonso 2009; Davis 1999; Dinerstein 2014).

The second limitation that much Social Movement literature suffers from is its disconnection from movements themselves. As Cox and Flesher Fominaya (2009, p. 6) argue, contemporary social movement studies are “institutionalized as an increasingly canonized body of knowledge” in academia, and have become “increasingly distant from any relationship to movements”. The first way in which this happens is that scholars tend to act as if movements existed in a different world from academic production, and hence that their work would have no bearing on movements themselves (Barker et al. 2013; Bevington and Dixon 2005; Cox 2017; Della Porta 2017; Flacks 2004; Harley 2014a; Shukaitis, Graeber, and Biddle 2007). Cox (2017, p. 3) explains this distinction as one between “*social movement* and *academic* intellectual relationships... those shaped within the process of popular self-emancipation and those shaped within the process of academic credentialisation, appointment and reproduction”. Most social movement academics are thus pressured to write primarily for an academic audience, even if they hold personal convictions relating to the movements themselves. Even this, however, is a form of action that may have consequences: policymakers might draw on this kind of theory to prepare for subsequent movements, for instance. This disconnection is also manifested when academic production is divorced from the theoretical and practical contributions of activists and movements. Social Movement literature, as an academic field, tends to ignore or marginalise traditions of counter-hegemonic knowledge production in feminist, anti-colonial, anti-racist, ecological, socialist, Marxist and anarchist currents (Barker and Cox 2002;

⁸²It is important to note that, since writing, I have been made aware that this is a misleading and potentially inaccurate portrayal of social movement theorising, particularly in relation to European movements. For practical reasons, I cannot significantly change the content of this paragraph, but see Flesher Fominaya and Cox (2013) for in-depth clarification on this complexity

Barker et al. 2013; Bevington and Dixon 2005; Cox 2017; Cox and Flesher Fominaya 2009; Cox and Nilsen 2014; Flacks 2004; Harley 2014a; Kelley 2002; Shukaitis, Graeber, and Biddle 2007). Even when theorists do draw on these contributions, they are practically limited to analysis and preclude the possibility of reshaping the structures that movements challenge (Cox 2017, pp. 5–6).

The third limitation is that Social Movement Theory has tended to analyse movements in static ways that mask the crucial social processes by which movements develop and change, whether because of internal heterogeneity or in dialectical relations with external agents such as the state, or contextual conditions (Benford 1997; Bernasconi 2010; Dores 2009; Jasper 2010; Maccatory, Oumarou, and Poncelet 2010).⁸³ This is crucial, because without understanding movements as changing over time, it would be impossible to understand how participants adjust their actions by learning from their experiences. Social movement learning is thus grounded in a dynamic understanding of collective action.

This dissertation therefore draws on the work of political activists and theorists, within the mobilisations and historically, to contextually situate the Brazilian and South African student-led mobilisations, analysing them as internally heterogeneous and dynamic, working out their positions through political practice, while being shaped both by the local and global contexts (Larmer 2010). Out of these conditions, the mobilisations developed new ideas and imaginaries of education and society.

2.3 Movements, Knowledge, and Imagination

Powerful actors denying subaltern groups the capacity to think, reason, or imagine has a long history,⁸⁴ asserted variously of the poor and working classes, women, indigenous and black people.⁸⁵ Denying people their epistemic capacities serves to justify denying them political agency and, by extension, for exclusion, marginalisation, exploitation and oppression (Fricker 2013; Mbembe 2017; Mignolo and Tlostanova 2006).⁸⁶

Epistemic recognition is thus central to numerous critical accounts of racism, sexism, colonialism, capitalism, and even protests generally.⁸⁷ Feminists like Fricker (2007) argue that oppressive systems like sexism not only deny women their intellectual faculties, but

⁸³Although this is perhaps more accurate of earlier SM literature; Cf. Tarrow (2011, p. 189) and McAdam and Tarrow (2011)

⁸⁴See for instance, Hegel ([1837] 1998) (Cf. Neocosmos (2017c) and Stephanson (2010)) and Kant ([1785] 2006, [1764] 2011) (Cf. Abundez-Guerra (2018), Allais (2016), Eze (1997), and Mills (1998, 2015))

⁸⁵Recognising that these are troubled, historically-produced and contested categories

⁸⁶Arch-liberal J. S. Mill ([1859] 1991), for instance, predicated liberty on the capability of “free and equal discussion”, while denying that “barbarians” were capable of the requisite reasoning (Neocosmos 2017b). Similarly, critics of the South African and Brazilian student-led mobilisations derided them as an unthinking mass. However, it should be unsurprising to hear that students can think. After all, it is what their ostensible role is as students

⁸⁷On workers’ autodidacticism, see e.g. (Rose 2010; Sawchuk 2003; Thompson 1963); on the epistemic life of crowds and protests, see e.g. (Rudé 1959; Stott and Drury 2017)

create “hermeneutical injustices”, in which even women’s self-understanding is limited by her community’s distorted epistemic resources. Autonomous groups, however, can and do challenge hegemonic knowledge. Collins ([1990] 2000) and hooks (1994) demonstrate such counter-hegemonic intellectual traditions among female black teachers in the segregated US South who saw “learning as revolution” (hooks 1994, p. 2). Epistemic and cognitive justice features prominently amongst decolonial theorists. Drawing on Quijano (2000), some argue that a “Coloniality of Knowledge” underpinned or justified European colonial expansion, creating a hierarchy of European above non-European knowledge production. This argument contests the colonial assertion that outside of the colonial metropole, “others do not think” (Maldonado-Torres 2013, p. 106).⁸⁸ Such critiques are of course not the preserve of academics. Abahlali baseMjondolo (2009), a shack-dwellers’ movement in South Africa’s townships, argues that “we may be poor, but we are not stupid! We may be poor, but we can still think!” This is demonstrated in practice, through their own knowledge-production activities such as the University of Abahlali baseMjondolo created in the mid-2000s.

Recognising that *all* people are capable of thought, reason, and imagination acknowledges a fundamental human capacity (Fricker 2015; Praeg 2017b), and is a prerequisite for an egalitarian politics which respects people’s knowledge and agency (hooks 1994; Neocosmos 2017a; Ranciere 1999; Waghid 2014).

A crucial conduit for these epistemic acts is in political action. Recognising this entails recognising that social movements produce knowledge (Choudry and Kapoor 2010; Harley 2014a). As Kelley (2002, p. 9) argues, “the most radical ideas often grow out of a concrete intellectual engagement [while] confronting systems of oppression”. Indeed, epistemic change can be grounded in social change inasmuch as some epistemic developments may *only* take place through action that changes social conditions (Haslanger 2017). Central to this is the role of *praxis*, the dialectical relationship between action and reflection, as developed in Marxist accounts of human activity and social organisation (Carpenter and Mojab 2017; Gramsci 1971; Marx [1844] 1988, [1844] 2000f), critical and radical educationalists (Freire [1970] 2006; Kolb and Fry 1975), and decolonial scholars (Sousa Santos 2008, 2014; Walsh 2015). While undertaking practical, self-directed political activity, activists reflect, attempt to understand, theorise, and learn from their own actions and those of others, integrating these reflections into subsequent action (Choudry and Vally 2018). In the prominent case of Brazil’s *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* -

⁸⁸Alternative interpretations are obliquely explained as “precisely the affirmation of the zero point and the success in silencing or relegating other epistemologies to a barbarian margins, a primitive past or a communist or Muslim evil” (Mignolo 2013, p. 9), or as “the hegemony of Eurocentrism as the perspective of knowledge, and an association of intellectual production with ‘civilization’, the power of the written word, and with the established racial hierarchy.” (Walsh 2013, p. 83). The concept has also been expanded to account for various social identities and positions, such as one’s gender, which are implicated in these forms of domination; See e.g. Lugones (2008, 2010)

Landless Rural Workers' Movement (MST), Tarlau (2015) exemplifies how new critical pedagogies develop through a dynamic relationship between existing theories of learning and local practices. Social Movement Theory often obscures such praxis by presenting movements as static or resulting from *a priori* strategies. However, since the 1990s, Social Movement Learning has addressed how movements and the knowledge they produce are constructed through dynamic interactions between participants and broader social actors (Eyerman and Jamison 1991; Harley 2014a; Horton and Freire 1990). Social Movements are therefore pedagogical and epistemic communities, serving as repositories for knowledge which can outlast the activism of its individual members (Anderson 2016; Gill 2014; Hall 2009; McHugh 2017; Medina 2011; Okech 2020; Sousa Santos 2008).⁸⁹ Counter-hegemonic knowledge practices are thus grounded by alternative social formations, from transient mobilisations and social movements (Kelley 2002, p. 150; Ghanem 1998) to more durable indigenous communities (Akiwowo 1986; Dei 2000; Hoppers 2002; Walsh 2013), trade unions (Cooper 2006), and even alternative schools (Connell 2019; Maaba 2004).⁹⁰

Social movements can also be more broadly educative, drawing public attention to issues and shaping social knowledge (Choudry 2015; Eyerman and Jamison 1991), thereby functioning as insurgent, subaltern public spheres (Fraser 1990; Sousa Santos 2012; Squires 2002; Vatikiotis and Yörük 2016). Student movements are particularly significant because by challenging their institutions, they contest central nodes in existing networks of knowledge production and can thus reshape not only institutional curricula and pedagogies, but also societal knowledge formations (Arthur 2011; Kelly 2018; Stovall 2016).

Scholars of social movement learning thus focus on the content of subaltern knowledge (Cox and Flesher Fominaya 2009), ordinarily marginalised or masked by what Gramsci (1971) calls “common sense”, the taken-for-granted ideas aligning with the hegemonic social order. Movements create knowledge that tends to be “about the social world”, particularly its injustices, as well as strategizing how to affect change (Cox and Flesher Fominaya 2009; Ghanem 1998).⁹¹ Such knowledge is thus generally oriented towards changing the world, rather than profit-seeking or academic interest (Choudry and Kapoor 2010; Cox 2017; Hall et al. 2012).⁹²

⁸⁹Much of this work is ahead of philosophical theorising on the nature of social epistemology, which tends to highlight the same processes of collectively-held knowledge, albeit shorn of its political edge (Carter et al. 2018; Goldberg 2017; Haddock, Millar, and Pritchard 2010; Laden 2012; Zawidzki 2013)

⁹⁰Such epistemic practices range from the explicit and intentional, to the informal and incidental (Bleakney and Choudry 2013; Choudry 2015; Foley 1999)

⁹¹Although, in some cases, activists may learn “negative” lessons, such as student activists whose movements fail and thus come to believe that “no significant changes could happen” (Zlobina and Vazquez 2017)

⁹²Not all social movement learning is inherently positive or change-oriented, however. Institutionalised movement learning practices may disempower participants by denying collective agency and reaffirming the status quo (Bleakney and Choudry 2013; Foley 1999). Cooper (1998), for example, argues that movements' educational practices can shift according to broader historical conditions, drawing on changes

The specifically *educational* aspect of mobilisations are central to this dissertation. Recognising their internal heterogeneity while taking seriously their intellectual labour,⁹³ I argue that students and workers undertook collective action over 2015-16, influenced by their knowledge and experiences of the world, and in the process thought – about their lives and contexts, about their strategies and forms of organisation, and about their education and futures. Moreover, they learnt from and were shaped by their actions (Cox and Flesher Fominaya 2009; Freire [1970] 2006), thereby imagining and practising a different form of education from what their institutions mandated.

2.3.1 Conscientisation, Agency, and Belief Revision

A crucial component of social movements' epistemic life is the conscientisation of participants, which involves them revising their beliefs.

Political consciousness can be understood as a durable, shared form of (re)imagining social arrangements and power relations, and political *conscientisation* is an ongoing, collective process of questioning and challenging the values and forms of life that currently exist in society, coupled with a process of formulating possible alternatives (Marx [1844] 1978). It reveals the hidden workings of daily life so that “they might be critically evaluated” (Haslanger 2017, p. 15). Theorists of class consciousness, for example, emphasised that it entailed an understanding of the desirability and possibility of systemic political-economic change, the necessity of the working class under capitalism to shape the future of human social organisation, and the efficacy of the working class as an agent of change (Engels and Marx [1848] 2000; Lenin [1902] 1969; Wolpe 1970). Conscientisation thus involves an overcoming of alienation, by perceiving oneself as having the agency to affect changes in the world (Freire [1970] 2006; Piven and Cloward 1979; More 2017, p. 48). This requires individuals to draw links between their own experiences and broader patterns produced by social structures, necessitating knowledge of reality, and an imaginative reshaping of one's interpretative and conceptual schemes. Feminist, anti-colonial, and anti-racist praxis have contributed an important understanding of how embodied lived experiences shape people's perceptions of the world, thereby shaping their political conscientisation (Fanon [1963] 2004, [1952] 2008; Ferguson 2008). For black existentialist authors like Fanon ([1952] 2008), Gordon (1997), and Shelby (2002), the point is not to reinscribe an alternative essentialism, but to come to a grounded understanding of why and how blackness has been constructed as a social identity, and to collectively generate pathways to live on

in the South African workers' movement

⁹³This is not unique, however. As I return to throughout the thesis, numerous other authors have similarly pursued intellectual engagements with the student movements in South Africa (Booyesen 2016a; Chinguno et al. 2017; Gibson 2016; Gillespie and Naidoo 2019; Langa 2017; Luescher 2016; Mabasa 2017; Naidoo 2016a; O'Halloran 2016; Publica[c]tion Collective 2017) and Brazil (Alegria 2017a,b, 2018; Campos, Medeiros, and Ribeiro 2016; Martins et al. 2016; Paes and Pipano 2017; Pinheiro 2017; Roig Catini and Cavalcanti Mello 2016)

their own terms. Moreover, since the 1980s, authors have highlighted the importance of weaving together class, feminist, and black consciousness not as separate issues, but as the “multiple consciousness essential for our liberation” (King 1988, p. 72). As hooks (1985, p. 40) argues, “an important stage in the development of political consciousness is reached when individuals recognize the need to struggle against all forms of oppression”.

There is “no one strategy or formula for the development of political consciousness” (ibid., p. 58). In some cases, individuals become conscientised through a critical reflection of their own experiences and social position (Engels and Marx [1848] 2000; Lukács [1923] 1967; Mezirow 1990; King 1988, p. 71). Social conditions can give rise to critical, political consciousness because such conditions generate dissonance amongst those who are discriminated against, which provokes an initial rejection of injustice, which in turn can be developed into a political consciousness (hooks 1985, p. 10).⁹⁴ Secondly, movements can create intentional, directed educational activities such as “consciousness-raising” discussion and reading groups, to conferences and cultural activities (Biko 1978; Freire [1974] 2005, [1970] 2006; hooks 1985; Horton and Freire 1990; Rowbotham 1973; SASO 1971).⁹⁵ While such activities can take place within existing, formal institutions like state schools (Irwin 2012; Pilar O’Cadiz, Wong, and Torres 1998), they find an obvious home in autonomous, counter-hegemonic social movements (Cox and Flesher Fominaya 2009), and in inter-movement conversation with experienced activists (Debray 1967; Lenin [1902] 1969; Lukács [1923] 1967; hooks 1985, p. 10). Moreover, one’s political consciousness develops through experience of social struggle (Engels [1850] 2010; hooks 1985, pp. 46–8; Rowbotham 1973, pp. 27–8). Gramsci (1971)’s contribution here is crucial, drawing out different aspects of consciousness, from an intuitive sense of difference between different class positions through to a “coherent conception of the world”. This develops in part through the daily tasks of movement building and political organising (Clark 2018; Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001b; hooks 1985), as well as through experimenting with confrontational tactics, such as protests and occupations (Aitchison 2011; Pusey 2016).

However, conscientisation can be limited. Such activities are not guaranteed to work (Chibber 2017b), and in conscientising work, it is possible to reinscribe and reify the very issues that activists ostensibly oppose (Lennon 2015, p. 115). Moreover, if separated from a broader political strategy and practice, conscientisation can simply build awareness or even apathy (hooks 1985, p. 159).

⁹⁴A reductionist, “economist-determinist” position of this, in which economic relations are the source of all “subjective” conditions, is sometimes attributed to Marx and Engels, although contradicted by their own writings. Marx ([1894] 1991, pp. 927–8), for instance, argues that “the same economic basis - the same in its major conditions – [can display] endless variations and gradations in its appearance, as the result of innumerable different empirical circumstances, natural conditions, racial relations, historical influences acting from outside... these can only be understood by analysing these empirically given conditions”

⁹⁵These are liable, however, to shift according to prevailing political conditions, as demonstrated by the South African Black Consciousness Movement (BCM)’s shift towards less in-depth, personal conscientisation strategies and towards mobilising-focused political education practices (Naidoo 2015b)

Belief Revision and Reinterpretation Conscientisation is underpinned by belief revision. The beliefs in question are usually closely-held and have significant ramifications in constructing their holders' conceptual frameworks and identities. As Haslanger (2017, p. 10) argues, conscientisation involves self-questioning and self-reinterpretation, which changes "the very terms and concepts we use to understand the world". Classic accounts of belief revision present it as an active, individual process of gathering evidence to confirm or disconfirm a belief, and thereby grant or withhold assent from it (Goldman 1986; Harman 1986; Quine [1970] 1978). However, we may only undertake such reflective critique when we are forced to because "we are not jarred into critical thinking about our conduct until we confront a problem that stops us from carrying on unreflectively" (Anderson 2010, p. 3). Belief revision thus often takes place in the context of belief-reality incoherence in which existing conceptual schemes no longer serve to make sense of our lived experience or conditions (Harman 1986, pp. 32, 116).⁹⁶ Individually, this could take the form of a "moral shock", when "an unexpected event or piece of information raises such a sense of outrage in a person that she becomes inclined toward political action" (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2000, p. 76). This kind of belief revision is not narrowly cognitive and rationalistic. Collective action can generate emotionally intense responses amongst activists (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001b; Kelley 2002), which affect people by, for example, creating confusion, longing, senses of loss and disruption or agency and recognition. Trying to adjust to rapidly changing experiences, averse to painful experiences, or out of desire for a sense of connection, people may seek out alternative conceptual schemes that can help them make sense of themselves (Freire [1970] 2006, p. 89; hooks 2009, p. 248). More generally, beliefs and knowledge are embedded in and generated by social practices. Periods of rupture, in which social practices are disrupted, are crucial because they change the social basis on which knowledge formations are constructed. As Anderson (2010, p. 6) argues, "circumstances change, and new problems and complaints arise, requiring the construction of new ideals". Thus, social movements that challenge or change those practices "force our everyday concepts to break down and demonstrate how they fail to serve as adequate tools to get along in the world" (Haslanger 2017, p. 10).

Not all beliefs are equally important, however, and revising some beliefs can have significant implications more widely (Goldman 1986; Quine [1970] 1978). Importantly, we have strongly held, "central" beliefs which we take as "a crucial part of [our] reason for many other beliefs", helping us make sense of and act within the world (Harman 1986, p. 60; Thagard 1991). For example, colonial ideologies tend to be situated as relatively central belief and conceptual formations, including self-understandings of one's own humanity, agency, capacities and scope for action, role in the world and relations to others (Bulhan 1985; Fanon [1963] 2004, [1952] 2008; Fricker 2007; Hook 2004). Challenges to these

⁹⁶See similarly (Davies 1962); cf. (Wolpe 1970)

“central” beliefs are thus important as they operate against the general coherence of an entire world-view (Thagard 1991). Periods of rupture, in which widespread aspects of one’s context are rapidly destabilised, are thus likely to correspond to widespread epistemic changes. Such periods can force a kind of reckoning, where the future appears radically open and indeterminate, and induces a productive kind of *aporia* (Marx [1844] 1978), a sense of being “compelled to be aware of our ignorance and... motivated to do something about it” (Waterfield 2005, p. viii).⁹⁷ This can lead to new, imaginative ways of reconciling one’s experiences with the new situation.⁹⁸

2.3.2 Education and the Imagination

As movements produce knowledge, so too can they catalyse the imagination. As Kelley (2002, p. 8) argues, “revolutionary dreams erupt out of political engagement; collective social movements are incubators of new knowledge”. However, the imagination receives little attention in social movements (Castoriadis [1975] 1987; Khasnabish and Haiven 2014; Shukaitis 2009a; Shukaitis, Graeber, and Biddle 2007). This subsection therefore maps interrelations between education, collective action, knowledge, and the imagination, to explain how student-worker movements are able not only to produce new knowledge, but also imagine new possibilities.

Philosophical theories of the imagination focus on its role as a basic, intentional mental faculty, differentiating it from perception or intuition and unconstrained by reality (See e.g. Gendler 2010; Heal 2003; Hume [1740] 2000; Kant [1781] 1999; Kind 2016; Strawson 1982). Few, however, have analysed the imagination in relation to reality, or in a more socio-political sense, as an “effort to see the future in the present” (Kelley 2002, p. 9). An important exception to this is Sartre ([1940] 2004b), whose account of the imagination and its role in consciousness and human activity helps to develop an embodied account of imaginative activity. Sartre is recognised within traditional (often Eurocentric) philosophical literature alongside figures like Wittgenstein ([1953] 1986), as having one of the most well-developed theories of the imagination (Hopkins 2016; Lennon 2015; Warnock 1976; Webber 2004). At the same time, he has been highly influential amongst African

⁹⁷This knowledge-of-ignorance distinguishes *aporia* from “plain ignorance” (Waterfield 2005, p. viii). See several of Plato’s dialogues. Thanks to L. Cantor for discussion on this theme

⁹⁸Such ruptures can, however, also function inversely for people who are “disconfirmation prone”, and thereby reassert their prior held views in the face of evidence (Goldman 1986, p. 347)

and anti-colonial philosophers and activists,⁹⁹ notably Frantz Fanon¹⁰⁰ and Steve Biko¹⁰¹ (Bidima 2004; Gordon 2000; More 2017).

For Sartre ([1940] 2004b), the imagination is a faculty of thought that produces a kind of knowledge which can be influenced by, but is not reliant on, experience. It enables us to step back from reality and conceive of things that we know do not (currently) exist. Rather than a private mental object, the imagination is thus a form of *action* that people manifest in relation to the world (Priest 2001, pp. 11–12). This act is, as Hopkins (2016, p. 92) argues, to remove yourself from the “stream of reality”, to take a “step back”, and to be conscious of something that doesn’t presently exist in front of you (Baird et al. 2012; Beaty et al. 2014).¹⁰² We undertake numerous imaginative acts, ranging from being conscious of a purpose for an object when all that is present is the physical object itself,¹⁰³ to envisioning socio-political configurations that do not yet exist (Kelley 2002, p. 9).

To imagine something is to be conscious of it as *not* being real. The imaginary consciousness is thus “certainly unreal, but it drinks from the concrete world” (Fanon and Geronimi [1956] 2018, p. 431). This can only take place relating to, and with an experience of, what *is* real (Sartre [1940] 2004b, p. 185). This means, as Fanon and Geronimi ([1956] 2018, p. 431) argue, that “imaginary life cannot be isolated from real life: the concrete, objective world is what constantly fuels, enables, legitimates and founds the imaginary”. As a result, the imagination is a form of action that is *situated* and *embodied* (Hopkins 2016; Sartre [1940] 2004b; Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis 2002). It is grounded in our lived experiences, and “shaped and conditioned (although not determined)” by social configurations (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis 2002). Structurally oppressive systems like colonialism and capitalism can thus function to *deny* the imagination, reducing a sense of possibility to actuality (Fisher 2009; Giroux 2014; Graeber 2015a; Manganyi 1981; Roy 2016). To understand how people imagine therefore requires an understanding of their reality, without reducing the free act of the imagination to a cognitive reproduction of

⁹⁹Including N. Chabani Manganyi in South Africa, Paulo Freire ([1970] 2006) in Brazil, and bell hooks (1994), Angela Y. Davis and Lewis Gordon in the US (Gordon 2000, pp. 9, 19)

¹⁰⁰Fanon specifically drew on Sartre’s theory of the imagination in his own writings on the subject (Fanon 2018, pp. 442, 752; Fanon and Geronimi [1956] 2018, p. 432), as well as more widely (Fanon [1952] 2008, p. 140). Indeed, Fanon saw in Sartre a philosopher with significance for revolutionary anti-colonial struggle, giving lectures on Sartre to Algerian FLN troops on the Tunisian border (Bernasconi 2010, p. 36; Cohen-Solal 1988, p. 431; Fanon 2018, pp. 536, 782)

¹⁰¹More (2017, p. 86) argues for Sartre’s “significance in the development of Biko’s thought”, both directly and indirectly, through Fanon, US Black Theologian James Cone, and one of Biko’s intellectual interlocutors, Rick Turner, who had done a PhD in France in the mid-1960s on Sartre’s work (Nash 1999, p. 69)

¹⁰²Having a “consciousness of” something is to have an awareness of that which is being focused on by the act of imagining (Sartre [1940] 2004b, pp. 3–5). If we try to reflect on the image itself, it changes, because the act we undertake changes: “the object as imaged is never anything more than the consciousness one has of it” (ibid., p. 15)

¹⁰³Seeing something *as* something, beyond simply aspects of what is present, or to construct a narrative around it, its contexts and conditions, “demands *imagination*” (Wittgenstein [1953] 1986, pp. 197, 207, 210). See also (Wilkerson 1973)

their conditions.

Imagination in Social Life The imagination plays an important role at several levels, from the personal, to interpersonal, to social. For Sartre ([1943] 2001), using the imagination is a *practice of freedom*,¹⁰⁴ wherein one is free to “escape from the world” and thereby imagine how one might interact with reality differently (Sartre [1940] 2004b, p. 184; Webber 2004, p. xxvi). Moreover, it enables us to construct a sense of self, by relating our current experiences to an imagined future self with goals, projects, and priorities (Geuss 2010, p. ix; Fletcher 2016, pp. 394–5; Leeuwen 2016; Walker and Unterhalter 2007). Our agency is thus tied to the imagination. As Medina (2013, p. 253) argues, “a critical reimagining is not a purely intellectual exercise, but rather, a complex rearticulation that engages our emotions and our will and ultimately affects our capacity for action”.

The imagination also enables us to connect to others and *create relationships*. Removing ourselves from our own experiences enables us to open ourselves to seeing the world from another’s perspective (Dussel 2009, 2012; Grosfoguel 2012; Rappaport 2016; Walsh 2015), including “multiple, even incompatible, frames of reference” (Fletcher 2016, pp. 396–7).¹⁰⁵ Moreover, as Medina (2013, p. 255) argues, how we imagine ourselves in relation to others has ethical implications, because we “export from our actual world to the fictional scenario, and . . . import from the fictional scenario into our world”. The wilful ignorance of real injustice, for instance, can produce aversion to imagining possible futures that contain those injustices. This “imaginative resistance” demonstrates that the relationship between future possibilities and present conditions “engages our moral sensibilities”, even if we do not realise it (ibid., p. 254). Imagining can therefore sensitise or desensitise people, teaching us about aspects of reality and “creating or severing social bonds, affective ties, and relations of empathy and solidarity” (ibid., p. 254).

Finally, the imagination is crucial for *political action*, because it bridges personal experiences and broader social arrangements, understanding our role and relationship to large-scale structures and processes (Lennon 2015; Mills [1959] 2000; Taylor 2003), and how we imagine society to function affects how we participate therein (Geuss 2008, p. 27). Both existing social orders and proposed alternatives are justified with recourse to imagined shared values, principles, and stories (Castoriadis [1975] 1987; Geuss 2010). These social imaginaries are grounded in social practices, and to change them also requires a change in our social practices (Haslanger 2017; Kelley 2002; Medina 2013).¹⁰⁶ Collective

¹⁰⁴If Sartre ([1940] 2004b, p. 188) is right, this kind of imaginative freedom is a basic condition for any kind of consciousness at all

¹⁰⁵Simply being able to see the world from the perspective of another is not, however, a panacea for social injustice, as people in different positions, such as capitalist and worker, may still have incompatible interests and pressure to act against one another (Hamilton 2015, 2018; Marx [1879] 2000a,g; Marx and Engels [1845] 1956). Thanks to S. Bhuvanendra for helpful commentary on this

¹⁰⁶Or, at least, a distancing of ourselves from existing social practices (Geuss 2010, p. x)

self-determination therefore requires imaginative work (Castoriadis [1975] 1987; hooks 2009; Khasnabish and Haiven 2014; Naranch 2002; Shukaitis 2009b; Shukaitis, Graeber, and Biddle 2007).

Social structures shape our epistemic conditions. Because the imagination is situated, it can be developed or inhibited by the real conditions in which people imagine. As a result, collective action that changes those conditions can reshape beliefs, knowledge, and crucially, imaginative activity (Haslanger 2017).¹⁰⁷ Fletcher (2016) identifies three resources that are vital to the healthy development and exercise of the imagination: conceptual resources, dialogical spaces, and creative expression. Each of these is socially conditioned, and can thus be facilitated by social movements.

Conceptual Resources Being able to see possibilities beyond one's own direct experiences requires conceptual resources (ibid., p. 398). Because imagining draws on one's existing knowledge (Sartre [1940] 2004b, p. 9), it can be enhanced by introducing different ideas that weren't previously available, or in an engaging manner that makes the content significant (Castillo and Solbakk 2017, p. 2). Having exposure and access to those ideas builds a groundwork from which more possibilities become imaginable.

In formal educational institutions, these conceptual resources usually form the content of a *curriculum*. The curriculum captures what is thought to be important and valuable enough to learn about, according to those powerful enough to shape it (Jansen 2017, p. 155; Garuba 2015). In a sense, *what* is learnt is thus a condensation of broader social struggles and power dynamics. There are five key forms of curricula (Eisner 1979; McKernan 2008). Firstly, the *formal* curriculum is what is explicitly valued within the institution, for instance, on official curriculum documents (McKernan 2008, pp. 35–6). Superficial curriculum change entails changing only the formal curriculum. Secondly, the *null* curriculum addresses what is excluded from teaching, with this absence being devalued. Thirdly, the *actual* curriculum is what is taught within a classroom, regardless of formal documents. Fourthly, the *informal* curriculum is that which is recognised as part of the educational process, but goes beyond the formal syllabus, such as extracurricular activities. Finally, the *hidden* curriculum includes codes and values that are not made explicit but are imbued in institutional culture. This is wide-ranging, from developing a sense of individuality and community, to what cultures or histories are validated (Essop 2016; Grange 2016). These five types of curricula form the basis of knowledge upon which institutions mould and constrain the imaginaries of students.

Conceptual resources can be limited by material deprivation; for example, of books that could expand one's horizons. They may also be limited by epistemic injustice (Fricker 2007; Kidd, Medina, and Pohlhaus 2017), such as preventing a group of people from contributing

¹⁰⁷It is because social conditions play such an important role in facilitating or suppressing the imagination that we should not take individual reflective critique as the pinnacle of epistemic practices

to shared knowledge (Dotson 2012, 2014; Fricker 2016; Mills 2007), or by suppressing the writings of black people or women, or erasing marginalised groups' histories and languages (Depelchin 2005; Trouillot 1995).¹⁰⁸

Dialogical Spaces Dialogical spaces further enable people to reflect on their experiences and the world in conversation with others (Fletcher 2016, p. 399). People learn from, and are inspired by, the experiences of others in similar conditions and from similar struggles (Wallerstein 1983, 2002).¹⁰⁹ Dialogue enables people to discover new perspectives and test ideas with others (Medina 2013, p. 315), particularly through caring and constructive critique (Freire [1974] 2005, p. 40), which can render visible the process by which one comes to hold one's views (Escobar 1992, p. 22), building empathy (Harman 1999; Khasnabish and Haiven 2014; Rogers 1975; Stueber 2016). As Kelley (2002, p. 198) argues, "unless we have the space to imagine and a vision of what it means fully to realize our humanity, all the protests and demonstrations in the world won't bring about our liberation".

This dissertation engages with the centrality of dialogical spaces as they have featured largely in students experiences in mobilisations and in imagining new forms of education and of social relations. Dialogical *pedagogy*, as a style of teaching and learning,¹¹⁰ contrasts with what Freire ([1970] 2006) calls "banking" pedagogy: hierarchical forms of knowledge transmission which assumed that teachers held knowledge with which they filled their students as empty vessels, rather than encouraging them to critically engage with that knowledge, its source and generation, and role in society. Because banking pedagogies rely on "depositing" knowledge in students, they inhibit students from "being truly human" because they limit their capacities to inquire, question, or critique (ibid., p. 72). Additionally, banking pedagogies silence students, denying the relevance or importance of their own experiences and contributions, or even asserting them as unknowledgeable (Freire [1970] 2006, p. 72; Delpit 1988; Dotson 2011, 2014; Pillay 2016).¹¹¹ Authoritarian impositions of knowledge from above are a further kind of epistemic injustice, because they impede people from full participation in dialogical spaces, overwriting the experiences of less powerful people and undermining the capacity of students, particularly from marginalised groups, from contributing to collective knowledge (Fricker 2007, 2015). Without dialogue, students may only be presented with hegemonic or "common-sensical" perspectives (Gramsci 1971), which inhibits their imaginations and undermines their

¹⁰⁸Although there are likely to be 'subterranean', subversive counter-narratives that persist despite attempts to suppress people's histories and languages (Dotson 2012, p. 31)

¹⁰⁹Although these relationships are complex, as discussed in the literature on Travelling Theory (Lugones 1987; Said 1983, 2000b; Steinberg 2016). This is, however, beyond the scope of this text

¹¹⁰Although curriculum and pedagogy are mutually constitutive, rather than wholly separate domains, the distinction is nevertheless useful for discussing different aspects of educational processes

¹¹¹In interpersonal contexts, this is often grounded in hierarchical relations that involve the assumed superiority of one group, whose arrogance or wilful ignorance inhibits them from entering into true dialogue with others (Freire [1970] 2006, pp. 88-9; Ortega 2006, p. 66; Turner 1972, p. 22)

political capacities to effect change (Fricker 2013, 2015; Giroux 2017).

Creative Expression A third channel for developing the imagination is through creative expression, which entails not only being a receiver of ideas from other people, but recognising that we often spur our imagination through our own activity (Fletcher 2016; Leeuwen 2016). When we test and transcend the “limit-situations” that we encounter (Freire [1970] 2006, p. 99), for instance, we are able to see the world as changeable through our own acts and therefore imagine further ways in which the world might be different (Freire [1974] 2005, p. 39). Conversely, imposing “limit-situations”, promoting conformity and denying people’s agency inhibits creative expression (Freire [1970] 2006). This is common to everyday experiences under capitalism, as people are objectified and treated “simply as a profit motive” in a “cycle of maintaining a system” (Ryan 2017, p. 44). This has a significant impact because, as Kelley (2002, p. 11) argues, “the conditions of daily life, of everyday oppressions, of survival... render much of our imagination inert. We are constantly putting out fires, responding to emergencies, finding temporary refuge, all of which make it difficult to see anything other than the present”. Without experimentation, acting and living differently, a lack of outlets for creative expression dulls people’s imaginations (Naidoo 2016b; Sebambo 2015).

2.3.3 Imagination and Decolonisation

In disrupting existing social arrangements and imaginaries, the student-led mobilisations created the space to reimagine education and society. While the two concepts of imagination and decolonisation were crucial to the South African student mobilisations, these were hardly mentioned in the context of Brazil.¹¹² This is likely because colonialism in Brazil effectively destroyed many indigenous populations, erasing their histories, cultures, knowledge, and languages, and hence relatively fewer students would be familiar with such issues compared to those in South Africa.¹¹³

In South Africa, students in 2015 were confronted with institutions which retained much of their colonial roots and apartheid-era roles. They thus called into question the mainstream policies of “transforming” higher education, and instead calling for the “decolonisation” of education and, by extension, society (Becker 2017; Kamanzi 2015b;

¹¹²There is little written in Brazil on either topic, with only brief references in Camasmie (2018, p. 103) and Fernandes and Souza Lima Rizzi (2016, p. 564). I hope this thesis is thus a contribution to discussions in Brazil

¹¹³It may also relate to their position as high school students, inasmuch as knowledge is relatively less constructed and produced within their own institutions compared to South African universities. Discussions of decolonisation are, nevertheless, present both in Brazilian academic circles (Fleuri and Fleuri 2017; Maia 2011; Miki 2018) and in popular indigenous movements, such as in debates during the Indigenous People’s Week in Rio de Janeiro (21-23 April, Associação Indígena Aldeia Maracanã 2017), some of which I attended during fieldwork

Stanley 2015; Tyatya 2017). The Fallist mobilisations became a “catalyst for black imagination”, wherein students envisioned alternative, decolonised, anti-racist, and sometimes anti-capitalist and anti-sexist futures (#RhodesMustFall 2015b; Gamedze 2015; Khan 2016; Sebambo 2015).¹¹⁴ The Fallist mobilisations of early 2015 are a crucial moment for the creation of an activist-academic debate on the meaning of decolonisation in education. Unlike mid-20th century projects of political decolonisation (See e.g. Wilder 2015), this decolonial project has been particularly focused on epistemic questions (Grosfoguel 2013; Mignolo 2009; Savransky 2017), and what decolonising educational institutions would entail (Barnes 2019; Boidin, Cohen, and Grosfoguel 2012; Jansen 2019; Shahjahan, Ramirez, and Oliveira Andreotti 2016; Sousa Santos 2017). Indeed, the South African student movements have resonated globally, resulting in decolonisation becoming more widely discussed and contested in higher education in the Global North, particularly the UK and Netherlands (Ahmed 2019; Bhambra, Gebrial, and Nişancıoğlu 2018; Omarjee 2018; Rhodes Must Fall Oxford 2018).

Because South African university students’ actions directly affected academic researchers, academics and students looked to what decolonisation would entail in their own fields. Academics quickly created conferences and seminars, wrote opinion pieces, journal articles and books, in subjects ranging from economics,¹¹⁵ to engineering,¹¹⁶ as well as directly implicated disciplines like education (Tshwane University of Technology 2017; UNISA 2016; Wood 2017) and politics (Hamilton 2018; Matos-Ala 2018; Matthews 2018). The new decolonial critiques of knowledge production and education were infused with strands of Latin American decolonial literature; Postcolonial studies, particularly the subaltern school; African-American authors, particularly writing on Black Feminism, Critical Race Theory and Afropessimism; Fanonian scholarship; Pan-Africanism; and South Africa’s Black Consciousness movement (Sitas 2017, pp. 34–5).

Debates about decolonisation revolve around three central issues: critiques of existing curricula and knowledge formations, focusing particularly on Eurocentrism; advocacy for alternative knowledge formations, specifically African knowledge; and questions of how to relate existing curricula to new alternatives, whether through abandonment, complementarity, altering focus, or exploring interconnections.¹¹⁷

At the heart of decolonial critiques is the urgent need to confront what students labelled ‘Western’ or ‘Eurocentric’ knowledge, and ‘Whiteness’,¹¹⁸ in what Jansen (2017, p. 161) labels as a “critical engagement with settled knowledge”. This debate targeted the

¹¹⁴Thanks to S. Njica for discussion on this topic

¹¹⁵See e.g. Bassier (2016), Chelwa (2016), and Muller (2017)

¹¹⁶See e.g. Fomunyam (2017), Kamanzi (2015a, 2016), and University of Johannesburg (2017b)

¹¹⁷This categorisation draws on Jansen (2017, pp. 156–8) and Oliveira Andreotti et al. (2015) to map decolonial debates. Methodologically, it draws on Mafeje (1971), Ntsebeza (2016), and Wittgenstein ([1953] 1986), as well as Freire ([1970] 2006)’s discussion of “generative themes”

¹¹⁸These terms were often left vague or ambiguous, and were often used synonymously

nature of a transplanted higher education system that drew more on European experiences (Mbembe 2016, p. 32), rather than, for instance, humanity's oldest models of higher education in West and North Africa (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2017, p. 52). At a deeper level, students and academics argued that Eurocentric thinking isolated people from one another and from their environment, creating atomised individuals (Mbembe 2015, p. 9, 2016, p. 32; Shezi 2016, p. 5). Decolonisation therefore entailed *challenging* existing knowledge formations.

At another level, decolonisation entailed developing alternatives to Eurocentric knowledge, often emphasising the experiences of African societies, untainted by colonialism (Manthalu and Waghid 2019). Although 'Indigenous Knowledge Systems' have long been discussed in academic literature (Grange 2007; Hoppers 2002; Seroto 2011), they are nevertheless comparatively underdeveloped and marginal within most academic disciplines. Decolonisation would therefore resuscitate and valorise subaltern knowledge formations, particularly 'African knowledge'.

Finally, decolonisation debates raised the question of how existing, Eurocentric curricula ought to be radically transformed or relate to new alternative curricula, particularly those which developed African knowledge formations. The first approach to decolonising the curriculum suggests that alternative knowledge formations can be relatively straightforwardly *added* to the existing curriculum (Shezi 2016, p. 27; Garuba 2015). One refined version of this advocates for a "pluralistic" curriculum that teaches different knowledge formations alongside one another (Eybers 2019). In this regard, "epistemological decolonisation is about opening rather than closing the academy to a plurality of knowledges" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2017). However, as Connell (2016a) warns in conversation at the University of Johannesburg (UJ), such an approach may be underpinned by an assumption of static, isolated, self-contained "knowledge systems", which can be placed alongside one another in a "mosaic epistemology".

A second response advocates for *disconnection* from existing educational and social structures, highlighting the continuities between colonialism, apartheid, and contemporary society, specifically in continued anti-black racism in South Africa and globally (Lepuru 2016; Ndebele 2017; SOTLUJ 2016a; Xaba 2017c).¹¹⁹ This shares similarities to Amin ([1989] 2009, p. 183)'s argument for "delinking", whereby subaltern societies break away from global circuits of capitalism and domination, connected to local elites, instead autonomously organising themselves on their own terms. However, arguments in favour of epistemic disconnection go beyond geopolitical structures, in that they are premised on a claim that there is something both fundamentally different about "Western" and "African" societies and ways of knowing, such that any kind of mixing would result in the further

¹¹⁹Although it often coalesced around the conceptual header of 'Afropessimism' (gamEdze and gamedZe 2019; Mthunzi 2017), drawing on the US-centric theory outlined by Wilderson, Spillers, Hartman and others (Gordon et al. 2017; Olaloku-Teriba 2018; racked & dispatched 2017)

subordination of what was essentially “African”. This, as several authors argue, is false and politically problematic (Smith 2017a; Mills 1998, p. 23; Fanon [1952] 2008, p. 93).

Numerous authors have advocated for *recentering* the curriculum, which largely overlaps with calls to *Africanise* it.¹²⁰ Decolonial scholars like Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2017, p. 77), based at the University of South Africa (UNISA), endorse this position, arguing that the “centre has to be moved so as to privilege Africa-centred knowledge”.

The final approach entails stressing the “encounter and interaction” between and within dynamic “knowledge formations” (Connell 2016a, 2019, pp. 91–4), or what Jansen (2017, p. 162) calls *encounters with entangled knowledges*. This approach is committed to recognising the ways in which knowledge formations globally have arisen through interwoven processes of colonialism and conquest, trade and knowledge exchange, and other forms of social interaction (Connell 2016a).¹²¹ Joseph ([1991] 2011, p. 10), for instance, shows how mathematical knowledge was developed through interactions between thinkers in China, India, Persia, Iraq, Egypt, and Spain around the Sixth Century, later appropriated as a “European” achievement. A crucial aspect of decolonisation would thus recognise and enhance Africa’s contribution to humanity’s common heritage through the historical “interpenetration” of knowledges (Mazrui 1975, pp. 207–8; Comaroff and Comaroff 2012; Kies 1953; Lengwiler, Penn, and Harries 2018).¹²²

‘Decolonisation’ as an academic concept and an area of study remains fluid, and authors have not yet settled into agreement about what it exactly entails. The concept’s fluidity and imprecision has been critiqued as a weakness (Crowe 2017; Jansen 2017; Long 2017; Smith 2017a). For others, however, it is a necessary point of convergence that enable critical debates to take place on shared ground (Oliveira Andreotti et al. 2015; Publica[c]tion Collective 2017). In any case, decolonisation has successfully come to shape the higher education landscape in South Africa since 2015.

2.4 Contest, Learn, Reimagine

This chapter discussed the complex interrelations and dialectical dynamics between large-scale, political-economic conditions, educational institutions, collectives that challenge them, and the individuals that comprise those collectives. These multi-layered dynamics shaped how students and workers who undertook collective action in South Africa and Brazil came to produce knowledge and reimagine education. To construct a conceptual framework that could make sense of the unfolding political moment over 2015–16, I have drawn on several strands of literature, including Marxism, feminism, anarchism,

¹²⁰Jansen (2017, pp. 158–9) differentiates these between ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ versions of decentering/recentering/Afrocentrism. The distinction can be useful, but is not particularly relevant here

¹²¹Elsewhere, these discussions take place under labels like ‘hybridity’ (Burke 2009; Glissant [1981] 1996)

¹²²Globally, this addresses the kind of epistemic injustices that Fricker (2007) discusses individually

decoloniality, social movement studies, and social epistemology.

In the first section, I argued that educational institutions are shaped by and reproduce broader social relations, playing a central epistemic role in societies. However, such institutions are also contested sites of labour and social struggles which influence the trajectories of education institutions. In the second section, I argued that such struggles exhibit similarities across contexts. Moreover, because their mobilisations are shaped by the conditions in which they act, both students and workers are uniquely structurally positioned to be able to rupture their institutions' everyday functioning. In the third section, I argued that movements produce knowledge, notably through the political conscientisation of their participants, which entails them revising their beliefs. These epistemic practices also enable activists to imagine alternative possibilities and futures. In South Africa, decolonisation was the key imaginary around which students organised.

Collectives like the 2015-16 student mobilisations in South Africa and Brazil were able to disrupt existing social formations in their educational institutions. Because knowledge and imagination are grounded in material and social conditions, this enabled the possibility of new conditions to emerge, and hence new imaginaries and knowledge. In the following chapter, I provide a historical and political-economic contextualisation of the conditions from which the mobilisations emerged.

Chapter 3

Historical Context

Education always served to form a labour force. We see that here in Rio, with differences between schools. Each student will fulfil a role in the future. We are at Pedro II, a school created to shape people to be critical, to govern the country. We see that's not the same reality at state schools.

Juliana, Student, Rio, 10 August 2017

Political mobilisations emerge out of specific historical moments, informed by their particular contexts. However, social movements, including student movements, are not only conditioned by this context, but in turn shape socioeconomic conditions and power relations (Cox and Nilsen 2014). Educational systems are part of broader social relations, also shaped by these relations and serving to produce and reproduce them (Connell 2019; Giroux 1983). However, like other institutions, education systems are also driven by internal dynamics, particularly conflicts between authorities, students and workers. The student movements in South Africa and Brazil in 2015-16 thus form in response to and against a set of historically produced conditions that both shaped their demands, capacities, and forms of struggle, as they reshaped those contexts.

This chapter contextualises the 2015-16 mobilisations by examining the educational and societal structures to which students responded. It traces the continuities and ruptures in the development of those structures over several centuries, focusing on the 'modern' period of the nation-state and mass public education systems. Despite significant differences between the two countries, there are numerous parallels between them at key historical moments which have shaped their education systems in similar ways. The periodisation adopted below draws on the work of education historians such as Christie (1985, 2008) and Jansen (1990) in South Africa, and Freitag (1986), Lombardi (2008), and Ribeiro (1986) in Brazil. In both countries, the education systems have generally been shaped by elites for the purposes of social control and capital accumulation. They have, however, been constantly challenged from below by those excluded, marginalised, or disadvantaged

by the socio-educational system. These struggles for inclusion and justice have reshaped and democratised the educational systems, while also creating alternative institutions.

Chapter Outline The first section tracks the long history of the South African and Brazilian education systems from the onset of colonialism (1500s-1600s) until democratisation in the 1980s-1990s. It shows that the state and economic elites constructed an inegalitarian education system which preserved and reproduced their privileges and served projects of capital accumulation and nation-building. However, education was also adapted over time to meet the needs of a changing political economy. It also shows how students, workers, and those excluded from education challenged elite interests, demanding wider access and non-discriminatory public education, and at times building their own educational spaces.

The second section turns to changes in South African and Brazilian society and education since the 1990s. During this period, the contradictory attempts at “social-democratic neoliberalisation”,¹²³ largely under the African National Congress (ANC) and *Partido dos Trabalhadores* - Workers’ Party (PT), ensured wider access to a more democratic educational structure. However, the expansion of education remained profoundly inegalitarian and in the service of a deeply entrenched and exploitative political-economic order. Moreover, this model of development was heavily challenged, particularly after the ruling parties were beset by economic problems in the wake of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis. This chapter shows how the social movements emerging in this period would lay the foundations for the politics of the 2015 student mobilisations in both countries.

This period also saw the rise of three sets of factors that would become the primary catalysts for the 2015 uprisings: *cultural alienation* and disaffection, particularly in South African universities; *degrading material conditions*, particularly tuition fee increases in South Africa and school closures and infrastructure deterioration in Brazil; and *workers’ struggles* against outsourcing and low pay. These factors coalesced to politicise students and propel them towards collective action, creating a major moment of rupture.

3.1 Colonialism, Global Economic Integration: 1500-1900

In what is today South Africa and Brazil, a variety of educational practices and institutions characteristic of agrarian and nomadic societies worldwide existed prior to the onset of colonialism. Across the two regions, education was largely embedded in daily life, rather than controlled by specialised institutions (Christie 1985; Seroto 2011; Souza

¹²³Adapting Cerny (2010)’s “social neoliberalism” and Saad-Filho (2013)’s “left neoliberalism” in Brazil under Dilma

and Andreotti 2009). Education was generally directed towards socialisation and the inter-generational transfer of life-relevant knowledge, where systematic and extensive knowledge of the environment thrived (Bundy 1979; Fleuri and Fleuri 2017; Seroto 2011).¹²⁴ These indigenous forms of inter-generational knowledge production and transmission were, however, interrupted and subverted by colonial invasion and the arrival of Christian missionaries in the 16th and 17th centuries.

Portuguese, Dutch, and later British settlers attempted to create a formal education structure first and foremost through Christian missionary education, based off European models entailing specialised institutions controlling educational processes (Fischmann 2015, p. 115; Jansen 1990, p. 196). In both colonial settings, formal schools targeted two different groups. For the children of elite European settlers, schooling was generally theological and scholastic, designed to preserve the privileges of the ruling class (Arriada and Tambara 2016; Jansen 1990, p. 197). Higher education was not available in the colonies and required a return to the colonial metropole (Skidmore 1999, p. 31).¹²⁵

Slavery and coerced labour were integral to the colonial Southern African and Brazilian economies until the 1800s (Giliomee 2003, p. 184; Ribeiro 1986).¹²⁶ Indigenous peoples, enslaved populations, women, and some of the poorest descendants of European settlers, were predominantly excluded from education. The minimal instruction that some received was largely intended to “civilise” them and create a docile and obedient workforce, enforcing the dominant colonial language and indoctrinating them into Christianity (Giliomee 2003, pp. 108–9; Fischmann 2015, pp. 115–6).

In Southern Africa, the first formal school of this type was founded in the Cape in 1658, designed to instruct enslaved people from West Africa (Malherbe 1925, p. 28). Students in such schools repeatedly resisted these forms of dispossession and violence, escaping from the school, and ultimately making the school unworkable and leading to its closure (ibid., p. 28).¹²⁷ Similarly, enslaved people frequently revolted in Brazil against systems of exploitation, at times escaping enslavement and forming their own self-organised, autonomous *quilombo* communities. These communities, some of which persist today, had

¹²⁴Further research on pre- and extra-colonial education in Southern Africa is likely to arise as a result of calls for decolonisation within academia since 2015; whether this will emerge in Brazil is less clear. Cooper (1981, p. 13) outlines the material conditions that encourage this form of education, suggesting that agricultural modes of production give rise to relatively more elder-controlled modes of social reproduction than do, say, hunter-gatherer modes which tend to be more egalitarian

¹²⁵For students in Brazil, this particularly meant the University of Coimbra in Portugal (Skidmore 1999, p. 31); in South Africa, this was furnished by the Netherlands until the 1800s (Nash 2000, p. 66, 2009, p. 42), thereafter becoming the preserve of British settlers, which largely meant the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, and later the University of London and several Scottish Universities (Phillips 2004)

¹²⁶Although slavery was significantly more widespread in Brazil, where it was foundational to the colony’s economy. There were roughly 36,000 people enslaved at the time of its abolition in South Africa, compared to about 2 million in Brazil (Feinstein 2005, p. 51)

¹²⁷Malherbe (1925, p. 28)’s own racist interpretation frames this as being unfortunate and due to “difficulties” that the students had in learning

their own forms of education that prioritised their collective wellbeing, while maintaining historical knowledge of their communities and environment, cultural values and collective identity (Braga, Sousa, and Pinto 2006; Marinho 2015; Paré, Oliveira, and Velloso 2007; Sousa 2009).¹²⁸

As settler colonialism took root in both countries, education was reshaped by two inter-related processes: the development of local state bureaucracies and the expansion of “extraverted capitalism” which integrated Brazil and South Africa into the global economy on highly unequal terms that largely maintained them as agricultural exporters (Bayart and Ellis 2000; Feinstein 2005; Skidmore 1999).

In Southern Africa, wars of dispossession extended European colonial power across almost the whole region, consolidating by the end of the 1800s in four main polities: the British colonies of the Cape and Natal, and the two independent Boer Republics of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal Republic (Feinstein 2005, p. 34; Giliomee 2003, p. 189). These guaranteed both land and labour for rural capitalist accumulation for the settlers and their descendants, while Africans were denied “any means of survival other than the sale of their labour to white farmers and other employers” (Feinstein 2005, p. 34).

For male English and Afrikaner settlers in urban centres,¹²⁹ secular, Europeanised education expanded with an *Academic Curriculum* as a tool of social advancement (Christie 1985, p. 35; Jansen 1990, p. 197).¹³⁰ This occurred predominantly in British colonies, where for example the forerunner to the University of Cape Town (UCT), the South African College, was founded in 1829 to “inculcate the cultural dominance of English into the new colony” (Phillips 2004, p. 123). In Boer Republics, by contrast, education remained largely theological and administrative, or remained the parents’ responsibility (Christie 1985, p. 40). For Africans, however, the purpose of education was “social control through ‘peaceful subjugation’”, as Cape Governor George Grey infamously declared in 1854 (Jansen 1990, p. 198). British colonial authorities produced curricula for Africans centred around training for manual labour, particularly agricultural work on settlers’ farms (ibid., p. 198).

Alongside local resistance to colonial imposition, the colonial disruption of historical forms of social organisation in Southern Africa also presented educated Africans with opportunities for social advancement in the new social, political, and economic order (Bundy 1979, p. 43). As a result, local populations sometimes actively sought missionary education, which entailed evangelical, academic and practical technical training (Jansen 1990, p. 198).

¹²⁸Although these have not substantially affected the dominant formal educational system, except with some references to them in some recent history curricula as part of the history of Afro-descended Brazilians, particularly under Law No. 10.639/03 (Sousa 2009)

¹²⁹Afrikaners are a group largely descended from Dutch colonial settlers. For detail, see Giliomee (2003)

¹³⁰English and Afrikaner were considered until the 1900s to be two separate “white races”. See e.g. Malherbe (1925, pp. viii–ix), who claims that “the outstanding fact has been the struggle of the two white races to effect a fair adjustment of the educational system to their respective demands”

Nevertheless, until the mid-19th century, South African education was primarily attuned to the social conditions of a racialised, agrarian settler-colonial capitalism.

From 1867, the political economy and education systems shifted dramatically following the discovery of massive reserves of profitable, export-viable minerals. Southern Africa would soon supply a quarter of the world's supply of gold, and half the world's supply of diamonds (Marx 1998, p. 38). Elites with links to British imperial finance capital, like Cecil John Rhodes, attempted to monopolise the rapidly-growing mining industry (Rotberg 1988). By the end of the 1800s, Rhodes had a burgeoning economic empire, using both economic power and political measures like the 1894 Glen Grey Act to enforce racial segregation and pressure Africans to work in white-owned (and particularly Rhodes-owned) industries (ibid., pp. 470–1).¹³¹ Rhodes became the central symbol of colonial dispossession and exploitation targeted by #RMF campaign at UCT over a century later.¹³²

The shift to a mining-reliant, export-oriented, urbanising, industrialising economy required *Industrial Training Curriculum* that could shape a proletarian class capable of working in factories and mines (Jansen 1990, p. 198). Taxes generated by the Glen Grey Act, for example, were directed towards funding industrial schools, rather than existing theological training for Africans which became considered 'dangerous', encouraging students to question their context and agitate for change (Rotberg 1988, p. 471).

In Brazil, the declining fortunes of the Portuguese Empire saw the imperial capital move to Rio de Janeiro in 1808.¹³³ Britain supported the Portuguese on the condition that Brazil's protected markets were liberalised to serve the interests of the international market (Ribeiro 1986, p. 43). The relocation of the capital and economic liberalisation created necessitated professional training for a local bureaucracy of administrative and military personnel, in the service of the Empire and its commercial operations (ibid., p. 44). With Brazil declaring its independence in 1824-5, extensive education reforms were enshrined in the 1824 Bourgeois-Liberal Constitution (ibid., p. 48).¹³⁴

These were the first attempts to create a national education system in Brazil, primarily intended to serve the needs of an emerging capitalist class (Arriada and Tambara 2016, p. 288; Lombardi 2008, p. 207; Ribeiro 1986, p. 45). Many institutions were shaped by European, particularly French, models of education (Ribeiro 1986, p. 61). However, they

¹³¹This was highlighted in A. Nash's South African Political Thought course at UCT (POL3013S). This course circulated historical knowledge that would become crucial to #RhodesMustFall (#RMF) critiques of early 2015

¹³²Critics of #RMF, claiming that Rhodes was simply "a man of his time", conveniently forget Rhodes' staunch contemporaneous critics (Schreiner and Cronwright-Schreiner 1896)

¹³³Curiously, marking one of only two instances when the capital of a colonial empire was in a colony - the other being Algiers as seat of the French Empire during World War II

¹³⁴Although this and subsequent Constitutions in 1881 excluded the illiterate from the franchise, leaving political power in the hands of the wealthy and educated, who used this to reinforce their dominance (Skidmore 1999, pp. 74–5)

largely remained the preserve of upper-class, male descendants of European settlers (Louro 2004). Although elitist in character, they provided the space for new political subjects to emerge. As early as 1892, for instance, “Political Professors and Student Strikers” were active in the Minas Gerais separatist movement attempting to dissociate from the Empire of Brazil (Lage 2006). The *Colégio Pedro II* - Pedro II College (CPII), founded in Rio in 1837, was similarly intended as a flagship educational institution for the Empire and elite training (Ribeiro 1986, p. 59). In 2016, it would become one of the key schools occupied by its students. These reforms also expanded women’s education, although largely based on gendered stereotypes, focusing on domestic labour or, in some cases, teacher training designed to create “docile workers, dedicated and minimally demanding” (Louro 2004, p. 450). Along with similar global trends, the feminisation of teaching was coupled with its devaluation, resulting in low pay for schoolteachers that persists to contemporary Brazil and underpins much trade union activism (Louro 2004; Mies 2014).

Brazil’s largely slave-dependent, export-oriented agricultural economy was served by an education system reserved for elites and technocrats (Ribeiro 1986, p. 54). However, over the second half of the 1800s, the regions’ economic basis and sociopolitical structure shifted as the slave trade was outlawed in 1850 and slavery itself abolished in 1888 (Ribeiro 1986, p. 63; Skidmore 1999, p. 69). While the economy remained dominated by export-oriented agriculture in sugar and coffee, it slowly shifted towards textile production and industrial manufacturing. Changing demands for labour left underlying inequalities largely untouched, but sparked a search for immigrant labour that would change the face of Brazilian society over the 1900s (Skidmore 1999, p. 70).

3.2 ‘Modern’ Statehood and Mass Public Education: 1900s-1950s

The unitary territorial nation-state was entrenched in both South Africa and Brazil around the turn of the 20th century, serving the interests of dominant export-oriented industries. Nascent industries, mining and agriculture required a pliant workforce, for which states turned to mass migration, particularly from Europe. As the states adopted nationalist-developmental policies over the 1920s and 1930s, they also introduced mass education systems that would serve to train manual labour suitable for industry.

3.2.1 The Union of South Africa

Following the large-scale South African War (1899-1902),¹³⁵ the British consolidated their rule by forming the Union of South Africa in 1910.¹³⁶ With unification, “boundaries were drawn and a state system brought into being whose characteristics were to provide the foundation for the capitalist development of South Africa” (Marks and Trapido 1979, p. 52). Over the 1920s and 30s, the South African state pursued a form of white nationalist-developmentalism, largely in the service of the mining industry. In this period, ruling elites entrenched racialisation between ‘natives’ and ‘whites’ to divide the working class and accumulate wealth, opportunities, and privilege for the new “white nation” (Feinstein 2005, pp. 117–8; Marx 1998, pp. 2, 14).¹³⁷ State policies like the Mines and Works Act (from 1911), the Land Act (1913), and reinforcing the “Colour Bar”, which reserved skilled, highly-paid work for those racialised as white, consolidated a white group identity that would override class, English/Afrikaner, and urban/rural divisions (Feinstein 2005, p. 75).¹³⁸

Education played a crucial role in racialisation. For white children, compulsory schooling was designed to teach new generations “civilised” values and inculcate a sense of their “proper” social status in a modernising, urbanising economy (Christie 1985, p. 48). Several higher education institutions were established in this period, including the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), emerging in 1922 from the South African School of Mines.¹³⁹ Around the same time, several institutions were founded for the advancement of the “white nation”, notably the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), established in 1924 as “a forum for white English- and Afrikaans-speaking students” to advance their “common interests” (McKay 2015, p. 37).¹⁴⁰ Efforts to forge a single “white nation” were contentious however, including between British and Afrikaners. In 1912, for example, Minister of Education F. S. Malan proposed combined Afrikaans-English educational institutions that would lead to the “fusion of two races into one nation” (Giliomee 2003, p. 363). Afrikaners, however, resisted the move, seeking to preserve an idealised identity, culture, and language through independent “Christian National Education” schools (Christie 1985, p. 50).

¹³⁵The conflict has also been known as the Anglo-Boer war, a name which masks the extensive involvement of Africans

¹³⁶Roughly the same polity and territory as the Republic of South Africa today

¹³⁷Akin to the Vargas-era period in Brazil discussed below

¹³⁸Workers’ responses were uneven and contradictory, although many opposed these racialised class cleavages. In 1916, syndicalists in the International Socialist League (ISL) argued that white workers ought to “descend from the pedestal of race prejudice” and “cease to have an inflated idea of their own value as a superior race”, instead uniting with black workers (Walt 2004, p. 79), while in the 1922 Rand Rebellion, socialist and anarchist syndicalists attempted to build solidarity and “oppose racial clashes” (Walt 2010, p. 89), even while others called for working-class white power (Ulrich and Walt 2009, pp. 3091–2; Breckenridge 2007, p. 228)

¹³⁹See <http://tiny.cc/WitsHistory>

¹⁴⁰NUSAS became a key site of struggle at the intersection of education and politics in the 1960s

For black students, racial divisions were further enacted through the *Differentiated Education* policy of 1922. This policy emphasised training black students for manual labour in schools characterised by low academic standards and intentional degradation (Jansen 1990, p. 199). Notably, language became a key policy point, mandating schools to teach in “vernacular” (indigenous) languages to deny black students opportunities in white-dominated society (ibid., p. 199). This stands in important contrast from contemporary language debates (Hurst 2016; Schauffer 2017), discussed further in Chapter 7.¹⁴¹

3.2.2 The Brazilian Republics

In Brazil, the mass immigration policies that peaked in the 1890s after the abolition of slavery were designed to provide cheap labour for farms and mines, while being founded on a racist policy of ‘population whitening’ (*branqueamento*) (Skidmore 1999, p. 71). Although a state-sponsored and elite-driven policy, the effects of immigration would reshape Brazilian society from below. Amongst the hundreds of thousands of migrants, predominantly from Europe, many brought with them political militancy, experience of struggle, and revolutionary ideas, including socialist, communist, and anarchist ideologies (Dulles 1973).

Many of these migrants quickly began to contest discrimination and exploitation rife in Brazilian society, including in its educational system. Socialists, communists and anarchists in the early 1900s were often at the forefront of struggles for basic education for the working class, alongside demanding better working hours and job conditions (Ahagon 2015). Anarchist groups, for example, set up autonomous free schools, emphasising education for women as a “privileged weapon of liberation” (Louro 2004, p. 446). These autonomous schools were among the earliest attempts in Brazil to create a truly popular, public education, particularly for women (Moraes 1999).¹⁴² These ideas resonated throughout the 20th century, through to *secundaristas* in 2015 who drew on anarchist theory and forms of organising in their struggles.

Influenced by intellectual currents in Europe, the church and state became separated and education was secularised and “modernised” (Fischmann 2015, p. 116). In São Paulo, for example, children were for the first time grouped by age, with a teacher responsible

¹⁴¹At the same time, the first higher education institutions were opened for black students in this period, notably the University of Fort Hare in 1916 (Kerr 1968). Moreover, black teachers began to form their own independent institutions. During the segregationist period of the 1920s, for example, Elias Wellington Buthelezi in the Eastern Cape established “the first alternative education programme in South Africa” (Soudien and Nekhwevha 2002, p. 268). The teaching programme was designed to celebrate “African values” and as a form of cultural resistance to the imposition of European ideas amongst black people, particularly through religious instruction (ibid., p. 268), themes that resonated strongly in 2015 Fallist mobilisations

¹⁴²Such ideas would be developed over the early 1900s by militant anarchist educators like Maria de Moura and José Oiticica, as well as the founders of the “Modern School” in São Paulo in 1912 (Santos 2009). They were, however, largely constrained to urban hubs like Rio and São Paulo

for each cohort, and a school principal to oversee the institution (Souza 2016, p. 15). By 1924, ideas of democratic education began to influence mainstream education debates, with the Brazilian Association of Education (ABE) formed to promote the ideas of John Dewey (Bittar and Ferreira Jr. 2016, p. 71). The dominant social order, however, retained education as a tool of political control. State schools remained elite institutions, with 75% of Brazilians illiterate throughout this period (Souza 2016, p. 15), and women and illiterate people remained excluded from the franchise (Skidmore 1999, p. 75).

These conditions in Brazil changed rapidly over the 1920-30s. Increased industrialisation and urbanisation created a stronger urban proletariat class, particularly in Rio and São Paulo. Factory owners increasingly required literate workers, initially favouring immigrants and later encouraging a broader public education system that could train an appropriate workforce (ibid., p. 85). The state consolidated and extended its power throughout society under the Vargas dictatorship (1930-1945),¹⁴³ dominated by an uneasy alliance between new urban capitalists and older agrarian elites, with the support of major labour unions (Araujo 2007, pp. 31–3; Skidmore 1999, pp. 84–6). The elite alliance undertook a ‘nationalist-developmental’ socio-economic project, central to which was a campaign to create a single national identity through *Brasilidade* (Brazilianisation).¹⁴⁴ Like in South Africa, nationalism was a centrally managed project relying on state institutions (Marx 1998), particularly schools which were instructed to teach “Brazilian topics”, and languages other than Portuguese were outlawed (Lesser 1999, p. 130).

This period laid the foundation of the mass public schooling system that exists in Brazil today, regularised and overseen at all levels by a federal Ministry of Education created in 1930 (Lombardi 2008, p. 207; Sousa 2009, p. 292). In a significant difference from South Africa, prominent Brazilian educationalists like Anísio Teixeira drew on the liberal work of authors like Dewey to develop a new set of proposals for education, emphasising education for social equality through the eradication of ignorance. This *Escola Nova* (New School) movement, however, never engaged with the nature of inequality, domination, or stratification in Brazilian society (Saviani [1983] 1999). The authoritarian regime appropriated aspects of these new ideas which enabled it to expand its control over education, while largely ignoring, for example, Teixeira’s humanistic pedagogical proposals.¹⁴⁵ To the extent that the *pedagogia nova* (new pedagogy) was implemented in public schools, it was only viable in elite schools like CPIL, furthering a wide divide between high-quality elite education from low-quality mass education and reinforcing ruling class hegemony (Saviani [1983] 1999, p. 22; Souza 2016, p. 16).

¹⁴³The details of the ‘presidential’ period versus the ‘dictatorial’ period are not relevant here

¹⁴⁴Although aspects of this were present from the late 1800s, it became state policy in the 1930s

¹⁴⁵The state, for instance, adopted proposals to centralise education in the hands of the state, along with technical measurements, such as creating the Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira (INEP). Thanks to C. Souza for clarification on this point

Nevertheless, expanding public education brought new social groups into schools, helping create a strong base for students as a significant political force. Like in South Africa, the *União Nacional dos Estudantes* - National Union of Students (UNE) was founded in 1937-8, ostensibly to channel and control student demands as part of the centralisation of state power (Araujo 2007, p. 24). High school students participated in UNE's actions, but went further to form the *União Brasileira dos Estudantes Secundaristas* - Union of Brazilian Secondary Students (UBES) in the late 1940s to represent their own interests (ibid., p. 69).¹⁴⁶ UBES emerged in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro from High School Student Councils (*Grêmios*) and, like UNE, its initial campaigns demanding cheaper access to public transport or against tuition fee increases still resonate today (ibid., p. 68).

While urbanisation and industrialisation in South Africa were enabled by white nationalism and led to racialised divisions being entrenched in law, Brazilian national identity was constructed to override class differences while suppressing racial inequality through the myth of a “racial democracy” (Da Costa 2014; Marx 1998; Twine 1998). This ideological work was channelled through the expanded state apparatus, particularly public schooling. Competing visions of education and society at the time were thus deeply entwined. Educational debates highlighted differing visions of a unitary society, which necessarily entailed questions of social position, particularly class, race, and gender.

3.3 Dictatorships, Education as Social Engineering, Emergent Student Movements: 1950s-1980s

The global upheavals of the 1930s and 1940s strongly affected South Africa and Brazil. Established national elites vied for economic power with internationally oriented capitalists with links to Britain and the US, while military authorities and fascist groups clashed with militant syndicalists and communist parties in a complex matrix of power relations involving the Soviet Union and China. Although both countries emerged from the post-war 1940s under authoritarian regimes, Brazil had a brief democratic period in the 1950s before converging with South Africa in the mid-1960s, with both becoming authoritarian militarised regimes in which education became a key site of struggle.

3.3.1 South African Apartheid

The Second World War left South Africa's economy struggling with shortages of goods, pressures on domestic industry, increased urbanisation and strain on public services, including education (Christie 1985, p. 51). Promising ‘Apartheid’ as an alternative to

¹⁴⁶According to Araujo (2007, p. 69), the exact date and circumstances of its formation are disputed

cope with these pressures, the white supremacist Afrikaner Nationalist Party (NP) won the whites-only 1948 election.

Framing the oppression of black people as “fixed and natural”, the Apartheid project ensured a racial education policy deeply, explicitly and structurally entwined with the “racially stratified political economy” (Jansen 1990, p. 200).¹⁴⁷ Education thus took a dual role, both training the skills required for the racialised and gendered extractive economy, through the inequalities in investment and infrastructure, and social control by ideologically shaping people’s subjectivities by denying or distorting African histories, claiming white superiority, celebrating obedient Christian citizens, and discouraging critical reflection or action (ibid., p. 202).

State initiatives like the Eiselen Commission on Native Education (1949-1951) advocated for policies to entrench division and separation, emphasised tribal identity through language and “extolled ethnic pride and racial identity” (ibid., pp. 200–1). In 1953, Minister of “Native Affairs”, H. Verwoerd, argued that the purpose of education was to train people “in accordance with their opportunities in life” (Gerhart 1978, p. 255), and the NP introduced the Bantu Education Act (1953), inspired by Afrikaner Christian Nationalism and European Fascism, particularly Nazi Germany (Tabata 1959, p. 34). Similarly, the Extension of Universities Act (1959) rigidly segregated access to universities along racial lines, ensuring finer-grained state control over who was taught what (Nonyongo 1998). The Act also established the University of the Western Cape (UWC), designated for those racialised as ‘coloured’, but which by the 1980s would become a locus of student radicalism and an “intellectual home of the left” (Nash 2006, p. 4; Wolpe 1995, p. 286). At the same time, the ascendant dominance of the United States shaped education policies globally. Where South Africa’s universities had been used as a mode of social control, they also came under pressure to conform to US universities, which emphasised individualised competition and career advancement, and for knowledge to be systematised, standardised, assessed, and made marketable and relevant to the interests of business (Nash 2006, p. 5).

From its inception, Apartheid was challenged by numerous political and social movements. Many of these developed alternative imaginaries of society and education that would remain relevant even in the 2015 student mobilisations. Saliently, the ANC adopted the Freedom Charter in 1955, which outlined a vision of a democratic South Africa, strongly influencing the post-1994 Constitution. It famously stated that “the doors of learning and culture shall be opened!”, calling for “free, compulsory, universal and equal” state education with an internationalist focus.¹⁴⁸ Activists also formed the South African Committee

¹⁴⁷This included legislating stratified subdivisions of “Black”, “Indian”, and “Coloured”

¹⁴⁸These demands were extended in, for instance, the 1955 ‘What Women Demand’ document, which highlighted early childhood development programmes such as nurseries and childcare facilities, school feeding schemes, special dispensation for disabled children, and spaces for play, sports, and cultural activities (Unterhalter 1983)

for Higher Education (SACHED) in 1959, offering black students distance-learning degrees (Nonyongo 1998, pp. 3–4).¹⁴⁹ At the same time, Pan-Africanism and African Nationalism underpinned the rise of the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), a breakaway from the ANC in 1959 (Gerhart 1978; Lodge 1984). As I discuss in Chapter 5, this tradition would resurface in 2015 as a key influence for the Fallist mobilisations through Pan Africanist Student Movement of Azania (PASMA), the PAC student wing.

PAC-influenced protests in March 1960 were crushed by the state, culminating in the Sharpeville Massacre and the swift banning of opposition movements like the ANC and PAC. The state attempted to channel discontent through “ethnic politics” in pseudo-independent “homelands” (Gerhart 1978, p. 254; Lodge 2011). Apartheid state repression of black political organisations over the 1960s meant that domestic counter-hegemonic political organising largely took place in predominantly white institutions, notably NUSAS (Gerhart 1978, p. 257).

Militant students introduced and normalised new forms of political organising and action (Moss 2014). In 1968, for example, white students at UCT protested by “occupying the University administration building for nine days” after university management bowed to pressure from the apartheid state and rescinded a lecturing appointment for Archie Mafeje, a black anthropologist (Ntsebeza 2014, p. 275).¹⁵⁰ In 2015, Fallists recalled the “Mafeje Affair” by intentionally occupying the Mafeje Room of the university’s administration building (Moodley 2015, p. 118).¹⁵¹

Crucially, however, black student groups in the late 1960s managed to break with white-dominated politics and became the focal point for renewed anti-apartheid militancy. The black-only South African Students’ Organisation (SASO) was formed in 1969, emerging in a milieu of global 60’s student racialism (Gerhart 1978, p. 273; Moss 2014; Turner 1971).¹⁵² From a student-centric organisation, SASO grew over the 1970s into the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), highlighting the psychological dimensions of oppression and liberation (Magaziner 2010, p. 7), and emphasising self-organisation, for instance with community development programmes (Gerhart 1978, pp. 269–70).¹⁵³ The BCM ruptured the ideological weight of white supremacy and opened a moment of radical possibility. This

¹⁴⁹SACHED offered assistance with fees, books, tutoring, study resources, study space, and psychosocial support. This had its limitations, however, in the face of extensive state miseducation and indoctrination. Over the following decades, SACHED experimented with various projects, often in concert with trade unions and community organisations (Motala 2018; Nonyongo 1998)

¹⁵⁰The occupation gave rise to coffee-fuelled debates of the issues of the day, including contributions to conceptualising “student power” by Rick Turner, a radical interlocutor of Biko’s (Hendricks 2008, p. 439)

¹⁵¹I take up the political form of an *occupation* in Chapter 4

¹⁵²Students were influenced by anticolonial struggles particularly across Africa (Ahluwalia and Zegeye 2001; More 2008; More 2017), Existentialist authors like Fanon, Sartre, Camus, and Césaire (Magaziner 2010, p. 8), Latin American and US Black Liberation Theology (Magaziner 2010; Motlhabi 2012), combined with the political traditions of local national liberation movements and anti-colonial resistance struggles (Biko 1978; Mangcu 2012; Magaziner 2011, p. 47, 2010, p. 8)

¹⁵³For extended analysis on the dynamics of this shift, see (Naidoo 2015b; Platzky Miller 2014)

breathed new life into social struggles and enabled both black and white South Africans to reimagine “how one should live in the service of the future” (Magaziner 2010, p. 9), entailing a just society and its institutions, including the education system (SPRO-CAS 1971; Turner 1978).

Crucially for this dissertation, 1960s and 70s radicals drew extensively on the work of Paulo Freire, particularly his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Naidoo 2015b). Freire ([1970] 2006) thus has a long legacy amongst student radicals in South Africa and Brazil, and has seen a resurgence in recent mobilisations, with students in both contexts highlighting the importance of education for liberation, dialogical pedagogies, and radical praxis (Granato 2015; Naidoo 2015b,c). Freire’s appeal is partially due to contextual relevance. As Vally (2007, p. 42), argues, “the situation out of which Freire’s pedagogy had been formed resembled that which existed in South Africa’s ghettos and homelands”.¹⁵⁴

The BCM in the 1960s-70s drew in large numbers of students from an emerging black middle class who were “privileged enough to spend time at universities” but caught between a “colonial, modernizing, Westernized system” and “the dominant society that squeezed their aspirations” (Magaziner 2010, pp. 5–6). Similar conditions existed in 2015, suggesting students drew on Black Consciousness because it helped them make sense of their own experiences, as I discuss further in Chapter 5.¹⁵⁵

Militancy in South Africa grew over the 1970s, particularly in educational spaces with mass student uprisings.¹⁵⁶ The state’s emphasis on technocratic training of semi-skilled workers for administrative posts, coupled with the strain of a rapidly expanding schooling system for black students, built pressure and resentment (Hyslop 1990, pp. 79, 83). School students were politically conscientised by teachers involved in the BCM, many having been expelled from universities for their activism (Gerhart 1978, p. 298; Heffernan and Nieftagodien 2016; Magaziner 2010, p. 4). Many of the pressures in 1970s high schools resonated in 2015 universities.¹⁵⁷

When the apartheid state attempted to mandate schools to teach in Afrikaans, it sparked a crucial moment of rupture. On 16 June 1976, tens of thousands of high school students in Soweto, Johannesburg, protested the reforms. Police opened fire, murdering teenager Hector Pieterse and at least a hundred others (Hirson [1979] 1984, p. 184). In a striking parallel to the 1968 murder of Edson Luís in Brazil, the Soweto Uprising

¹⁵⁴Drawing on Helbig in (Alexander [1990] 2013a, p. 60)

¹⁵⁵Although this included recapitulating some of the limitations of the 1960s-70s, including stressing psychological and epistemic components to the exclusion of political economy analyses (Mandela [1978] 2001), and prioritising race over gender as the central axis of oppression, and hence the central point of organisation (Magaziner 2011, p. 47; Gqola 2001, p. 147) – although this was contested; Cf. Moodley (1993, p. 48) and Magaziner (2011, p. 50)

¹⁵⁶These were predominantly urban, although there have been links between urban and rural (Heffernan and Nieftagodien 2016), as well as distinctly rural educational movements (Hyslop 1990, p. 85)

¹⁵⁷Hyslop (ibid.), for instance, identified overcrowding, funding not keeping pace with student numbers, high drop-out rates, few opportunities upon graduation and, once protests start, intensive state suppression

sparked youth protests across the country. This generated a new wave of resistance to the state, including a national school boycott affecting almost 200,000 students (Brewer 1986, pp. 84–6). Students in the 2015-16 Fallist mobilisations explicitly referenced the “spirit of 1976”, linked with slogans like “same struggle, different generation” (Fekisi 2018; Iqani 2015; Jeenah and Rodrigo 2016; Mosiuoa 2016).¹⁵⁸

The impact of the Uprising over the 1970s and 80s was ambivalent. The state mandated more flexibility in mother-tongue language instruction, and the 1979 Education and Training Act committed to “introduce compulsory school attendance and free tuition” (Jansen 1990, p. 201). While these changes were attempts by the state to placate rebellion, they were nonetheless the real achievements of the student movement (Hyslop 1990, p. 86). The Uprising also left a mark on the political consciousness of a generation of students, who carried their experiences through the transition into the post-apartheid period (Ndlovu 2017c, p. 40). South African Education became a key research topic, with many publications explicitly referencing how ’76 made clear the interconnections between education and political struggles.¹⁵⁹

However, these changes were accompanied by the deeper securitisation and militarisation of the country, with several States of Emergency over the 1980s.¹⁶⁰ State control became more careful and strategic, including targeted assassinations and terrorism designed to impede liberation struggles (Brewer 1986, p. 85; Ellis 1998, pp. 275–6).¹⁶¹ Like Brazil under the dictatorship, apartheid state repression specifically targeted students and teachers,¹⁶² with students forming some 60% of police detainees in the early 1980s (Brewer 1986, p. 88).¹⁶³

The 1980s were characterised by extensive links between educational and broader political struggles, particularly as students joined national political organisations (Reagan 1989). Localised, school-based issues could spark large-scale protests, and students mobilised in support of workers’ bus boycotts and strikes (Badat 1999, p. 215; Brewer 1986, p. 89).¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁸Although, as Ntsebeza (2019) observes, they could share the limitations that Mafeje (1978, p. 24) critiqued of 1976, particularly that protest “continued to be characterised by spontaneity and to be informed by simple slogans”

¹⁵⁹See, for instance, Nasson and Samuel (1990) and Kallaway (2002)

¹⁶⁰This resembled the AI-5 legislation in Brazil, discussed below

¹⁶¹Unsurprisingly, many of those responsible for enacting the apartheid state’s securitisation over the 1970s and 80s had been trained in cross-border ‘counter-insurgency’ operations against liberation movements in Namibia, Zimbabwe and elsewhere, and learnt from tactics like torture used in the ‘dirty wars’ conducted by France in Algeria, as well as from Israel, Chile, Argentina and the United States (Ellis 1998, p. 269)

¹⁶²Including harassment of left-wing lecturers, and even targeted assassinations like that of Rick Turner (Keniston 2013)

¹⁶³Like the *Comitê de Mães e Pais em Luta* in the 2015 Brazilian student mobilisations, parent-student committees were formed “to coordinate mass action” against police “killings, attacks, and harassment” (Badat 1999, p. 215)

¹⁶⁴Importantly, students from across “schools, colleges and universities” formed a co-ordinating forum,

Black students and parents generally adopted three responses to education in this period. Some valorised education in general, while emphasising *equal education* to “improve their life chances” (Brewer 1986, p. 69).¹⁶⁵ In other cases, students turned towards slogans like *Liberation before Education* (Alexander [1990] 2013a, p. 14; Bundy 1987, p. 323).¹⁶⁶ This was manifested, for instance, in a series of school boycotts across the country in the mid-1980s (Sisulu and Karis 1987, pp. 18–19; Bundy 1987), although predominantly by young men (Healy-Clancy 2014, p. 165).

Finally, black communities developed *alternative and people’s education* programmes,¹⁶⁷ with a critical focus on existing educational curricula (Jansen 1990, p. 203). People’s Education promoted political conscientisation, a critical understanding of the “sociopolitical and economic realities that shape our lives” (Vally 2007, p. 42). Some People’s Education experiments were informal or ad-hoc, such as the workers’ movement using “buses and trains [as] vehicles of mass education” (ibid., p. 44), or hosting *siyalalas* (all night education sessions) (Vally 2006, p. 167).¹⁶⁸ Elsewhere, alternative education was institutionalised. Trade Unions developed “labour schools” for workers (Byrne and Ulrich 2016; Cooper et al. 2002), and institutions like Khanya College were founded in Cape Town and Johannesburg (Naidoo, Adriansen, and Madsen 2015),¹⁶⁹ as well as in exile, like the ANC’s Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO) in Tanzania (Maaba 2004; Morrow, Maaba, and Pulumani 2004).

Although not widely discussed, students in 2015-16 sometimes drew on such traditions (Benson, Gamedze, and Koranteng 2018; Mjoli 2015).¹⁷⁰ These experiments, often linked to South African liberation movements (Alexander [1990] 2013a, p. 64), provide a rich resource for reimagining education and a liberated society, emphasising both thinking differently about the world *and* acting to transform it (Marx [1845] 1969). This multiplicity of relations and practices would shape the transformation of the education sector in the transition from apartheid into post-1994 period.

the *Committee of 81* (Badat 1999, p. 214), which operated similarly to the *Comando das Escolas em Luta* in the 2015 Brazilian school occupations

¹⁶⁵Within formal institutions, like UCT, extensive debates over race and gender took place, including publications on possible futures beyond apartheid. See for instance Goosen, Hall, and White (1989)

¹⁶⁶Alternatively “Freedom Today, Degree Tomorrow”, from *inkululeko ngoku, idegree ngomso*

¹⁶⁷See e.g. (Mathebula 2013; Muhammad 1996; Reagan 1989; Sisulu and Karis 1987). For more, see Molobi (1986); Nyaka (1986); Samuel (1986); NECC (1987), cited in (Jansen 1990, p. 203)

¹⁶⁸These were built on earlier traditions from the 1940s of Night Schools for urban adult workers (Wilson 1991)

¹⁶⁹Khanya was founded in 1986, affiliated to SACHED and linked to UCT and Wits. It supplemented the dominant state education system, while simultaneously critiquing it and exposing students to alternative educational practices (Baker 1995; Cornell and Witz 1994; Pape 1997; Rassool and Witz 1990)

¹⁷⁰Several scholars, however, drew attention to these histories in the 2015-16 political moment (Garuba 2015; Pillay 2015)

3.3.2 Brazilian Military Dictatorship

For a brief period in the 1950s-60s, a constellation of Brazilian left-wing parties and movements managed to turn the state towards redistributive social-democratic policies.¹⁷¹ Students become an important political force, introducing new tactics (Araujo 2007, p. 99). From the late 1950s, for example, UNE built a mass campaign, culminating in a 1962 strike of one-third of Brazilian students which paralysed 40 universities across the country, alongside street demonstrations and a student occupation of the Rio de Janeiro Education Ministry (ibid., p. 105).¹⁷² Students demands included democratising higher education, assured investment, and abolishing the elitist ‘vestibular’ entrance exam (ibid., pp. 103–5), issues which resonated in Brazil in 2015.

Such pressure garnered national institutional changes. In 1963, the *Comissão de Cultura Popular* (Popular Culture Commission) was founded under the Goulart administration, headed by Paulo Freire (Freitas and Souza Biccas 2009, p. 240).¹⁷³ Freire promoted popular education and adult literacy, both educationally and politically crucial in a country where 40% of Brazilians remained illiterate in 1960 and could not vote (Bittar and Ferreira Jr. 2016, p. 67).¹⁷⁴ In 1964, Goulart’s administration attempted to expand the franchise to illiterate citizens, extend trade union participation, nationalise oil wealth, and enact agrarian and land reform (Araujo 2007, pp. 95, 135–6; Skidmore 1999, p. 155). However, this was rapidly smothered by a right-wing, US-backed military coup (Skidmore 1999, pp. 157, 162).

The coup resulted in a Brazilian military dictatorship from 1964 to 1985, overlapping with the peak of Apartheid. The dictatorship attempted to subject the population to state discipline, while “modernising” the country, orienting the domestic political economy towards globalisation and international capital flows, with support for specific domestic manufacturing industries (Skidmore 1999, p. 177; Alves 1989, p. 279). It also instituted education reforms, attempting to reshape the system to extend state control and train a workforce with basic skills in the interests of capital (Bittar and Ferreira Jr. 2016, pp. 68, 72). The state expanded public universities, with student enrolment rising from 27,000 in 1945 to over 100,000 in 1962, to over 200,000 by 1968 (Cancian 2007; Bittar and Ferreira Jr. 2016, p. 72), drawn from an urbanising middle class, as well as wider sections of Brazilian

¹⁷¹The key actors here were the Brazilian Labour Party (PTB), flanked on the left by the *Partido Comunista Brasileiro* - Brazilian Communist Party (PCB) and *Partido Comunista do Brasil* - Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB), affiliated to the USSR and China respectively, as well as activists from the Liberation Theology-influenced Catholic Church affiliated to groups like *Ação Popular* (Popular Action) (Skidmore 1999, p. 153)

¹⁷²The longer-term trajectories of student activists was ambiguous. One *Ação Popular* militant and president of UNE, José Serra, became a centrist politician affiliated to the *Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira* - Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB), mayor and then governor of São Paulo, and main presidential candidate against the PT in the 2002 and 2010 elections

¹⁷³These experiences predate by 5 years the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, first published in 1968

¹⁷⁴Enacted in Decreto No. 53.465, 21 Jan 1964

society (Siqueira 2014, pp. 380–1). This created a social basis for a broader *student movement*, while shaping its intellectual climate as more students engaged with critical, left-Catholic, and Marxist theories society, state and education (Bittar and Ferreira Jr. 2016, p. 73).¹⁷⁵ The dictatorship also attempted to reshape the basic education system, which was further regulated, centralised, and extended, emphasising *technical education* in the service of economic growth (Lombardi 2008, p. 207; Saviani [1983] 1999). The regime also imposed *moral and civic education* intended to shape students' political subjectivities by inculcating supposed "civic virtues", teaching conservative history and geography and discouraging critique of the regime (Skidmore 1999, p. 176; Souza 2016, p. 19). Some of these changes were shaped by global pressures, such as the 1966 MEC-USAID Accord, which Brazilian student activists strongly rejected as an imperialist imposition (Araujo 2007, p. 158; Skidmore 2010, pp. 252–3). The reforms also attempted to professionalise teachers, bureaucratising their work and standardising teaching material, while shifting the work, predominantly done by women, from an extension of women's "natural" nurturing to professional labour (Louro 2004). This enabled "proletarianized" teachers to organise as workers, striking for equal pay and improved working conditions, and teachers' unions grew substantially (ibid., pp. 473–4, 476). These militant unions became critical, going on strike prior to the 2015-16 mobilisations, and then supporting students' actions once their occupations started.

At the same time, state repression targeted trade unions, social movements, and Catholic activists (Skidmore 1999, p. 155). Students were specifically targeted, with organisations like UNE banned (Araujo 2007, p. 149). In response, students set up parallel and autonomous *Entidades Livres* (Free Entities), adopting more radical tactics like university occupations (ibid., pp. 157, 162–3, 177). On 28 March 1968, teenager Edson Luís de Lima Souto was murdered by Military Police in Rio de Janeiro, sparking mass student protests that brought tens of thousands onto the streets (Siqueira 2014, pp. 386–7). Student protests were so substantial that the CIA took an interest, arguing in a secret 1968 report that "student grievances in Brazil... pose a long-range threat to the maintenance of stability".¹⁷⁶ Students in the 2015-16 mobilisations drew on these struggles as evidence of the history of important and heroic struggles by Brazilian students.

In response, however, the military regime was swift and brutal. By December 1968, it had arrogated to itself wide-ranging repressive power through the notorious AI-5 legislation, abolishing most democratic procedures and guarantees for human rights, and legalising

¹⁷⁵Notably structuralist and social-reproductive theories of Althusser, Bourdieu, Bowles and Gintis (Bittar and Ferreira Jr. 2016, p. 73)

¹⁷⁶Interestingly, the report bemoans participation of the "undisciplined" *secundaristas*, who "appear to operate outside the effective control of any organization... They often turn out in large numbers at demonstrations, and their emotional, daring participation is no doubt nearly as frustrating [to organisers as to security forces]". See CIA (1968) "Brazil's Restless Students", p12. <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP79-00927A006600050003-4.pdf>

torture commonly practised by the state (Coimbra 2001).¹⁷⁷ Universities were subject to surveillance and purges from faculties (Skidmore 1999, p. 164). Because of the enlarged student population, this had a significant effect. Middle classes and even elites realised the profoundly stratified and violent nature of Brazilian ‘law and order’ (Skidmore 1999, pp. 174, 204; Siqueira 2014, p. 392). When subjected to violence and brutality, as indigenous, afro-descended and poor Brazilians had been, these privileged classes started to turn against the state, and some became radicalised (Alves 1989; Stein 2012; Skidmore 1999, p. 175).¹⁷⁸ In the initial days of the *Anos de Chumbo* (Years of Lead), many students who otherwise would have protested for improved educational conditions turned to armed struggle against the state (Siqueira 2014, p. 396).¹⁷⁹

Like in the anti-apartheid struggle, Brazilian activists generated new educational practices (Tarlau 2015). Most notable was the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* - Landless Rural Workers’ Movement (MST), a militant social movement emerging in the 1980s to demand land and agrarian reforms in favour of peasants and the poor. While making demands on the state, it was significant for its autonomous action and self-organisation, including thousands of land occupations that were often violently suppressed by wealthy landlords (Carter 2010, p. 191; Skidmore 1999, p. 230).¹⁸⁰ In its occupied and autonomous areas, the MST prioritised education drawing on Freirean methods, from basic literacy to political conscientisation (Meszaros 2000, p. 16; Pahnke 2017; Robles 2000, p. 679).¹⁸¹ Although much of their work was itinerant, in the post-dictatorship period the movement began to influence the public schooling system (Tarlau 2015), alongside founding multiple schools, notably the Florestan Fernandes National School (ENFF), created in 2005 in São Paulo state (Skidmore 2010, p. 246).¹⁸² This linked different parts of the MST, other movements in Brazil, and international liberation movements, including unions like NUMSA and activist-academics in South Africa.¹⁸³ The long history of struggle in the MST also directly influenced student activists in the 2015-16 mobilisations. Visiting the ENFF in 2017, I met several militant *secundaristas* who had been involved both in the MST youth wing and school occupations in Brasília and São Paulo.

¹⁷⁷Often functioning similarly to the State of Emergency in Apartheid South Africa, discussed above

¹⁷⁸Most middle classes and elites, however, like most whites under apartheid, remained comfortably ignorant and even supported the regime (Stein 2012)

¹⁷⁹Dilma Rousseff, PT president from 2011-2016, was one of the students who in 1969 opted for clandestine struggle against the repressive state

¹⁸⁰The MST is the most well-known movement to adopt *occupations* as a central tactic, a theme I take up in Chapter 4

¹⁸¹By 1998, the MST was running a semi-independent primary school system for over 150,000 children, with links to progressive academics in over 50 Brazilian universities (Robles 2000, p. 683). The MST’s pedagogy draws together academic and practical work, on themes from philosophy to human rights to history and agroecology, to questions of organisation, relations between people, and artistic and cultural production (MST 2011; Tarlau 2015)

¹⁸²See <https://www.mstbrazil.org/video/history-enff>

¹⁸³One of the scholar-activists I interviewed from UWC had given lectures in gender and social change at ENFF

3.3.3 Ruptured Authoritarianism, Democratisation: 1980s-90s

In both South Africa and Brazil, the authoritarian regimes were put under pressure by mass uprisings grounded in industrial working-class militancy (Seidman 1994; Westhuizen 2016b). Combined with pressure from fractions of the capitalist class, existing elites began a negotiated transition with key members of the democratisation and liberation movements (Alexander 2002; Alves 1989). However, both countries were indebted with weak economic bases, resulting from oil shocks and debt crises, and this provided fertile ground for economic liberalisation over the following decades (Feinstein 2005, p. 249).

In Brazil, the state had largely crushed dissent in the early 1970s. However, oil shocks, debt crises, decreasing real income levels, and high inflation led to growing resentment towards the government, increasing pressure for change over the decade (Skidmore 1999, p. 181). Student protests in 1977 were followed by mass industrial strikes in 1978 (Saad-Filho 2007, p. 10). By the 1980s, students joined left parties like the growing PT,¹⁸⁴ trade unions, popular movements such as the Black movement,¹⁸⁵ and cross-class alliances, calling for democratisation under the slogan of *Diretas Já!* (Direct Elections Now) (Alves 1989; Filho and Collins 1998, p. 166; Skidmore 1999, pp. 185–6).¹⁸⁶ A negotiated transition led to a democratic election in 1985, entailing formal changes without deeply affecting the country's socio-economic structure (Kingstone and Power 2000, p. 3; Skidmore 1999, p. 190).

In South Africa, mass protests, particularly in education, and waves of strikes over the 1980s limited the profitability of South African companies (Bundy 1987; Kessel 2000; Rueedi 2016; Walt et al. 2017). Combined with these pressures, companies started to look for higher-productivity workers, which necessitated a more skilled black workforce in conflict with the racist apartheid labour and training policies (Chisholm 1983; Saunders 1988, p. 190). Large businesses began to endorse deracialised educational programmes for the skills they required, while opposing racialised job reservation and the colour bar (Feinstein 2005, p. 241). While maintaining a massive racialised disparity in educational spending, the state loosened legal restrictions for black students (ibid., p. 243). However, rising levels of unemployment not only strained state services (ibid., p. 237),¹⁸⁷ but also

¹⁸⁴PT has been a singularly important and controversial organisation in Brazil since its inception in the 1970s. It was founded as a “mass democratic party”, a broad home for left groups and tendencies of different persuasions, including civil servants, middle-class professionals and Catholic activists, and trade unionists, many affiliated to the major confederation *Central Única dos Trabalhadores* - Unified Workers' Centre (CUT). It has been framed at times as being “internally divided from the start” (Skidmore 1999, p. 213), or as having differing points of view “not only permitted, but even encouraged to thrive” (Saad-Filho 2007, p. 11). Since the 1980s, however, it has substantially relied on Lula for mass support

¹⁸⁵Formed in 1978, the *Movimento Negro Unificado* - Unified Black Movement (MNU) adopted a critical, political, and activist stance, including opposing the dictatorship (Hanchard 1994, pp. 77, 109, 125)

¹⁸⁶*Diretas Já!* was repurposed in 2016 after Michel Temer (*Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro* - Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB)) became president in a parliamentary coup against Dilma Rousseff (PT)

¹⁸⁷There were a host of reasons for this, including increased mechanisation, low domestic demand, and

generated a class of militant, educated, and unemployed black youth, many of whom became anti-apartheid activists (Brewer 1986, pp. 18, 92). Like in Brazil, economic crises had thus generated further resentment against the regime, with mass action including leftist parties, trade unions, civic organisations, churches, and cross-class alliances. From the late 1980s into the 1990s, high-level activists met state, military, and business representatives, resulting in a negotiated transition while retaining “the fundamental (capitalist) social relations” (Alexander 1993, p. 94). The ANC’s success in the 1994 democratic elections thus dramatically altered political power without substantially addressing underlying socio-economic structures (Alexander 2002; Bond 2000; Habib and Padayachee 2000; Hamilton 2014b; Marais [1998] 2001; Reddy 2016).

The end of both the dictatorship and apartheid were moments of rupture that sparked new possibilities in the 1980-90s. It seemed that society, including the education system, could be radically changed, particularly with the ANC in power in South Africa. While the contest over which ideas would take root and be implemented was unclear at the time, it has since become apparent that “conventional approaches were favoured over experimentation” (Christie 2008, p. 129).

3.4 Social-Democratic Neoliberalisation: 1990s-2000s

The foundations of the South African and Brazilian education systems had been laid over centuries, built most strongly in the 1900s. Around the turn of the millennium, democratic governments attempted to change these long-standing political-economic and education conditions. Both countries share a roughly similar trajectory since democratisation. The new political order was guaranteed by a relatively progressive Constitution in both Brazil (1988) and South Africa (1996) that embedded human and socio-economic rights into law – but did little to address profoundly unequal property relations in either society (Hanchard 1994, p. 137; Skidmore 1999, pp. 190–1; Marais 2011, p. 76; Vos 1997). Indeed, the structure and composition of the economy remained largely intact, prioritising extractivist mining, agriculture, and finance (Ashman, Fine, and Newman 2013; Karwowski 2015), although parts of it were “placed under new management” (Alexander 2002, p. 63). Since the mid-1990s, both countries have adopted risk-averse, stability-oriented policies of “social-democratic neoliberalism” (Cerny 2010; Saad-Filho 2013). Centre-left ruling coalitions, under Cardoso (PSDB) and then Lula (PT) in Brazil, and Mandela and Mbeki (ANC) in South Africa, attempted to use the historically oppressive state machinery to provide grants and services to the poorest. At the same time, they avoided confronting existing economic elites, instead developing a new elite that benefited massively from neoliberal economic policies (Bhorat, Naidoo, and Westhuizen 2006; Cuadros 2016; Medeiros, Souza,

the reduced importance of the labour-intensive mining sector (Feinstein 2005, p. 240)

and Castro 2015).

3.4.1 Political Economic and Educational Neoliberalisation

In South Africa, the redistributive Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) of the early 1990s quickly gave way to Growth, Employment, and Redistribution (GEAR) in 1996, a programme of neoliberal macroeconomic policies that emphasised deregulation and integration into global capital markets, fiscal austerity and privatising state assets (Christie 2008, p. 91; Bond 2000; McDonald 2002; Natrass 1996).¹⁸⁸ Inequality remained high, through to 2015 when the Fallist mobilisations erupted (Leibbrandt et al. 2010; Schiel, Leibbrandt, and Lam 2016). At the bottom, unemployment more than doubled from 14% in 1993 to 29% in 2001, largely unskilled black workers who had been denied access to education (Finn, Leibbrandt, and Oosthuizen 2014). At the top, a new black capitalist class emerged, often connected to political power (Ashman, Fine, and Newman 2013, p. 260; Marais 2011, pp. 140–1), and a professional class reaping the gains from tertiary education (Finn, Leibbrandt, and Oosthuizen 2014, p. 6). Higher education, particularly at Historically White Universities (HWUs), became an essential ticket into wealth, with work outside of graduate employment being significantly lower-paid (Donn 1997, p. 185).¹⁸⁹

However, the post-1985 democratic period in Brazil has been more fragmented than in post-1994 South Africa, where the ANC has largely been hegemonic.¹⁹⁰ Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Brazil struggled with hyperinflation and economic crises, corruption scandals, and the legacy of a Left crushed by the military regime (Skidmore 1999, pp. 190, 212). Amidst this turbulence, President Collor was impeached in 1992 after a corruption scandal led to mass protests involving thousands of students (Filho and Collins 1998; Skidmore 1999, p. 221). This important episode in the history of Brazilian student mobilisations remained in living memory for some teachers during the 2015-16 mobilisations. Over the 1990s, the Brazilian state attempted to integrate into global economic and financial markets by pursuing export-led growth, relying on low wages which reinforced inequality (Carvalho 2007, p. 28; Loureiro and Saad-Filho 2018, p. 3; Skidmore 2010, p. 224). Although individualised social programmes were expanded under Cardoso and scaled up under Lula, the state attempted to lower its debt by privatising public assets and implementing austerity measures (Motta 2016; Silva 2014; Skidmore 1999, p. 234).

¹⁸⁸Even basic public goods like water were partially commodified, often under pressure by the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Harvey 2003, p. 159; McDonald 2002), in a process similar to the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) elsewhere in Africa (Wahby 2019)

¹⁸⁹Roughly 40% of the wealthiest South Africans, with assets in the millions of dollars, were educated at UCT and Wits, with over half doing degrees in Law and Commerce (AfrAsia Bank 2019, pp. 17–18). By comparison, fewer than 10% did degrees at UWC and the University of Johannesburg (UJ)

¹⁹⁰According to former Brazilian President Cardoso, Brazilian political parties “are not ideologically oriented, although they believe otherwise. Brazilian parties are interest-oriented” (Hoge Jr. 1995)

This process of neoliberalisation entrenched the “financialisation of production” and social life (Loureiro and Saad-Filho 2018; Saad-Filho 2015).

A dramatic turning point in Brazilian society and education arrived in 2003 with the election of Lula and the PT government (Melo 2017; Neri 2014).¹⁹¹ The PT attempted to placate elite interests, while redistributing the gains from economic growth, largely derived from the global commodity “super-cycle” (Cuadros 2016; Loureiro and Saad-Filho 2018; Skidmore 2010, p. 234). By Lula’s second term (2006-2010), inequality had significantly decreased and millions were out of poverty, off the basis of an export-driven economic boom, alongside low inflation and significant increases in the minimum wage and redistribution through social programmes like *Bolsa Família* (Neri 2014, pp. 113–4; Schwartzman 2006; Skidmore 2010, p. 243).¹⁹² Real wages improved rapidly for the poorest Brazilians, particularly in rural and urban-periphery areas (Saad-Filho 2015, p. 1241). Nevertheless, the individualised aspect of some social programmes would shape the political subjectivities of recipients. In the 2015-16 occupations, for instance, some students and parents opposed the school shutdowns, worried that they would not receive *Bolsa Família* payments if schools were closed.¹⁹³

Expanding Inegalitarian Education These contradictory political economic conditions shaped an expanding, but still highly unequal education system. Over the 1990s-2000s, South African and Brazilian governments have attempted to redirect the long-term trajectories of their countries’ education systems. These changes, however, could not overcome deep-rooted issues, like low pay for Brazilian teachers or institutional culture of South African universities. At the same time, the problems that catalysed students’ mobilisations in 2015 were often introduced over the 1990s-2000s, such as outsourcing and high tuition fees in South African universities, and underinvestment in Brazilian schools.

From the 1990s, the education system has both been a target of state reforms, as well as a key mechanism by which inequality was reproduced under neoliberalised market capitalism. Education policy in both countries aimed to create a unified, post-authoritarian, democratic education system, through the legal framework established by the Brazilian National Educational Guidelines and Framework (1996)¹⁹⁴ and the South African Schools Act (1996), National Education Policy Act (1996), and Higher Education Act (1997).

¹⁹¹ Although much of the groundwork for this was laid in the late 1990s by Cardoso (PSDB), including the *Comunidade Solidária* (Community Solidarity) programme and numerous educational policies (Davies 2016; Neri 2014, p. 105; Skidmore 1999, pp. 231–4)

¹⁹² Aspects of these programmes have since been rolled back by austerity programmes by Dilma and, since 2016, Temer (Orair and Gobetti 2017, p. 17)

¹⁹³ *Bolsa Família* grants were conditional on each individual child’s attendance in school, as confirmed by school authorities. Various interviews, including at *Instituto Superior de Educação do Rio de Janeiro - Higher Education Institute of Rio de Janeiro (ISERJ)*, 19 September 2016, and *Colégio Estadual - State School (C.E.) Mendes de Moraes*, 22 August 2017

¹⁹⁴ *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação*, or LDB; law No. 9.394/96

Perhaps the most significant *change* over the last century and entrenched in the legislation of the 1990s has been the integration of women into mainstream public education (Healy-Clancy 2014; Louro 2004), such that women’s participation in schooling does not differ drastically from men’s (Lam 1999).¹⁹⁵

South African education legislation was designed both to dismantle apartheid legacies (Vally 2007, p. 45), while using the education system to build a post-apartheid national identity in the form of a “rainbow nation” (Christie 2008, p. 190; Chipkin 2007; Walker 2005).¹⁹⁶ Brazilian education expanded, particularly for the poor. Where 16% of Brazilian children (7-14) were out of school in 1990, there were only 4% by 2000, as mean years of schooling increased (Neri 2014, p. 115). Literacy rates for Brazilians over 15 increased from 74% in 1980 to 86% in 2000, reaching 92% by 2015.¹⁹⁷

However, in both contexts, education largely remained subservient to economic imperatives, with institutions adopting discourses of “human capital” formation and largely accepting neoliberal hegemony (Libâneo 2016; Lombardi 2008; Vally 2007). Despite the history of radical and alternative education in South Africa, policy changes offered “small *reformist* transformations” (Cooper 2015, p. 259), still primarily based in skills training for an exploitative economy (Alexander 1993, p. 96; Jansen and Sayed 2001, pp. 17–18; Vally 2007, p. 42).¹⁹⁸ Similarly, neoliberalisation in the Brazilian education system saw private, for-profit education institutions proliferate, and the burden of improving educational quality shifted from the state to individual schools and even teachers (Davies 2016, p. 45; Ramos 2000, pp. 9–10). The prevailing ideology was that education ought to “restrain social conflict”, which was the product of ignorance, rather than conflicting interests, exploitation or oppression (Libâneo 2016, pp. 49, 52).

As a result, the schooling system in both countries has remained bifurcated, as those who could afford it retreated to privatised enclaves (Bhattacharya, Saha, and Banerjee 2016; Caldeira 2000).¹⁹⁹

3.4.2 Stratified South African Education

In South Africa, a small network of elite private schools, closely linked to public universities, predominantly teaches white children, and a largely under-resourced public education system serves working class, predominantly black, children (Bloch 2008; Cooper 2015,

¹⁹⁵Once other markers of social difference are accounted for, particularly class and ‘race’

¹⁹⁶A project retroactively referred to as “rainbowism”, particularly by Fallists critical of it

¹⁹⁷Data from UNESCO, <http://data.uis.unesco.org/>

¹⁹⁸This is exemplified in the shift from the mass movement-led National Education Conference (1992), focusing on the relationship between education and social transformation; to the National Education Training Forum (1993) amongst the “old order”, largely led by business and the state, prioritising technocratic frameworks that subordinated education to economic growth (Vally 2007, p. 43)

¹⁹⁹Replicating the settler-colonial patterns of a wealthy, Europeanised enclave amidst indigenous poverty (Fanon [1963] 2004; Gledhill 2009; Mbembe 2000)

p. 248; Christie 2008, p. 136).²⁰⁰ With the problems in the public schooling system, black parents who could afford it sent their children to formerly whites-only (“Model-C”) schools. Black students experienced ‘insider-outsider’ effects, alienated from the dominant culture in schools, which carried into higher education amongst so-called ‘coconut’ students (Cooper 2015, p. 258; Chigumadzi 2015; Chikane 2018a,b). Although these problems have been well-documented and challenged by civil society (Brockman 2016; Marais 2011, p. 323), schools nevertheless continue to channel students in highly unequal, racialised ways into further education and broader society.

Particularly since the 1990s, South African universities have been sites of contestation over questions of transformation, Africanisation, and massification, entailing opening universities up to large numbers of previously excluded black students (Cloete 1997; Donn 1997; Kallaway et al. 1997).²⁰¹ Debates frequently focused on institutional culture, opportunities and throughput rates for black students, and even the role of universities in wider society (Waghid 2002, pp. 458–460).²⁰²

However, changes in the sector were uneven. HWUs were largely left to manage themselves, while the state intervened heavily in Historically Black Universities (HBUs) (Nash 2006).²⁰³ The 1997 Higher Education Act proposed the merger of South Africa’s 101 colleges and universities into 24 higher education institutions (Christie 2008, p. 131; Jansen 2005).²⁰⁴ In 2005, the University of Johannesburg (UJ) was created through an uneven merger between the apartheid-created Rand Afrikaans University (RAU), parts of the formerly-black Vista University, and the Technikon Witwatersrand (Beukes 2010; Goldman and Tonder 2006). At the same time, student enrolment expanded from 473,000 in 1993, to almost 800,000 in 2008, of which black students comprised roughly 52% and 75% respectively (Badat 2010, pp. 7–8). Nevertheless, by 2013, 55% of white South Africans between 20-24 were enrolled in higher education, compared to just 16% of black South Africans of the same age (Council on Higher Education 2016, p. 6).

Although the South African education system was changing, universities were maintained as elite spaces that reproduced a stratified society, entangled in broader processes of neoliberalisation. Isaac, a lecturer at Wits who saw these changes first-hand, argued that behind the “rhetoric” of Africanising, massifying and democratising universities,

²⁰⁰A similar system has been created in Brazil since the 1980s (Torres 1994, p. 197)

²⁰¹See at UWC (Wolpe 1995); Wits (Makgoba 1997); UCT (Goosen, Hall, and White 1989)

²⁰²In 2008, for example, a DHET-led task team published a report on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions. They argued that, to deal with racism in universities, it was not enough to deal with instances of student or staff demographics or culture. Rather, universities needed to work towards “epistemological transformation” and re-examine the appropriateness of the curriculum (Essop 2016)

²⁰³UWC, however, was also largely autonomous (Jansen 2003, p. 307)

²⁰⁴Although the mergers attempted to shift South African universities from elite reproduction and professional training, towards knowledge production and research (Muller, Cloete, and Schalkwyk 2017, pp. 12–13), this was marred by problems of implementation

“transformation was shaped more by the politics of neoliberalism” accepted by the ANC and its partners.²⁰⁵ By 2015-16, this had still not changed dramatically, such that students argued that educational institutions were “not built for us” (Morake 2015, p. 53; Sebambo 2015, p. 108).

Institutional Culture A key aspect of this was that universities’ institutional cultures were still predominantly rooted in their colonial and apartheid legacies (Chikane 2018b; Godsell and Chikane 2016; Jansen 2017). Black students, whether they went to “Model-C” and private schools, or managed to get through the public-schooling system, often found universities to be culturally dissonant and alienating (Chigumadzi 2015; Chikane 2018a; Nyamnjoh 2017). Particularly at elite HWUs, these students often drew on their personal experiences to challenge their institutions, as well as the broader ‘Rainbow Nation’ project. This produced what Okech (2020) refers to as the “fourth wave” of decolonisation debates in Africa,²⁰⁶ grappling with a commodified education system that prioritises Science, Technology, Engineering, Maths (STEM) fields while disinvesting from the humanities, producing questions of resource allocation and the politics of knowledge.²⁰⁷

Tuition Fees A second key aspect was that tuition fees became normalised, particularly in universities. The student movement, primarily through South African Students Congress (SASCO),²⁰⁸ had in the early 1990s proposed radically restructuring the university sector to be collectively-owned and embedded in local social projects (Naidoo 2006, p. 59, 2009). By the mid-1990s, however, they too had been domesticated by the ANC, abandoning the anti-apartheid demand for free, public higher education.²⁰⁹ Over the 2000s, the student movement largely lost its capacity as a “watchdog... holding accountable custodians of political and institutional power” (Ndlovu 2017c, p. 45). Universities settled on charging annually-increasing tuition fees.²¹⁰ This functioned “as an automatic mechanism to regulate the class composition of the student body”, dissuading working-class students from entering

²⁰⁵Interview, Isaac, 23 March 2017

²⁰⁶The first three waves are, firstly, the Africanisation of institutions in service of the “demands of newly independent countries”; secondly, the distance between state objectives and university autonomy; and thirdly, the neoliberalisation of education with the introduction of SAPs (Okech 2020)

²⁰⁷Although some such work had been ongoing; see e.g. the ‘catalytic’ projects to reconstruct history in Southern Africa between the 11th and 16th centuries, develop local languages, conceptual thinking and pedagogies, systematise the popular education traditions, build networks researching and developing non-textual forms of knowledge (such as oral history and poetry) and develop research at the interface of cultural production and knowledge, and draw on unpublished knowledge produced from the 1950s to 1980s (Sitas et al. 2011, pp. 20–1)

²⁰⁸Formed through the merger of the formerly whites-only NUSAS and the Black Consciousness Azanian Students Organisation (AZASO). By the 2010s it had 60,000 mostly inactive members (Ndlovu 2017c, p. 44; SASCO 2017)

²⁰⁹SASCO stopped arguing even for student grants and endorsed a repayable loans system (Naidoo 2006)

²¹⁰Beyond fees, this included treating education as a commodity, new hierarchical managerial cultures (and salaries), and corporate interests shaping institutions as state funding was withdrawn (Muller, Cloete, and Schalkwyk 2017, p. 6; Alexander 2014; Naidoo 2006; Nash 2006; Walt et al. 2003)

academia (Pendlebury and Walt 2006, p. 89). University demographics adjusted: although somewhat deracialised, particularly at elite institutions, students remained middle-class, with a failing public education system limiting opportunities for poor and rural students (Cooper 2015, p. 258; Jansen 2003, p. 308, 2017, pp. 38–9). The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) was set up in 1996 to help poorer students pay for education.²¹¹ The result, however, is a class of students burdened with individualised debt, in an economy with stagnant wage earnings (Jansen 2017, pp. 35–6, 41; Langa 2017; Nash 2006, p. 9).

Students had protested at numerous institutions over the 1990s and 2000s, often independently of ANC-affiliated student organisations. After 2007 protests at Wits and UJ specifically, President Zuma (ANC) promised free education from 2009 (Ray 2016, p. 344). Despite the promise, state funding stagnated and universities increased tuition fees to “pick up the slack” (Jansen 2017, p. 29).²¹² As a result, university tuition fees roughly *doubled* from 2008-2015 and student debt increased dramatically (ibid., p. 31).²¹³ While wealthier, more middle-class institutions like UCT could internally redistribute student subsidies, others like UJ were under financial pressure from increasing student numbers (ibid., pp. 33–5).²¹⁴

Because of general economic decline and higher indebtedness (Ndlovu 2017c, p. 51), however, the 2015 fee increase became the spark that ignited the #FeesMustFall (#FMF) campaign. What Melucci (1989, 1995) calls “submerged networks” of student activists,²¹⁵ who had protested fee increases in previous years, re-surfaced in 2015. According to Annika at UCT,

We went as a group of students to participate in - or disrupt - the Higher Education Summit in Durban.²¹⁶ Met a lot of students wanting to be in solidarity with students at Wits, but to also say it's not just solidarity, we have the fucking same shit happening at our university and we tried to convince people that weekend, that we needed to have a national shutdown.

Interview, Annika, UCT, 7 April 2017

These clusters of activists became “a definite group becoming increasingly self-empowered to take on the role of attempted historical agents, setting out to ‘make an event’ that

²¹¹NSFAS was, however, burdened with delays in disbursing funds, alongside corruption and nepotism allegations (Iwara, Iwara, and Kilonzo 2018)

²¹²In some cases, such as Wits, this shift in the cost burden was substantial: from having had state subsidies covering 70% of the university's expenses in the early 1990s, the state covered only 30-35% in the years preceding the Fallist mobilisations (Jansen 2017, p. 29)

²¹³In 2014, the year preceding the uprisings, students and their families had taken on 33% of the cost burden of universities, up from 24% in 2000 (ibid., p. 41)

²¹⁴Many turned to private funding to shore up their finances, thus becoming further shaped by the imperatives of the private sector

²¹⁵See Barker et al. (2013, p. 14)

²¹⁶15 October 2015. See Peters, Ndebele, and Ntanzi (2015)

will challenge structures” (Barker et al. 2013, p. 15). Indeed, the national shutdown they enacted ruptured the country’s ritualised annual fee protests, as I discuss in Chapter 4.

3.4.3 Inequality in Brazilian Schooling

Brazil’s tumultuous 1990s saw several localised education experiments. Notably, Paulo Freire became São Paulo’s Municipal Education Secretary (1989-1992), enacting reforms that, for instance, created democratic school management bodies,²¹⁷ enabling parents, students, and social movements to manage their own schools (Pilar O’Cadiz, Wong, and Torres 1998; Torres 1994).²¹⁸ These are important historical resources, given that students in the 2015-16 mobilisations demanded democratic self-governance for schools.²¹⁹

However, these experiments did not fundamentally change the character of the education system. Despite investment from democratic governments to improve schooling, the legacy of Brazil’s deeply unequal educational system continued to benefit elites (Loureiro and Saad-Filho 2018, p. 6; Schwartzman 2006, p. 21). Public education access for the poor remained limited, and schooling was such low quality that even by the late 2000s, one tenth of Brazilian students left school functionally illiterate (Bittar and Ferreira Jr. 2016, p. 69; Skidmore 2010, p. 254).²²⁰ Like in South Africa, the distribution of these outcomes remained classed and racialised (Torres 1994, p. 198). Despite the absence of formal, legislated discrimination in the democratic period, Brazilians from poor and black families tend to have low levels of education and lower wages (Lam 1999). In the early 1990s, at one of Brazil’s most prominent universities, the Universidade de São Paulo (USP), there were “less than a dozen” students and “even fewer” faculty members who identified as Afro-Brazilian or Black - despite 20% of the state identifying as such (Skidmore 1999, p. 208).²²¹

Over the late 1990s, and particularly during the 2000s under PT governments, combined with pressure from anti-racist and black movements, the social-democratic state enacted anti-discrimination policies (Skidmore 2010, p. 223; Sousa 2009). These included affirmative

²¹⁷See Lei No. 11.229, 26 Junho 1992

²¹⁸Similarly, in Rio de Janeiro, left-nationalist Leonel Brizola’s governments (1983-7 and 1991-94) created roughly 500 state-wide Integrated Centres of Public Education (CIEPs, referred to as *Brizolões*), that were designed by Darcy Ribeiro, Goulart’s education minister prior to the 1964 coup. *Brizolões* were open all day, with teaching alongside leisure and cultural activities, and served as community centres as much as traditional schools (Bomeny 2007). They were later closed or folded into the general public schooling system

²¹⁹Similarly, *Brizolões* are notable experiments for students looking to make their education relevant and integrated with their communities, as I discuss in Chapters 6 and 7

²²⁰Religious instruction also remains highly contested (Fischmann 2015, p. 118). Recently, this tension has re-emerged in ideological and often subtly theologically-driven debates about *Escola Sem Partido* - School Without Party (ESP)

²²¹Some Brazilian institutions had already recognised this problem, and implemented affirmative action policies, such as the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) in the 1980s, which “sharply increased Afro-Brazilian enrolment” (Skidmore 1999, p. 210)

action entrance policies in public universities which, as in South Africa, became focal points of controversy around injustice and privilege, historical inequality and visions of the future (Cicalo 2013; Htun 2004; McCowan 2007; Telles and Paixão 2013). After the 2001 World Conference Against Racism in South Africa, Black Brazilian activists also secured legislation for teaching African and Afro-Brazilian history in public schools (Sousa 2009, p. 292).²²² By 2008, activists had also secured similar legislation for Indigenous histories (Russo and Paladino 2016).²²³ However, the implementation of legislation was uneven and often ineffective (Oliveira and Braz 2016). Racism and prejudices entrenched in the education system have been difficult to shift, which *secundaristas* challenged in their 2015-16 mobilisations. In the same period, workers' movements and trade unions managed to institutionalise Workers' Education in 2004,²²⁴ securing gains but also "flexibilising" the workforce and thereby maintaining a bifurcated wage structure between highly-educated, highly-paid professional work, and low-paid manual and technical work (Frigotto, Ciavatta, and Ramos 2005; Rodrigues 2005; Silva 2014). Since 2007, the number of working-class students at university increased considerably, particularly after the 2012 introduction of quotas for *ensino médio* (high school) students in the public system (Wiesebron 2014, p. 128).²²⁵

Beyond access, the character of education changed. In 2009, for instance, the Ministry of education proposed *Educação Integral* (Integrated Education) plans and, in 2014, the National Education Plan.²²⁶ These emphasised broader objectives than merely labour market training, including a more "dialogical" approach that respects social difference, and developing "cognitive, political, social, ethical, cultural and emotional" aspects of students' lives (Libâneo 2016, pp. 42, 50). However, these were diluted by conservative and corporate interests by the time it became law, as were calls for the "democratic management" of schools (Lino and Morgan 2018, p. 70; Libâneo 2016). The inadequacies of these policies became clear in the 2015-16 mobilisations, for instance when students challenged the lack of democratic self-governance of their schools and implemented practices of *autogestão* (self-management), as I discuss in Chapters 5 and 6.

Even with such changes, Brazilian education has become a commodified, "competitive, fragmented and selective" sector (Silva 2014, p. 50), which in practice consigns a large

²²²Codified in Law No. 10.639 (2003). Brazil's National Council on Education (CNE) similarly adopted guidelines (CNE/CP Determination 003/2004 and Resolution 1/2004) on how Afro-Brazilian history and culture could be taught better, in concert with activists in Brazil's black movements (Sousa 2009, p. 292)

²²³Law No. 11.645 (2008)

²²⁴Decreto No. 5.154/04

²²⁵Quotas were legislated under Law No. 12.711 (2012). This would later be rescinded by Michel Temer and Alexandre de Moraes in 2016 under Law No. 13.409 (2016). Moraes was the minister of Public Security for São Paulo in 2015-16 and was responsible for much of the state violence against students in this period

²²⁶Law No. 13.005/14. The working document, created by social movements, teachers and their unions, was significantly more transformative than the final outcome (Brasil 2014, p. 64)

part of the population to an underclass destined to serve a small elite. In São Paulo and Rio, the neoliberalisation of the education sector underpinned two significant catalysts for the student mobilisations, school closures and infrastructure degradation.

School Closures In September 2015, the São Paulo state government proposed a school restructuring programme that would have closed almost 100 schools and could have moved millions of students from one school to another (Campos, Medeiros, and Ribeiro 2016, p. 27).²²⁷ Students rejected it because the changes would make transport and safety difficult for them, while others wanted to preserve the sense of community at their existing school. Some students also highlighted the state's unstated motives, arguing for instance that shutting numerous schools was a way of hiding austerity measures,²²⁸ and that the closures were efforts to privatise and gentrify parts of São Paulo, showing the correspondence between state infrastructure investment and regions in which schools would be closed and state-owned properties sold to private developers (Giroto et al. 2017, p. 135; Capai 2019).

The reorganisation proposal was made in an authoritarian manner, with minimal consultation, and created mass confusion. Students began to organise against it. Because the state had poorly communicated which schools would be closed, opposition drew in a wider range of students who believed they might be affected, many of whom had no activist experience. Initially, students attempted to pursue existing official channels, including petitioning the state governor, Geraldo Alckmin (PSDB), going to the state's Legislative Assembly, and collecting local councillor's signatures to oppose the reorganisation.²²⁹ However, they were ignored or marginalised. Students learnt from the history of student struggles, which largely stopped at street-based protests and petitioning politics, and were determined not to repeat the same mistakes.²³⁰ Students at Diadema, the first school occupied in São Paulo, argued that "it was getting exhausting" just doing what student movements had done before and these actions "didn't get results".²³¹ They thus sought an alternative, and turned to occupations as I discuss Chapter 4.

Infrastructure Degradation In Rio, two interrelated processes catalysed the student mobilisations in 2016: concern over investment in education, and the teachers' strike. Investment in public services nationally increased under the PT, including in education

²²⁷The state's explicit argument for this was to 'rationalise' the number of students per school, supposedly to prevent overcrowding, and to specialise schools in terms of their age-range for students' educational benefit, with schools dedicated for students in grade ranges Fundamental I, Fundamental II, or Ensino Médio. For extended analysis on this, including the research that these policies were created on and was later discredited, see Campos, Medeiros, and Ribeiro (2016)

²²⁸Interview, Carol, *Escola Estadual* - State School (E.E.) Diadema, 8 June 2017

²²⁹Interview, Carol, Diadema, 8 June 2017

²³⁰One student made reference to 'Diretas Já!', the anti-dictatorship in the 1980s, as well as the 'Caras Pintadas' student movement that contributed to ousting Brazilian President Collor in 1992. Interview, Luis, Diadema, 8 June 2017

²³¹Group Interview, Carol and Luis, Diadema, 8 June 2017

(Libâneo 2016, pp. 54–55; Lino and Morgan 2018, p. 79; Orair and Gobetti 2017, p. 4).²³² However, by the late 2000s, investment faltered as the PT adopted austerity measures, and public schools particularly faced significant funding cuts (Domingues et al. 2014; Loureiro and Saad-Filho 2018). By 2016, this had intersected with the Rio state financial crisis, resulting in state spending on public education further reducing by 27% between 2015 to 2016 (Bacelar 2016; Kurczy 2016). Between 2014 and 2016, educational investments reduced by 94% (Galdo 2016; Oliveira 2018).²³³

Students argued that this *sucateamento*, or intentional abandonment and degradation, of education led to poor conditions within schools and negatively affected learning. One student at ISERJ described this escalation, where initially “we lost some language classes”, later “they were totally scrapping the school. They left the school to the flies”.²³⁴ Although the state was in crisis, the rationale for cutting *education* funding was unclear. One hypothesis is that the degradation was intentional, to ‘prove’ that public education is poor-quality and thereby provide an ideological justification for privatisation (Barreto 2016; Castro and Amaral 2019; Venco and Carneiro 2018).

The underinvestment had severe consequences for students. By February 2016, Rio’s summer peaked at 37°C outside. At Mendes, up to fifty students were crowded into small classrooms with broken air-conditioning. Students could not learn; one recollected that she “fainted at school several times” from the heat.²³⁵ Students organised themselves, demanding infrastructure improvements, but the school director (who had two air-conditioning units in his office) dismissed their concerns as “bullshit” and “just drama”.²³⁶ Although many teachers supported the students, little changed. Students recalled how “we’re doing various protests. But... it’s not enough”.²³⁷ Searching for an alternative, students turned to occupations, which quickly spread to over 70 schools across Rio state, and which would rupture the state schooling system, as discussed in Chapter 4. Similarly, at ISERJ, students gave me a tour that demonstrated numerous infrastructural problems deriving from the lack of investment. The physical space had become so neglected that it posed a safety risk to students and workers at the school.²³⁸

²³²A major commitment was the 2014 National Education Plan (*Plano Nacional de Educação*, PNE, Law No. 13.005/14) that dedicated 10% of GDP to the sector. See Meta 20. <https://www.jusbrasil.com.br/diarios/72231501/dou-edicao-extra-secao-1-26-06-2014-pg-7>

²³³A decrease from roughly R\$340,9m (£67,5m), or 0,51% of the state’s total budget in 2014, to R\$92,1m (£18,3m, or 0,14%) in 2015, and reached a nadir of R\$19,3m (£3,8m, or 0,03%) in 2016. Total state investment also fell significantly, by 17.5% from 2009, disproportionately in the construction sector (Domingues et al. 2014, pp. 58, 68). Thanks to C. Souza for clarification on this point

²³⁴Interview, Thaís, student at ISERJ, 19 September 2016

²³⁵Group Interview, E.E. Mendes de Moraes, 22 August 2017

²³⁶Group Interview, Mendes de Moraes, 22 August 2017

²³⁷Interview, Luiz, E.E. Mendes de Moraes, 22 August 2017

²³⁸ISERJ, for example, had no money to maintain their swimming pool, which became a breeding ground for mosquitoes at the height of the Zika outbreak in 2016

3.4.4 Workers' Struggles: Teachers Strikes and Outsourcing

In both South Africa and Brazil, workers' struggles became catalysts for student mobilisations in 2015-16. The origins of these struggles lie both countries' long-term racialised and gendered class formation, as well as the neoliberalisation of society and education since the 1990s.

Teachers' Strikes In Brazil, many teachers acknowledged the inegalitarian nature and historical roots of their education system. Some had been student activists against the military dictatorship, others were politicised through their trade unions, others still recognising their conditions and treatment as denigrated and low paid functionaries (Silva 2014, p. 50). A key issue for teachers, which would have significant ramifications for student organising in 2015, was the historical continuity of being paid low salaries. In 2008, PT introduced a federal minimum wage for teachers (Davies 2016, p. 44).²³⁹ While crucial for teachers' basic wellbeing, it was still low, and the increased public wage bill meant that states sometimes simply resorted to not paying teachers.

As a result, in both São Paulo and Rio, teachers had gone on strike in the months before the student occupations. From March 2015, São Paulo teachers undertook a 92-day strike over salaries, the longest in the history of their trade union, *Sindicato dos Professores do Ensino Oficial do Estado de São Paulo* - São Paulo State Teachers' Union (APEOESP) (Araújo 2015a,b; BBC 2015; Payne 2015). However, they failed to achieve substantial gains. One student in São Paulo, for example, argued that this was because APEOESP ignored the demands of teachers themselves and "had a history of class betrayal".²⁴⁰ While the union machinery itself was bureaucratic, rank-and-file teachers had nevertheless become more militant as a result of the strike and their internal struggles against undemocratic union officials (Barbio 2015).²⁴¹

The strikes were more dramatic in Rio. As Brazil entered a recession in 2015, Rio state was in a deep financial crisis (Cuadros 2016).²⁴² While spending billions on the 2016 Olympics, Rio reduced funding for social services (Alves 2016b). Teachers faced real pay cuts and delays to their salaries (Barreto 2016, p. 78), and had in turn stopped teaching some courses. In March 2016, as the crisis deepened, teachers' unions called a state-wide strike focusing on their salaries.²⁴³ Although roughly 80% of the state's teachers were on

²³⁹Law No. 11.738/08 mandated a minimum of R\$950.00, roughly £200 per month

²⁴⁰Interview, Maria, 5 June 2017

²⁴¹See e.g. Luxemburg ([1906] 2004) and Moody (2000, 2014)

²⁴²The crisis was so serious that by the end of 2016 the state's bank accounts were frozen by the Federal Government (Alves 2016a)

²⁴³The almost five-month strike, organised by *Sindicato Estadual dos Profissionais de Educação do RJ* - Rio State Union of Education Professionals (SEPE-RJ), officially started on the 2nd of March 2016, and was halted on the 26th of July 2016 (G1 Rio 2016)

strike, it was largely dismissed by state negotiators (ibid., p. 78).²⁴⁴ The strike was one of the key catalysts for the first school occupation in Rio de Janeiro in 2016, as I discuss in the following chapter.

#EndOutsourcing As discussed in the Conceptual Framework (Chapter 2), broader patterns of neoliberalisation had numerous effects, including organisations pursuing profit-maximisation by reducing labour costs, particularly through *outsourcing* workers. At the turn of the millennium, this was adopted in South African universities.²⁴⁵

The staff trade union²⁴⁶ had fought outsourcing in the 1990s, but had lost, and outsourced workers were unable to organise effectively (Johnson 2001; Luckett and Mzobe 2016; Walt et al. 2002). Like broader political movements, student and worker movements on campuses had been severely weakened, suppressed or domesticated by the ANC and its affiliates (Luckett and Mzobe 2016; Luckett and Pontarelli 2016; Vally 2007, p. 46). Trade unions on university campuses were bureaucratic or even hostile to workers' self-organisation (Luckett and Mzobe 2016; Luckett and Pontarelli 2016),²⁴⁷ or simply "not interested" in outsourced workers' struggles (Hunter 2015, 2016).²⁴⁸ Despite moments of independent organisation and direct action,²⁴⁹ it would take until 2015 for a concerted uprising by students and workers to successfully challenge these calcified arrangements (Hamilton 2017; Kgoroba 2017; Satgar 2016).

A week before the highly visible South Africa-wide student protests from 14 October 2015, students, academics and operations workers created a national day of action labelled #October6 (#Oct6).²⁵⁰ This group emerged from questions raised by the "black-led, decolonial student formations" in early 2015, which realised that workers were amongst the most vulnerable in the neoliberal university.²⁵¹ A graduate student at Wits explained that,

²⁴⁴Interview, Júlia, teacher at Mendes de Moraes, Rio de Janeiro, 22Aug17

²⁴⁵Outsourcing was often enacted by former activists, like BCM leader Mamphela Ramphele (UCT, 1999) and Marxist historian Colin Bundy (Wits, 2000) (Pendlebury and Walt 2006, p. 86)

²⁴⁶National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union (NEHAWU)

²⁴⁷One of my interviewees at UJ described how the cleaning workers' trade union, NEHAWU, had been cosy with university management in shutting down their workers' demands, and how the union's secretary had only been seen to tell disgruntled workers to return to work. He also mentioned how NEHAWU had later tried to claim credit for insourcing at UJ. Interview, Mark, 17 March 2017

²⁴⁸According to Hunter (2015, p. 6), "although shop stewards were very present in the struggle, it was not a union organised struggle, nor were representatives from the unions even present". In some cases, the legal conditions arising from outsourcing meant that workers could not legally organise at their workplace (the university) and were repeatedly told to take up their grievances with the outsourced company (Luckett and Pontarelli 2016). In other cases, the unions themselves were "close with management" (Luckett and Mzobe 2016, p. 97)

²⁴⁹Such as a student-worker alliance in 2000 occupying the Wits VC's office against outsourcing (Pendlebury and Walt 2006, p. 87)

²⁵⁰The nomenclature referenced protests in the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street. Interview, Patricia, Wits, 22 March 2017

²⁵¹Interview, Patricia, Wits, 22 March 2017

Fanon²⁵² quotes from the Bible, says that decolonisation is a process of putting the last first and the first last. That was the principle. . . . If we were to be honest about who was last, excluded, poor black students are not actually the most marginal in the context of the university because they can leave. Whereas workers stay, badly paid, with this terribly dehumanising system of outsourcing, unable to use the same toilets as everyone

Realising this, students shifted how they organised. A graduate student at UJ recalled that #Oct6 was initially set up to bring together UJ and Wits activists, but workers' issues were not prioritised and meetings were organised at inconvenient times for outsourced workers, with only a few able to attend.²⁵³ However,

Eventually the structure changed because we focused on workers' issues. They would organise meetings on Saturdays, when more workers turn up. It transformed into worker-controlled space

Interview, Aisha, 15 September 2017

On 6 October 2015, shortly before the emergence of #FMF, students, academics, and outsourced workers undertook major, coordinated protests against outsourcing at four universities, Wits, the University of Pretoria (UP), the University Currently Known As Rhodes (UCKAR), and UCT under the #Oct6 banner (Mabasa 2017, p. 131; Naidoo 2016b, p. 183).²⁵⁴ Students and workers at other institutions joined these protests.²⁵⁵ At Wits, for example, the combined protest with UJ had roughly five or six hundred outsourced workers, students, and academics, as well as letters of support from students and workers at other institutions.²⁵⁶

The #Oct6 protests were an important moment of cross-campus coordination that would directly feed into #FMF.²⁵⁷ The power of coordinated protest, facilitated by social media, amplified demands which resonated across the country, creating a “national profile against outsourcing, inspiring the confidence of workers to engage in a struggle” (Hamilton 2017, p. 187).²⁵⁸

The organisers were formed from outsourced workers themselves, mostly acting independently of trade unions, along with a few progressive academics. Amongst students, organisation was largely through a number of pre-existing workers' solidarity groups,

²⁵²See Fanon ([1963] 2004, p. 2)

²⁵³Although in the earlier period, some workers nevertheless raised transitional demands such as “interim funding for poor students and children of outsourced workers” (Booyesen 2016a, p. 41)

²⁵⁴Interview, Patricia, 22 March 2017

²⁵⁵A lecturer at UJ, for instance, recalled activists from his institution attended and supported the Wits protest. Interview, Mark, 17 March 2017

²⁵⁶Interview, Patricia, 22 March 2017

²⁵⁷Interestingly, the #Oct6 protests were described at the time as a “new student movement”, just weeks before the mass mobilisations of #FMF (Nkosi 2015). They were thus themselves a rupture in the ordinary patterns of student-worker-institution relations

²⁵⁸Interview, Patricia, 22 March 2017

including the Left Students Forum at UCT,²⁵⁹ the UJ Persistent Solidarity Forum,²⁶⁰ and the Wits Workers Solidarity Committee.²⁶¹

No political parties were centrally involved, although participants included affiliates of the ANC, as well as the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) who were particularly vocal on workers' issues.²⁶² However, relatively few students overall were directly involved in workers' struggles. As a result, students who were involved "recognised that we had to operate effectively in order to achieve political results" (Dlakavu 2017, p. 114).²⁶³ These students looked towards forming alliances and coalitions, an important catalyst for the student mobilisations in 2015, as I discuss in Chapter 4.

3.5 Democratic Consolidation to Crisis: 2000s-2010s

3.5.1 Aftershocks of 2008: Disaffection and Denied Opportunity

Since 2010, the tensions within "social-democratic neoliberalisation" could not be maintained. The aftershocks of the 2008 global financial crisis, coupled with the loss of legitimacy of political elites, laid the ground for uprisings and challenges. These uprisings, in turn, shaped the emergence of the 2015 student mobilisations. Although the 2008 global financial crisis did not dramatically affect Brazil or South Africa directly, its longer-term impacts were severe. Because both countries relied on export-oriented growth, the global recession following the crisis limited domestic economic growth, while reduced demand globally ended the commodity boom of the 2000s (Ashman, Fine, and Newman 2013, p. 264; Habib 2013, pp. 147–8; Skidmore 2010, p. 251).

Contracting Opportunities Thus, although education was expanding, opportunities were contracting. By 2015, Brazil had entered the worst recession in its history as the state implemented austerity measures (Orair and Gobetti 2017, p. 17). According to the ILO, Brazilian youth unemployment increased from 15% in 2008 to 20% in 2015, climbing to 27% in 2016.²⁶⁴ Escalating tensions rendered Brazil deeply divided (Kingstone and Power

²⁵⁹See <https://www.facebook.com/UCTLSF/>. Earlier iterations of this included the UCT Student Worker Alliance, the Workers' Support Committee and the Students of the Workers Forum; see Left Students' Forum (2015)

²⁶⁰See <https://www.facebook.com/Justice-for-UJ-cleaners-1466467900248506/> e.g. <https://www.anarkismo.net/article/27247>

²⁶¹See <https://witsworkerssolidaritycommittee.blogspot.com/>

²⁶²Other political parties were also involved, such as Workers and Socialist Party (WASP), a small militant left party involved in grassroots organising, with a history dating back to the 1970s as the Marxist Workers Tendency within the ANC (Hamilton 2017)

²⁶³These students thus organised into "task teams which included: insourcing; logistics; legal; direct action; media and political education" (Dlakavu 2017, p. 114)

²⁶⁴Unemployment generally increased dramatically, almost doubling from 6.67% in 2014 to 11.61% in 2016 (ILO 2018). Figures from <https://www.ilo.org/ilostat/>

2017). In South Africa, unemployment rates have been persistently high, particularly amongst youth, since the adoption of neoliberal policies. However, these too increased, from 45.6% youth unemployment in 2008 to 50.1% in 2015.²⁶⁵ University degrees were one of the few ways out of poverty for young South Africans: among 2.7 million unemployed 18-24 year olds in 2008, young graduates accounted for only 11,500 (0.04%) (Badat 2010, p. 10). However, the massification of education meant that South African students shifted from being a privileged class to facing limited future options and economic turmoil (Ndlovu 2017c, p. 49).²⁶⁶ Ndlovu (ibid., p. 75) thus argues that the *loss* of students' economic privilege and their mounting economic hardship in the 2010s was what sparked the scale and intensity of the 2015 South African mobilisations.²⁶⁷

Disaffection Economic problems were compounded by widespread public disaffection with the PT and ANC, particularly in light of various corruption scandals. Despite the supposed shift “left” under Zuma’s ANC from 2009, little improved at a macroeconomic level, while state institutions were systematically undermined for private gain (Habib 2013, p. 147; Public Affairs Research Institute 2017; Smith 2018).²⁶⁸

After the 2005 *mensalão* scandal, and continuing through the 2010 election of Dilma Rousseff, the PT pivoted away from its mass base towards elite politics to be able to govern (Loureiro and Saad-Filho 2018, p. 8).²⁶⁹ Spurred by a hostile, oligarchic media, anti-PT sentiment rose, with many activists and popular movements alienated from an increasingly elite-oriented PT and a growing “anti-politics” characterised by “moralist claims against corruption” (Fernandes 2017a, p. 61; Loureiro and Saad-Filho 2018, p. 13).²⁷⁰ Against PT’s adherence to neoliberal policies and 2005 corruption scandal, the party’s left wing, formed primarily of activists linked to social and student movements, broke away to form

²⁶⁵Unemployment generally increased from 22.4% in 2008 to 25.2% in 2015. Figures from <https://www.ilo.org/ilostat/>

²⁶⁶Much like Zeilig (2007) argues took place after independence elsewhere in Africa

²⁶⁷Drawing on Davies (1962) relative deprivation thesis

²⁶⁸One of the supposed markers of the “left” move was increased numbers of Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and South African Communist Party (SACP) members in ministerial positions. Particularly notable is the SACP general secretary and former Black Consciousness student activist, Blade Nzimande, who was minister of Higher Education from 2009 and through the 2015-16 mobilisations. Nzimande, ironically, pushed for affordable tertiary education, and encouraged vocational training and colleges for the large numbers of young people who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) (Habib 2013, p. 148)

²⁶⁹My own introduction to Brazilian politics was the impassioned debates in the 2010 elections between *petistas*, supporting Dilma, and *tucanos*, supporting José Serra. Both had been militants in the struggle against the military dictatorship, although had taken starkly divergent paths

²⁷⁰Since 2014, this was fed by the *Lava Jato* corruption investigation, which implicated large numbers of business elites and politicians from all major parties (Loureiro and Saad-Filho 2018, p. 14). The investigation both discredited the political class in general, but has been used particularly against the Left. Since its jailing of Lula in 2018, allowing Bolsonaro to ascend to the presidency, it has been revealed that presiding Judge, Sergio Moro, conspired with others to ensure Lula’s ineligibility in the election. Bolsonaro has since appointed Moro as head of the Justice ministry. See e.g. <https://theintercept.com/2019/06/17/brazil-sergio-moro-lula-operation-car-wash/>

Partido Socialismo e Liberdade - Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL) (Pompêo 2007, p. 10; Skidmore 2010, p. 242). Similarly, *Levante Popular da Juventude* - Popular Youth Uprising (*Levante*) was founded in 2005 as an autonomous left tendency, with roots in São Paulo and Rio's favelas, emphasising feminist and anti-racist struggle while drawing on local cultural expression (Silva and Ruskowski 2010, p. 31).²⁷¹ Youth affiliated to both PSOL and *Levante* became actively involved in the 2015 mobilisations.

3.5.2 From Disaffection to Rupture: Jornadas de Junho and Marikana

Since the end of authoritarian rule, the Left in South Africa and Brazil have become weakened and fragmented. While many groups and activists were absorbed into the PT and ANC's state-based hegemonic projects and domesticated, dissenting groups have often been marginalised or suppressed (Fernandes 2017a,b; Loureiro and Saad-Filho 2018; Smith 2018). As I discuss in Chapter 5, the broader political landscape strongly impacted students, many of whom attempted to position themselves and their demands in relation to national-level politics, with multiple external political actors attempting to influence the student mobilisations in turn. In the context of disaffection against the prevailing centre-left project of the ANC and PT, two moments of rupture dramatically shifted the political terrain: the 2012 Marikana Massacre and the 2013 *Jornadas de Junho*.

Marikana In August 2012, the South African state massacred 34 mineworkers at the Marikana platinum mine in Rustenburg, following a wildcat strike over pay and other issues (Alexander 2013b; Benya 2015; Bond and Mottiar 2013; Lester 2014; Naicker 2017; Rajak 2016). Mine owners Lonmin²⁷² were in close contact with the police and the ANC, whose members profited from their connections to Lonmin (Alexander 2013b, p. 613). The Massacre led to further strikes, as well as strengthening trade unions independent of the COSATU-affiliated ruling alliance with the ANC.

Since 2012, Marikana has become one key “organisational frame” (Benford and Snow 2000, p. 619), around which autonomous student-worker alliances held annual commemorations, with discussions and talks on university campuses. Indeed, student campaigns memorialisation of massacred mineworkers contributed directly to student-worker organising, such as the #Oct6 campaign. This fed directly into the Fallist campaigns, with students arguing for the interconnections between white supremacy, colonialism, and

²⁷¹Like PSOL, *Levante* also emerged out of popular struggles against PT's neoliberal austerity programmes, specifically from a 'Popular Consultation' organised by the MST and groups affiliated to the World Social Forum (WSF) (Bernardini and Gobbi 2013; Silva and Ruskowski 2010, p. 30)

²⁷²Formerly the London-Rhodesian Mining Company, LonRho, enabled by Cecil John Rhodes' conquests in Southern Africa (Mbele 2015)

capitalism through the interconnections between mining capital and elite universities.²⁷³ The Marikana Massacre thus contributed to politicising a new generation of students in universities, becoming a “symbolic focal point” in students’ imaginaries in the Fallist mobilisations of 2015-16 (Smith 2018, p. 159).²⁷⁴

Marikana also split the ANC, leading to the EFF’s formation in 2013. The EFF is a self-described “vanguard of community and workers’ struggles” that “draws inspiration from the broad Marxist-Leninist tradition and Fanonian schools of thought”, while discursively linking anti-colonialism and a rejection of “whiteness” (Alexander 2013b, p. 616; Mbete 2015, pp. 39, 50–1).²⁷⁵ The party specifically appealed to black students and youth, forming the Economic Freedom Fighters Student Command (EFFSC) and emphasising anti-racism in professional settings, while clashing with ANC-affiliated student groups (Mbete 2015, pp. 41–3).²⁷⁶ If the 2015 South African student mobilisations entailed a rejection of the post-apartheid order and its institutions following the weakening of ANC hegemony (Ndlovu 2017c, p. 48), this is exemplified in the prominence of the EFF and EFFSC.

Jornadas In Brazil, the PT project was dramatically challenged by the 2013 uprisings, the *Jornadas de Junho* (June Journeys).²⁷⁷ These were the largest protests since the end of the dictatorship, bringing over a million protesters to the streets of major cities across the country.²⁷⁸

The complex assemblage of groups and interests initially coalesced around opposition to bus fare increases in São Paulo (and later elsewhere), under the banner of *Movimento Passe Livre* - Free Fare Movement (MPL).²⁷⁹ Notably, the Movimento Passe Livre (2005) prioritised mobilising students, who formed a significant part of MPL protests (Alonso and Mische 2016; Snider 2017). As I discuss further in Chapter 5, these patterns of organising extended to the 2015 *Primavera Secundarista* (Alegria 2018, pp. 19–21). By

²⁷³Interview, Annika, 7 April 2017

²⁷⁴Much like the massacre of mineworkers in September 1972 at the Western Deep Mine, which served as a “political awakening to a generation of South African students about the link between apartheid and capitalism” (Fogel 2014, p. 492)

²⁷⁵See <https://www.effonline.org/about-us>. Unfortunately, in the last few years, the EFF has largely abandoned its ideological position for a nationalist-populist platform (Smith 2018)

²⁷⁶Depending on the campus, these include the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL), SASCO, Young Communist League (YCL), and Progressive Youth Alliance (PYA)

²⁷⁷Sometimes also called the “vinegar protests” or “Brazilian spring”

²⁷⁸Due to their scale and impact in universities, they have generated wide-ranging scholarship. See (Assy 2013; Corrêa and Souza 2014; Friendly 2016; Glass 2014; Holston 2013; Osborn 2016; Pacca 2016; Waisbich 2013; Zaytsev 2017). Particularly important for the student movements of 2015-16 are analyses of political economy and class (Mollona 2018; Purdy 2017; Saad-Filho 2013, 2014; Strazzeri 2017), as well as anarchist influences (Amar 2013; Gonçalves 2017; Hacon 2015; Moraes and Vieira 2017; Zúquete 2014), and intersections of gender, racism and racialisation (Mattos 2014; Vargas 2016)

²⁷⁹Movimento Passe Livre (2005), an autonomous social movement drawing together transport-related struggles across Brazil, was founded during the 2005 WSF. Since its founding in Porto Alegre in 2001, the WSF and other alter-globalisation movements have influenced Brazilian ‘horizontalist’ organising

2014, particularly in Rio, protests blended with movements against the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympic Games, challenging spending priorities on mega-events instead of social services like education (Gaffney 2016; Kamaldien 2014). In the process, education was explicitly *repoliticised*, where funding priorities became open to question and challenge. The *Jornadas* shifted state-society relations. Since democratisation, state violence had largely been “hidden” within favelas, but was now widely targeted against protesters (Amar 2013; Loureiro and Saad-Filho 2018). A new generation of activists lost confidence in the state to resolve conflict, rather than stoke it, and turned towards anarchist, autonomist, and horizontal modes of organising (Gonçalves 2017; Moraes and Vieira 2017).

These processes continued into the 2015 student mobilisations (Tatagiba and Galvão 2019). Indeed, at Diadema in São Paulo, one student referred to the student mobilisations as the *Jornada de Novembro de 2015*.²⁸⁰ In Rio, one student recalled how his mother, a teacher, had taken him to some 2013 protests and discussed the relationship between education and politics, thereby planting the seeds of his participation in 2016.²⁸¹ Direct experience of political struggles, as well as familial relations (Sanchez 2016), can thus be crucial for conscientising subsequent mobilisations.

3.5.3 Learning from Recent Student Movements

Students’ experiences of other social movements fed into the 2015 mobilisations in three ways. Students developed *networks* amongst each other and with broader social activists, which enabled the 2015 mobilisations to reach wider audiences; their *attitudes* changed, often radicalised by their experiences of state violence and institutional conservatism; and they learnt various organising *skills* that would aid them by late 2015. In addition to the broader social movements discussed above, there were several key *student* movements that influenced the emergence and trajectories of the 2015-16 mobilisations.

Black Student Movements In South Africa, a nascent ‘Black Student Movement’ emerged in early 2015, reintroducing a radical critique grounded in political currents outside of the ANC’s main historical trajectory, particularly Black Consciousness, Pan-Africanism, and Black Radical Feminism (Naidoo 2016a). At UCT, the mass meetings and calls for decolonisation that followed a symbolic challenge to the statue of Rhodes were the groundwork for a renewed and reinvigorated student activist base (Chikane 2018a; Nyamnjoh 2016). Student mobilisations’ ability to win concessions from their universities through direct action emboldened them, drawing more students into an effective form of politics. Most prominent in this period was the #RMF campaign at UCT, but students

²⁸⁰Interview, Luis, 8 June 2017

²⁸¹Interview, Filipe, Rio, 11 August 17. Similarly, students at Fernão Dias in São Paulo had been involved in MPL and drew on their links various autonomous movements (Campos, Medeiros, and Ribeiro 2016, p. 84)

conducted similar independent campaigns at universities across the country. At UWC, students attempted to “decolonise accountancy”, independently auditing the university’s finances to expose corruption and find ways to pay off students’ debt.²⁸² By March 2015, students at Wits demanded more black academic staff, an Afrocentric curriculum, support for poor students, and workers’ rights (Pilane 2015).

These continued into central themes during the #FMF period in late 2015, largely because the same students continued campaigning, learning from their experiences in the process. At UCT, for instance, a group of students were radicalised over the course of the year, moving from #RMF through a Marikana Commemoration in August and the #Oct6 Workers’ movement, as well as marches to Parliament and Home Affairs against Afrophobia. These students were radicalised through formative experiences of state violence, particularly once they left the “ivory tower”.²⁸³ Like the 2013 *Jornadas* in Brazil, experiencing state violence turned many middle-class protesters against the ANC and the state.

Students against Neoliberalism In Brazil, students in 2015 learnt from several regional student movements. Domestically, while various student activist groups formed and dissipated, students drew on Castoriadis (1988, p. 214) to emphasise the importance of continuity to build a “historical consciousness” and thereby “maintain the vital link between the past and the future of the movement” (Martins et al. 2012).²⁸⁴ Some students pursued this through formal representative organisations like UNE or UBES, while others set up autonomous structures. These struggles included a wave of university student occupations in 2007-8, which shaped many young teachers’ experiences with effects lasting to the 2015 school occupations (Bringel 2009; Espiñeira and Souza 2017). However, Brazil rarely had *school* occupations specifically.²⁸⁵ Most significantly were the 2009 struggles at E.E. José Vieira de Moraes, in the extreme south of São Paulo (Campos, Medeiros, and Ribeiro 2016, p. 60). Students challenged the authoritarian school director, while forming alliances with teachers, parents, and the local community. While this was quickly shut down by police repression, it became relevant again in 2015.²⁸⁶ The Vieira struggle gave rise to the autonomous student collective *O Mal Educado* (The Badly Educated), which

²⁸²Interview, Beverley, UWC, 6 April 2017

²⁸³Interview, Annika, UCT, 7 April 2017

²⁸⁴Castoriadis (1988, p. 214) argues that the function of revolutionary theory is to “state explicitly... the meaning of the revolutionary venture... to shed light on the context in which this action is set, to situate the various elements in it and to provide an overall explanatory schema for understanding these elements and for relating them to each other”

²⁸⁵In 2012, students occupied E.E. Prof Luiz Carlos Sampaio, in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul, but this was one of the only schools occupied in the past decade and, although it was referenced as an icon of past struggles, students in 2015 had almost no direct contact with Sampaio (Campos, Medeiros, and Ribeiro 2016, p. 57)

²⁸⁶Supporting the São Paulo occupations, for instance, MC Foice e Martelo paid homage to Vieira in their 2015 funk song ‘Escolas de Luta’. See <https://youtu.be/QvdrLD1RbTI?t=92>

drew links between struggles in schools across São Paulo state and created a political-historical archive of students' struggles, even though it was at times, reduced to a single person posting on Facebook. O Mal Educado intentionally tried to create a "historical consciousness" of activism amongst students to see larger-scale issues in their educational struggles.

In 2015, O Mal Educado became a catalyst for the student occupations, particularly notable for sharing the instructive "How to Occupy Your School" pamphlet (ibid., p. 79), thereby enabling bridged conversations between generations of student activists.²⁸⁷ The pamphlet was translated from a document circulating in the Chilean student movements. Between 2006 and 2011 Chilean students undertook several large-scale waves of protest, culminating in school and university occupations, which challenged the neoliberalisation of their education sector (Bülow 2018; Donoso 2013, 2017; Fleet and Guzmán-Concha 2017). Brazilian *secundaristas* had shared a documentary, *A Rebelião dos Pinguins* (The Penguin Rebellion),²⁸⁸ learning about the protests and students' tactics. The movement resonated with Brazilian *secundaristas*, as Chilean students challenged "low educational standards, high fees, and barriers to postsecondary education" (Valenzuela and Dammert 2006, p. 75).

3.6 Conclusion

By late 2015, three sets of factors had converged to produce large-scale student uprisings that ruptured the existing education systems.

The long history of colonialism, racialised capitalism, and authoritarianism shaped the Brazilian and South African education systems, producing highly unequal, discriminatory institutions that served to train a differentiated labour force for an exploitative economy. Struggles from below against this shaped both the education system and politics more generally, particularly in the student movements from the 1960-70s. Students in 2015 drew on these historical cases as inspiration for their own activism.

Since the elite transition from authoritarianism and democratisation in the 1980-90s, the centre-left ANC and PT entrenched a "social-democratic neoliberalism". The result has been an expanding, but commodified and bifurcated education sector that remains largely subordinated to economic interests. Simultaneously, "ex-activists"²⁸⁹ attempted to move away from the authoritarian past by embedding issues of citizenship, human rights, and freedom in education. The result has been a contradictory educational experience

²⁸⁷The document remains accessible on blog run by O Mal Educado. See <https://gremiolivre.wordpress.com/2015/10/21/como-ocupar-um-colegio-versao-online/>

²⁸⁸One version on YouTube had about 22,000 views at the time of writing. The documentary was produced by left filmmaker Carlos Pronzato, who went on to make several documentaries about the Brazilian student uprisings

²⁸⁹As Patricia and Isaac at Wits described anti-apartheid activists who championed the new orthodoxy

that often fails to live up to its intended goals, remaining deeply stratified and unequal.

Since 2008, the ANC and PT's attempts to redistribute the gains of growth, while placating economic elites, have faltered in the context of the global crisis. The disaffection from unfulfilled promises, corruption scandals, and economic downturns led to mass protests in both countries by working and middle classes, most notably in the ruptures of the 2012 Marikana Massacre in South Africa and the 2013 *Jornadas de Junho* in Brazil. At times, these shaped student organising by forming networks, sharing repertoires of contention, and politically conscientising them.

The 2015 student-worker mobilisations were thus conditioned by broader political-economic factors, as well as recent and historical mass movements. These conditions shaped the way in which students would come to rupture their respective education systems, organise themselves, and reimagine education and society. There were, however, several specific catalysts for the mobilisations in 2015. Particularly in South African universities, students experienced *cultural alienation* and institutional racism. They also faced adverse *material conditions*, specifically fee increases in South African universities, and school shutdowns and infrastructure degradation in Brazilian schools. Finally, *workers' struggles* which had preceded the 2015 student mobilisations became interrelated as students and workers drew closer together. These conditions politically conscientised students, creating the conditions for the moments of rupture in late 2015, discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 4

Rupture: Breaking Apart Hegemony

It started as this atom that exploded into something that had influences - in places where you didn't think it was possible.

Thandolwethu, Student, Johannesburg, 27 March 2017

You saw people coming into the school, passing on their knowledge, their experiences. They weren't part of the more traditional vision of the school. The occupations were a rupture of a paradigm

Matheus, Teacher, São Paulo, 8 June 2017

Ruptures are periods of intense disintegration of existing patterns of behaviour and belief, when what is 'normal' breaks apart. As discussed in the Conceptual Framework (Chapter 2), these are dramatic periods in which existing structures break apart without clear alternatives to take their place. Such periods rapidly reconfigure social relations, breaking apart and reshaping networks and collectives, often while putting collective actors into confrontation with existing authorities. In the process, the individuals and collectives that induced the rupture develop a sense of their own agency and capacity to change the world around them. Moreover, because knowledge formations are grounded in social practices, these changes create the possibility to think anew about prevailing ideas, allowing for new imaginaries to emerge. In particular, ruptures destabilise existing understandings of the world, calling into question existing social structures by denormalising and denaturalising them. Thus, Booyesen (2016a, p. 22) argues, the Fallist rupture meant that "foundational values were to be reconsidered, and their ideological bases laid bare and cast off; policies were changed and institutions transformed".

Students in South Africa and Brazil were able to break dominant structures in existing educational-political spaces and create a moment of possibility. In South Africa, the rupture was the period in October-November 2015 when students blockaded, shut down,

and occupied almost every university in the country, under the banners of #FeesMustFall (#FMF), #EndOutsourcing, and #NationalShutdown. At the same time, thousands marched to Parliament in Cape Town, the seat of the executive in the Union Buildings in Pretoria, and the African National Congress (ANC) headquarters, Luthuli House in Johannesburg. In Brazil, the period of rupture varied by city. Like in South Africa, October to November 2015 saw students in São Paulo occupy their schools in resistance to the state's proposed high school reorganisation. In Rio, however, it was largely in March-April 2016, when students occupied their schools in support of the teachers' strike and against state austerity. In each case, the mobilisations of students drew in many who had never taken part in activism before, and were thus internally heterogeneous. They also formed alliances with education workers, and developed new tactics which disrupted the functioning of their education systems. The ways in which these ruptures took place laid the groundwork for how the mobilisations would change over time, and hence what kinds of imaginaries they would develop.

Outline In this chapter, I examine how students in both South Africa and Brazil had built sufficient power to produce a rupture in the educational-political hegemony of their respective contexts. The initial moment of politics that “bursts its bounds” (Tarrow 1993a, p. 281) during the early stages of student protests is characterised by a number of features which enabled student actions to cause a rupture. To examine these characteristics, the first section discusses the composition of the mobilisations that caused the rupture. By presenting the profile of the students who were involved, it argues that their heterogeneity enabled them to rupture their respective educational systems. The second section looks to the alliances between students and workers, arguing that their mutual solidarity was crucial for building enough power to generate a rupture. The third section interrogates the tactics used by participants and their crucial role in disrupting the existing sets of practices and institutions. In particular, shutdowns and occupations stand out as the most prominent and disruptive in this process. By denaturalising and denormalising existing social and educational arrangements, they also opened space for alternative knowledge practices to emerge.

4.1 Internal Composition and Student Power

In both South Africa and Brazil, students were able to mobilise broadly, from across a spectrum of elite and subaltern groups, across class and intersectional cleavages. This breadth and heterogeneity enabled students to draw on the experience, strengths, and skills of a wider variety of activists to create new forms of collective action that had the power to effect a rupture. The heterogeneity of the mobilisations would also go on to

shape their priorities, tactics, and imaginaries, centring issues of oppression and injustice that had ordinarily been marginal (hooks 1985).

4.1.1 Recruitment into Activism

Social movements across the world have similar recruitment processes, although conditioned by localised factors (Barkan and Cohn 2013). In the early stages of the 2015 South African and Brazilian student mobilisations, it was essential for activists to recruit new participants, particularly because pre-existing activist networks were relatively small compared to the overall student population. Because students successfully included new participants, widening an activist base, the mobilisations grew to the dramatic scale seen in late 2015, and hence were able to rupture everyday activity within their educational systems.

In the earliest stages of student mobilisations, students in South Africa and Brazil joined through numerous channels which drew together diverse participants. Like other social movements globally, mobilisations often relied on existent political networks (Klandermans and Oegema 1987; McAdam 1986; Snow, Zurcher Jr., and Ekland-Olson 1980). The most obvious group of students was those who already had experience with political organising or activism, such as students who had participated in the 2013 Jornadas de Junho in Brazil, as discussed in the Historical Context (Chapter 3). Several of my interviewees described how their political consciousness was awoken because they had participated in the demonstrations in 2013, with some even travelling to different cities to take part in multiple protests.²⁹⁰ Others had already been working with political collectives, like the favela-based, autonomous anticapitalist group *Levante Popular da Juventude* - Popular Youth Uprising (*Levante*), or one of Brazil's left-wing party youth leagues, like *União da Juventude Socialista* - Union of the Socialist Youth (UJS) or *União da Juventude Comunista* - Union of Communist Youth (UJC).²⁹¹

In South Africa, the early 2015 mobilisations of #RhodesMustFall (#RMF) and the Black Student Movement (BSM) dominated campus politics and student activists involved in these campaigns became actively involved in the early stages of the #FMF mobilisations. Similarly, autonomous activist collectives like the Left Students' Forum at the University of Cape Town (UCT) were important hubs for mobilising. At the same time, activists affiliated to party-political youth leagues were often crucial, notably South African Students Congress (SASCO), the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL), and Economic Freedom Fighters Student Command (EFFSC).²⁹² At the University of the Witwatersrand

²⁹⁰Interview, Mendes de Moraes, Rio de Janeiro, 22 Aug 2017

²⁹¹UJS is affiliated to the *Partido Comunista Brasileiro* - Brazilian Communist Party (PCB), while UJC is affiliated to the *Partido Comunista do Brasil* - Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB)

²⁹²Affiliated to the ANC and Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) respectively. Other groups also participated, depending on the university, including Pan Africanist Student Movement of Azania (PASMA), the youth wing of the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), and an ANC-aligned coalition, the Progressive

(Wits), for example, the first march against fee increases (14 October 2015) was called by the SASCO-led Students' Representative Council (SRC) at the time (Ndlovu 2017a, p. 30). However, in other cases, such as at the University of Johannesburg (UJ), students affiliated to political parties were more concerned with campus SRC elections and "competing for institutional positions than about participating in a growing national movement" (Lockett and Pontarelli 2016).

The second key channel for recruiting students relied on raising issues that were likely to affect a broad variety of students, irrespective of their political beliefs, past experiences, or even class position. By highlighting their shared conditions or experiences of injustice, students attempted to recruit their peers by speaking to their immediate interests (Chibber 2017b; Gamson 2002, 2013; Shelby 2002). In March 2016, at *Escola Estadual* - State School (E.E.) Mendes de Moraes, the first school occupied in Rio,²⁹³ activist students who had been supporting the ongoing teachers' strike,²⁹⁴ proposed a general meeting in the school to address how the strike would affect students while planning supportive action.²⁹⁵ In both South Africa and Brazil, active groups of students recruited new students by calling for an assembly in which they could discuss crucial issues, such as fee increases in South Africa, and school closures or teachers' strikes in Brazil. This tactic successfully drew in students who had previously been apolitical.

In the process, students sought to develop affective bonds on the basis of shared experiences and in so doing forge a common vision of the world, including a common subjectivity (Goodwin, Jasper, and Khattra 1999; Melucci 1995; Polletta and Jasper 2001). As Annika, a student activist at UCT explained, #FMMF at the university was intended to be a "a non-partisan student structure", that could bring together "those of us who were independent, PYA people, PASMA... Left Students Forum, EFF, everybody".²⁹⁶ In this process, interpersonal connections often helped already-active students draw in their friends (Klandermans and Oegema 1987; McAdam 1986; Snow, Zurcher Jr., and Ekland-Olson 1980; Somma 2009). Students also emphasised the historical legacy that their families had fought for, integrating the past sacrifices and struggles against apartheid and the military dictatorship into their appeals. In doing so, they framed their struggles as a continuation of a longer arc of historical struggles against oppression and injustice (Benford 1997; Benford and Snow 2000; Snow et al. 1986). Not all students joined for deep-seated reasons, however. Like student movements elsewhere, some students joined simply out of curiosity (Hirsch 1990).

Youth Alliance (PYA)

²⁹³Occupied 21 March 2016 to 16 May 2016

²⁹⁴March-June 2016

²⁹⁵Group Interview, Mendes de Moraes, 22 August 2017

²⁹⁶Interview, Annika, 7 April 2017

4.1.2 Politics of Inclusion and Exclusion

This recruitment process brought in new participants, beyond those already politicised or committed from the start. Many of those who became involved in this period were to become important actors in the mobilisations. However, from the very beginning, students in South Africa and Brazil grappled with questions about who could be part of the movement, and who could not. While these questions could not be settled in the tumultuous early period, they would later feed into the forms of sustained mobilisation that would take place.

In South Africa, black students comprised the core of the mobilisations. However, they worked in spaces that could morph between being inclusive and welcoming, and exclusively shunning people, and there were fuzzy boundaries between who was ‘in’ the #FMF mobilisations and who was not. At one level, self-identification and a subjective affinity was key to participating (Turner et al. 1987). Regarding oneself as part of the process was a key element for many students to perceive of their place within the movement. Even students who did not necessarily participate in many specifically ‘Fallist’ activities could identify with it. One of my interviewees at Wits considered herself to have been a part of the mobilisations, although she had been working while studying and hence had limited time to attend meetings, protest, or occupy. However, mere subjective affinity was obviously an insufficient condition. Social acceptance through activity was often necessary to distinguish participants from non-participants, as was mutual recognition by other participants (Melucci 1995; Polletta and Jasper 2001; Sartre [1960] 2004a). From the earliest days of the mobilisations, the demarcations that dictated who was included and who was rendered external were shifting and inconsistent. It was often a racialised process, but depended on local institutional history and existing forms of student organising, as well as students’ ideological outlooks. At UCT, for instance, #FMF was described as ‘open’. This was a euphemism for allowing white students in largely black student-led activities,²⁹⁷ which stood in contrast to the early-2015 #RMF mobilisations which had excluded white students. Annika described how this “changed the dynamic” because activists in #RMF were generally “less open” to political organising with white students, often having stronger ideological ties to separatist forms of Black Consciousness, Pan-Africanism and African nationalism.²⁹⁸ In other cases, exclusion was not necessarily racialised. Looking to confront patriarchal politics within their organising spaces, women and queer people experimented with organisational forms that specifically excluded men

²⁹⁷Ironically, UCT had under apartheid been prescribed as an ‘open’ university, meaning that it predominantly enrolled white students, with a minority of black students allowed to study

²⁹⁸Interview, 7 April 2017. Annika also mentioned how in early 2015, #RMF activists had been “very clear that it was a movement for black students, workers and academics, and that white students, academics and workers had to organise... amongst themselves and that manifested in, [e.g.] the White Privilege Project at the university”

(Khan 2017; Mahali 2017; Matandela 2017; Ratele 2017).²⁹⁹ At times, political affiliation also played a role, with students sometimes asked to remove visible symbols of their party affiliation or in some cases even being shouted down or asked to leave, particularly in the case of ANC-aligned students. In one case, students affiliated to the right-wing Afrikaner identitarian group Afri-Forum were blocked from a general meeting at Wits.³⁰⁰

In Brazil, mobilisations were generally claimed to be open to all high school students (*secundaristas*). This was particularly true in São Paulo, where students easily united against a state that they perceived as acting arbitrarily against students across public schools through the school closure policy. Once the state endorsed police violence against students, while ignoring all attempts to negotiate (Campos, Medeiros, and Ribeiro 2016), a clearer sense of collective identity emerged, as students were positioned in opposition to the state. The basic principle for the student activists was captured in the slogan *nós por nós* (us for us), which meant that the movement was for and by students, regardless of who those students were. Students also welcomed support from a range of other actors, including teachers who provided assistance in occupied schools, university students, and members of other social movements who were regularly invited to discuss questions ranging from the role of the state and legal advice, to issues of sexism and racism, to other social struggles in Brazil.

Because of this inclusive character, the mobilisations achieved an impressive scale of participation in both São Paulo and Rio. Students also learnt from the failures of the mass protests from 2013 to 2014 in Brazil, where the left-wing *Movimento Passe Livre* - Free Fare Movement (MPL) had been repoliticised as an anti-left force (Saad-Filho and Boito 2016). While this “takeover” had changed the “basic character” of the MPL (Wallerstein 2004, p. 637), students in 2015-16 instead grounded their participation in smaller group assemblies characterised by face-to-face participation within individual schools, and federating into city-wide coordination networks (Bookchin 2015). In doing so, core groups of activist students remained largely stable over time, with the mobilisations achieving impressive scale across cities.

However, not all students agreed on the need for social struggle, particularly not the kind that the *movimento secundarista* was undertaking. One school in Rio, for example, “became totally divided between the student strikers and occupiers, and the teachers that didn’t go on strike and the students that didn’t occupy”.³⁰¹ In São Paulo, students largely agreed on the threat of state school closures, and hence could mobilise on a large scale. In Rio, however, student mobilisation was largely sparked by support for the teachers’ strike, and many students regarded the cause as external to them and were unsure of the need for student mobilisation. One teacher at a working-class school in Rio explained,

²⁹⁹Interview, Patricia, 22 March 2017

³⁰⁰Interview, Thandolwethu, 27 March 2017

³⁰¹Interview, Francisca, teacher, 18 August 2017

Man, it was really tense. We ended up with the teachers needing to mediate between the students in the occupation, and students who wanted the school running normally. They didn't understand that the movement was happening to improve the school. They thought that because there weren't classes happening, the school was getting worse.

Interview, Gabriel, 28 August 2017

In some cases, students even actively opposed the school occupations.³⁰² Some antagonistic students went as far as to take part in *desocupa* (de-occupy) groups that attempted to block or evict student occupiers through intimidation and physical force, including assaulting the teenagers. *Desocupa* groups consisted mostly of conservative parents and community members, acting in collaboration with the military police and in complex relationships with local gangs. Some of my interviewees mentioned that some residents in the school's neighbourhood had joined *desocupa* groups because they believed hostile media reports that portrayed student occupiers as violent vandals. In South Africa, opposition to Fallist mobilisations generally was reserved to voicing dissent and criticising them, with only a few scuffles but no organised grassroots opposition. Physical action against the Fallists was largely reserved for police intervention.

The turbulence of the earliest phases of the mobilisations lent itself to confusion amongst participants and supporters, whose positions were in flux as they tried to make sense of what was happening around them. As is characteristic of moments of rupture, there was little consensus within the mobilisations on most issues, despite some common ground in opposing high tuition fees in South Africa and opposing school closures and state intransigence in Brazil. This broad base nevertheless enabled a wide variety of people to join, which would shape the ways in which the mobilisations could sustain themselves after the initial period.

4.1.3 Class Dynamics

Because of the varied recruitment strategies and patterns of inclusion in the mobilisations, the groups which constituted these mobilisations were necessarily heterogenous, bridging divides including class, race, gender and sexuality. This heterogeneity is important as people from different social locations have different interests (Chibber 2017b; Wright 1985), and are likely to have different life experiences, priorities, and ideas, shaping movements' political dynamics and imaginaries. In this section, I focus on the students' class position, which "structures the actual range of strategies that actors can pursue" (Chibber 2008, p. 364).³⁰³

³⁰²Although this is beyond the scope of this study, these cleavages are part of broader Brazilian polarisation over the last decade; see e.g. (Romancini and Castilho 2019)

³⁰³Regardless of their self-understanding or sense of identification

The class composition of South Africa's university sector generally reflects global patterns, largely populated by the children of elites who, because of South Africa's history of racial capitalism, are largely white. Of the 1 million university students in South Africa, roughly 180,000 were on financial assistance through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) in 2015, with many more ineligible for NSFAS, having household income above the mandated maximum, and hence falling into the recently-categorised 'Missing Middle' (Africa Check 2016).³⁰⁴ The rigid categorisation according to household income produced a perverse structure, in which 'Missing Middle' students were disadvantaged relative to those whose families earn slightly under the bound.³⁰⁵ In the Universities of Johannesburg and the Western Cape, the students involved in the mobilisations came largely from the working class and 'Missing Middle'. Students' experiences in these institutions were shaped to a significant extent by the challenges they faced in securing student housing, access to money for food and transport, prohibitively expensive educational materials such as books – as well as the primary hurdle of affording tuition fees in the first place. The same students also faced a university environment very different from the school system that many of them came from (Jogee, Callaghan, and Callaghan 2018; Tabensky and Matthews 2015). According to Kabelo, a lecturer at Wits, the majority of black students coming from poor backgrounds struggled to fit into the university system, where “even the language and culture” felt alien.³⁰⁶

At the privileged, Historically White Universities (HWUs) such as Wits and UCT, by contrast, most active students came from professional, middle-class families and emerging elites (Jansen 2017, p. 56).³⁰⁷ As Wits Vice-Chancellor at the time, Habib (2019) estimated, fewer than 30% of Wits undergraduate students were on NSFAS. At UCT, then Vice-Chancellor Max Price argued that students at the university were not in a dire financial situation because the university had enough resources to offer further financial aid to students in need (Jansen 2017, p. 32). However, many students at these HWUs were in the 'Missing Middle', up to roughly 60% at Wits (Habib 2019), and faced some form of financial challenges, deterring many from pursuing postgraduate study. Nevertheless, as discussed in Chapter 3, their experiences were shaped by a sense of cultural dissonance and alienation. Although fluent in discourses of struggle, the goals that middle-class students organised around fluctuated, between a desire for positions within elite spaces, and more radical demands, such as land seizures and redistribution (Makitla 2016). Mark,

³⁰⁴'Missing Middle' refers to students coming from families with a household income of above R120,000 (roughly £6,500) per year, preventing them from accessing financial aid through NSFAS, but whose incomes are still too low for them to be able to live decently (estimated at less than R350,000, or £19,000 per year)

³⁰⁵Thanks to S. Fennell for discussion on this

³⁰⁶Interview, Kabelo, 23 March 2017

³⁰⁷For broader tensions around the position of new and aspirant middle classes in South Africa, see e.g. Coninck (2018) and Zuma (2013)

a lecturer at UJ, highlighted how aspirant elites had promised to “bring the struggle to the boardrooms”,³⁰⁸ while Annika, a student at UCT, noted how “at times people thought we were overly radical... At some point we used to say ‘one settler, one bullet’ all the time”.³⁰⁹

Although the relationship between a student’s class position and their demands is clearly ambiguous, the overall class composition of a mobilisation has a bearing on its character and trajectory (Ndlovu 2017c, p. 70). Middle-class students in South Africa were crucial in enabling the mobilisations to rupture the normal operation of the institutions and the national discourse around education (ibid., p. 74), because they were more closely connected to national elites, to media organisations, and to each other across the country. As a result, their protest activity was extensively covered by news media and major political figures paid attention to their activity. As Thandolwethu, a Wits student reflected, “because us, the middle class kids decide to protest, suddenly the president finds it fit to come meet with us and tell us they are going to give us the zero percent fee increase”.³¹⁰ In South Africa, the rupture was made possible because of the combination of cross-class alliances and mass mobilisation that incorporated both poor, working class, and relatively wealthy, middle-class students. These class dynamics also shaped the patterns of ongoing mobilisation in the period following the rupture.

Class played a similarly central role in the Brazilian school mobilisations, although with students’ demands focusing on preserving public education rather than on tuition fees. One of the biggest differences between South African higher education and Brazilian secondary education is the clear class segregation in Brazilian schooling. Since the 1990s, most Brazilian students from elite families attend private schools (Pilar O’Cadiz, Wong, and Torres 1998), completely separated from the public schooling system, whereas elite South African students still attend local public universities like UCT and Wits, where they encounter students from different class backgrounds. As schooling in Brazil is also segregated through high levels of spatial inequality (Caldeira 2000), schools in poorer neighbourhoods are usually academically worse than those elsewhere, and are also more homogenous in terms of their student body coming from poor and working-class families (Cunha et al. 2009; Venco and Carneiro 2018). At the top end of the public system, in schools like *Colégio Pedro II* - Pedro II College (CPII) in Rio and Fernão Dias in São Paulo, students come from a more mixed range of backgrounds, with a bias towards wealthier and, because of Brazil’s history of slavery and racialised capitalism, whiter families (Arcand and d’Hombres 2004; Ferreira and Mellis 2015, p. 27).

The economic crisis that Brazil faced in the lead up to 2015 had a relatively homogenis-

³⁰⁸Interview, Mark, 17 March 2017

³⁰⁹Interview, Annika, 7 April 2017. The slogan, associated to the PAC, is as old as it is controversial (See e.g. Halisi 1998; Ruth 1996)

³¹⁰Interview, Thandolwethu, 27 March 2017

ing effect on the experience of poor and middle-class families, who faced similar economic pressures akin to the ‘Missing Middle’ in South Africa. This helped school students from different classes mobilise along similar lines, for similar objectives. Like in South Africa, the involvement of the middle class students was important in the earliest stages of the mobilisation. The second school occupied in São Paulo, Fernão Dias, was a relatively wealthy institution whose students come from and are well connected to Brazilian cultural elites. The students had contact with NGO networks, including Minha Sampa and the Open Society Foundation, as well as cultural activists and musicians who offered to host events and concerts at the occupied school. The visibility afforded to the students’ struggles by these contributions played a dramatic role in bringing public attention to the students’ struggles and in popularising them.³¹¹

Similarly, in Rio, students occupied the network of CPII schools in 2016. CPII is relatively privileged and is one of the only public schools that regularly ranks highly on competitive school leaving and university entrance exams such as *Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio* - National High School Exam (ENEM) (G1 2011). According to teachers and students at the school, many of the students’ families include artists and academics, and are relatively more elite than the public schooling system as a whole, although they are not necessarily part of contemporary Brazil’s ruling class.³¹² In Gávea, one of the wealthiest suburbs of Rio, students occupied *Colégio Estadual* - State School (C.E.) André Maurois and in turn had a famous Brazilian singer, Marisa Monte, perform a benefit concert that made national news (G1 2016).

While student mobilisations and occupations cut across class lines, internal differentiation in class position was visible in the significance students attributed to their struggles (Capai 2019). In São Paulo, for example, working-class students argued that the state’s proposed ‘reorganisation’ would force students to relocate to more distant schools, or split up siblings who had attended the same school.³¹³ The impact of this on poorer families was significant, as they were less able to afford the additional time and cost burden of transportation.

The sense of being disadvantaged by an elite class who were ignorant of the lives of working-class families played a significant role in the early moment of mobilisation. As Luis, a student from E.E. Diadema, in a working-class neighbourhood and the first school occupied in São Paulo, argued,

The students saw that they weren’t being represented against a class that had

³¹¹Interview, L. Trajber-Waisbich, 4 Sep 2019. Thanks to the Mawson Breakfast Conversations for developing this point

³¹²See Chapter 3 for more on CPII. Pereira and Dyke (1984) characterise this class in Brazil as “petit-bourgeois” or “technobureaucrats”

³¹³The proposed ‘reorganisation’ planned to divide schools by age range, justified on the basis that students would learn better amongst same-aged peers

privilege. . . we weren't being represented by the government, which is a part of a favoured class. All those processes that happened in 2015 were a part of a revolt from a population that is less favoured

Interview, Luis, 8 June 2017

Brazilian students' occupations therefore ranged from neglected schools in favelas and working-class neighbourhoods, to relatively elite public institutions that had produced both elites and artists, administrators, and professional workers. In both South Africa and Brazil, the (sometimes uneasy) cross-class alliances that characterised the initial mobilisations enabled students to organise at a large scale and to receive widespread attention. These class dynamics would also come to have a bearing on how the mobilisations were sustained, and how students reimagined education.

4.1.4 Intersectional Identities and Movement Building

Central to the students' frustrations, forms of organising, and ways in which they practiced and reimagined education were questions of social identity, particularly race and gender. Similar to other social movements, the moment of rupture brought these questions to the forefront of movement organising, with activists in both countries coalescing around the idea of intersectionality (Choo 2012; Smith 2013; Verloo 2013).³¹⁴

Social movements globally have historically mobilised around singular issues, often deferring other questions of social identity and oppression which were often labelled as "divisive" and marginalised to preserve "unity" (Gqola 2001; Lorde 2009; Magaziner 2011; Wallerstein 2004). In 2015, however, many students in South Africa and Brazil rejected the idea that simultaneously challenging multiple forms of oppression, particularly (hetero-)sexism and racism, was "secondary and should be addressed 'after the revolution'" (Wallerstein 2002, p. 35). Their refusal to ignore more complex social injustices for the sake of a shallow unity was a crucial development, particularly their rejection of sexism in the context of historically male-dominated Brazilian and South African student struggles (Capai 2019; Matandela 2017).³¹⁵ The moments of rupture thus brought to prominence people's diverse marginalised identities, while centring their struggles for liberation.³¹⁶

Although identities in social movements are often mistakenly presented as static or reified, students' identities were multifaceted, fluid, and liable to be reformulated through

³¹⁴The concept emerges largely in the 1990s in US academia amongst black feminists (Collins [1990] 2000; Collins and Bilge 2016; Crenshaw 1991), although traversing academic production and 'movement work' from the 1960s (hooks 1982; Smith [1983] 2000; Vogel 2018; Wallerstein 2002)

³¹⁵Interview, Maria, 5 June 2017

³¹⁶Although, as I discuss in Chapter 5, this principle was contested, particularly by men who wished to retain power within the mobilisations

the actions they undertook (Puar 2012).³¹⁷ My interlocutors framed their identities in terms of a host of factors, including sexuality, gender, race, age, body type, socio-political beliefs, faith, and relation to others. They highlighted how their self-perception had been shaped over time, and how their identities were inter-personal. In Rio, for instance, two friends who had occupied their school described themselves by saying,

Juliana: I'm a bisexual woman. I don't accept myself as a white person, but I also don't understand how I describe myself in relation to colour. I'm young, that's decisive for my ideas... and feminist, communist... I think that's it. Fat.

Marcia: I never stopped to think about how I describe myself. I'm a woman, a feminist, and now I have discovered myself as a Christian. And I found out that I'm straight (laughs).

Interview, Juliana and Marcia, 10 August 2017

In Johannesburg, Aisha found it difficult to express her identity, but saw herself “as a feminist, part of the feminist and queer movements”. As she described,

I'm a socialist, but it's always a tense space. I don't exactly belong fully anywhere... It's not necessarily a bad thing, it just means you're always thinking a bit differently, as someone on the outside.

Aisha, Interview 15 September 2017

These multiple, overlapping, complex, dynamic identities would become vital in how students organised themselves in later phases of the mobilisations.

From the start, the mobilisations' intersectionality drew in a wide range of students who may otherwise have been put off from taking part in its activities (Davis 2008), and their participation enabled them to have a significant influence ordinarily inaccessible or denied to them. In both the South African and Brazilian mobilisations, people who identified as women, black, and LGBTI+ were central actors.³¹⁸ For these students, in a socio-political context that often denies them their humanity or their identity, their centrality in the mobilisations can be read as an assertion of their existence, their presence, and their agency (Aspis 2017). Thus, from the earliest stages of the mobilisations, the prominence of people whose social identities are marginalised in 'ordinary' daily life, notably queer and trans black women, was a rupture in the normalised dynamics and representations of political activity, including social movement activity (Khan 2017, p. 4). As Maria, a student in São Paulo, observed,

³¹⁷In my fieldwork, I tried to acknowledge the dynamic and intersectional process of identity formation and its relationship to the broader movement, for instance by asking how students would “describe themselves”, without specifying what this description needed to entail

³¹⁸Interview, José, teacher in Rio, 20 September 2016

Those who spoke [in public, for the movement] were mostly women. When it was a man, it was a black man. To show that there was representativeness, right? It's important... People identified with it. Those people who almost never speak in Brazil, were at the front of the movement

Interview, Maria, 5 June 2017

From the earliest moments of rupture, students in South Africa and Brazil challenged gendered patterns of labour division, challenging gendered biases and stereotypes. In Brazil, for instance, Alegria (2017b) notes how women quickly became predominant in more cognitive and political roles in movement organising, which had been traditionally reserved for male activists. Likely because at the start of the student mobilisations, many activist women already had experience of feminist organising, female participants explained this change by arguing that women “have been in this for a while, we’ve already been concerned with these issues, we’ve been occupying these [leadership] spaces”. Although some forms of traditional gender roles were reproduced, there was a significant and historically unusual role reversal when non-leadership work was “left with the boys”, because they “didn’t know how to do anything [else]” (ibid., pp. 8–9). Similar patterns emerged in South Africa, albeit with stronger cleavages between patriarchal and feminist currents (Ndelu, Dlakavu, and Boswell 2017).³¹⁹ The ‘double burden’ of struggle was identified more readily in South Africa, where women and non-binary students felt they had to fight both the battles of the movement overall, as well as against patriarchy within the movement (Hotz 2017; Khan 2017; Mahali 2017; Ndlovu 2017b). The moment of rupture in South Africa nevertheless enabled feminist students to challenge patriarchal norms and put gender ‘on the agenda’ more overtly than before.

4.2 Student-Worker Alliances

Bafundi nabasebenzi manyanani!

Students and workers unite!

Mahlangu (2017, p. 27)

Alliances between students and workers were crucial for creating this moment of rupture in both contexts. Students forged alliances with teaching and academic staff, as well as with operations workers such as cleaners and cooks. Educational institutions rely on the participation and labour of their students and workers to function, as discussed in Chapter 2, and thus these student-worker alliances were able to severely disrupt campuses. In South Africa, these struggles undermined the hegemonic justification for outsourcing, namely the distinction between “core” and “non-core” work (Bardill 2008; Bezuidenhout

³¹⁹For more on these cleavages, see Chapter 5

and Fakier 2006; Lockett and Mzobe 2016), and thereby fundamentally challenged one aspect of neoliberal hegemony within the institutions. As Mabasa (2017, p. 130), a Fallist at Wits argues, “the university, without cleaning services, would be ungovernable, and automatically the university administration would be dysfunctional”.

As discussed in Chapter 3, Brazilian teachers had gone on strike prior to the student mobilisations, in March 2015 in São Paulo and March 2016 in Rio. However, they had not achieved their demands and their actions were “reabsorbed into the pre-existing structure” (Sewell 1996, p. 843), becoming simply another episode in Brazil’s long history of labour struggles. However, the militancy of rank-and-file teachers in their trade unions did lay the groundwork for the student-led mobilisations that followed.

In South Africa, the student-worker alliances challenged the decade-old, institutionalised practice of outsourcing operations workers. Students and workers, acting collectively under the banner of #OutsourcingMustFall, secured early victories at numerous universities across the country, including management conceding to insource workers at UCT (28 Oct 2015) and Wits (1 Nov 2015). These struggles for workers’ rights also reshaped national discourse, with news media around the country rapidly acknowledging their significance (Nkosi 2015; Petersen 2015). This was a dramatic shift in education workers’ struggles, standing in sharp contrast to the invisibility of outsourcing in the public sphere, despite numerous previous debates and protests (Bardill 2008; Johnson 2001; Walt et al. 2002, 2003). As Leonard, a lecturer at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), explained, “the insourcing of workers was never taken seriously until #FMF put it on the agenda”.³²⁰

Student-worker strikes shut down several universities across the country (Booyesen 2016a, p. 324), most noticeably at the University of Pretoria (UP), where “between 80 and 90 per cent of workers, including security workers, downed tools and the university was forced to close down after three days of strike action” (Hamilton 2017, p. 189). These student-worker alliances broke with the “dictated rules of engagement” of following bureaucratic institutional channels of permission and containment (Lockett and Pontarelli 2016). Both workers and students opted for forms of direct action, assessing for themselves the best forms of engagement. Rather than remaining subject to university strictures, they “made their own laws in action” (ibid.), and their actions were thus significantly more self-determined than usual.

4.2.1 Workers’ Struggles as Catalysts for Student Organising

In both South Africa and Brazil, workers’ struggles predated and were crucial catalysts for the period of student-led rupture in late 2015. Without workers’ struggles, fewer students would likely have been involved in the period of rupture, and in some cases, students may not have mobilised at all.

³²⁰Interview, Leonard, 29 June 2018

Educational workers' struggles in South Africa played a key role in initiating the major national rupture of #FMM. The day after the #October6 (#Oct6) anti-outsourcing protest, students and workers from universities in Johannesburg met at UJ to reflect on their success and chart a way forward. According to a student at the meeting,

[Wits] outgoing SRC president, Shaera Kalla, who had been part of #Oct6, came to the meeting and said 'we've been in negotiations with our council, they're going ahead with their massive fee increase. . . We're going to protest now, before exams. Would you be prepared to use the networks and momentum that's been created and take this into another protest around fees?'

Interview, Patricia, 22 March 2017

From its inception, then, the issues of student fees and outsourced workers were integral to the student-worker alliances in Johannesburg, although shifting organising from the banner of #Oct6 to #EndOutsourcing.³²¹ Similarly, in Cape Town, Ramaru (2017, p. 95) argues that UCT students who had been involved in the #Oct6 campaign followed the example of the Wits student-worker alliance to "adopt the programme as part of our organising". Elsewhere, these alliances were less clear-cut. At UWC, for instance, students and workers only undertook an #EndOutsourcing protest at the end of 2015 (University of the Western Cape Student Representative Council 2015). It was, according to Beverley, a lecturer at UWC, "a bit belated and quite messy", with student and worker struggles often operating in "parallel" rather than as an alliance.³²²

In general, workers' struggles had a direct, early influence on students' own mobilisations. At UJ, for example, the student movement was "very weak" without SRC backing.³²³ One student there recalled that,

When the workers went on strike we just literally rode on that. For the three-week strike, a small band of militant students supported it, pushing for more radical action and organising funds. That made us important, because we were filling a vacuum left by the trade union.

Interview, Aisha, 15 September 2017

Students at UJ who had supported the workers' struggles were perceived as "people who could be trusted in that moment", and were able to mobilise students to participate in #FMM.³²⁴

³²¹Commentators, such as Beukes (2017), are thus factually and chronologically inaccurate when arguing that the #EndOutsourcing and #OutsourcingMustFall campaigns were a "spin-off" from #FMM. Although they were not identical, they were in fact integrally interwoven

³²²Interview, Beverley, 6 April 2017

³²³Interview, Aisha, 15 September 2017

³²⁴Interview, Aisha, 15 September 2017

In Brazil, education workers played a similarly important role as a catalyst for student mobilising. Maria, a student in São Paulo, argued that “the struggle for a better education, for improvements, first came from the teachers”, followed by militant students like herself.³²⁵ These militant students had supported the 2015 São Paulo teachers’ strike by initiating a school shutdown in April 2015. In turn, rank-and-file teachers who had become radicalised during the strike supported students’ struggles once the ‘reorganisation’ policy was announced. In São Paulo, there were fewer connections in schools between students and *terceirizados* (outsourced operations workers). Carlos, a student at E.E. Maria Elena Colonia, in a peripheral South-East neighbourhood of São Paulo, mentioned how “there are people that don’t want to know about outsourcing, it doesn’t matter much to them”.³²⁶ Nevertheless, although not as widely as in South Africa, students in some Brazilian schools did connect with outsourced workers, recognising how important they were for making schools a place that students wanted to attend. At his school, Carlos argued, this was because workers were also “neighbours”,

Whoever works there, even if they are outsourced, is from the community. We have this relationship. And besides... When we’re fighting for a collective, it’s for the collective. Nobody gets left behind.

Interview, Carlos, 29 May 2017

In Rio, both teachers and *funcionários* (operations workers) were more important for students’ struggles, having undertaken collective action that preceded the students’ mobilisations and occupations. Because of the state’s financial crisis, some schools had no budget to hire essential workers. In other cases, workers had not been paid for months leading up to the occupations, and in at least one case, some workers had still not been paid by September 2016, months after the occupations had ended.³²⁷ Students at ISERJ described how their main motivation to self-organise and occupy the school was because “the general services in the school stopped working. There was no food, cleaning, or security”.³²⁸

From the outset, workers’ conditions were central in students’ concerns, and their struggles were also one of the inspirations for students’ own collective action. In this sense, student-worker alliances were a catalyst for the student-led mobilisations which ruptured their education institutions.

³²⁵Interview, Maria, 5 June 2017

³²⁶Interview, Carlos, 29 May 2017

³²⁷Group Interview, *Instituto Superior de Educação do Rio de Janeiro* - Higher Education Institute of Rio de Janeiro (ISERJ) students and workers, 19 September 2016

³²⁸Group Interview, ISERJ students, 19 September 2016

4.2.2 New Relationships of Solidarity

The formation of these alliances was also a rupture in how students and educational workers related to one another, changing existing patterns of sociality within educational institutions. From its earliest moments, student-worker alliances broke with individualistic, career-advancing norms on campuses, and built a sense of commonality that was grounded in a change of interpersonal relations and everyday interactions.

However, these new relations were not guaranteed (Chibber 2017b). New student-worker relations were major accomplishments, forged through struggle. In South Africa, for instance, Lockett and Pontarelli (2016) argues that “an internal struggle within the students’ movement took place in order to put workers’ issues at the centre of the agenda and to not allow these issues to be optional”, while conversely, workers acted despite their vulnerability to institutional backlash, risking their jobs and safety in supporting students. Because students had supported workers during the earlier phases of struggle, and workers had in turn supported students’ initial protests against fees, the alliance-building was largely successful. From the start of #FMF, the student-worker alliances were thus built through continuous interactions and mutual support. Mahlangu (2017, p. 27) thus argues that this solidarity “translated into real action, not mere rhetoric or slogan that it was for years preceding this major breakthrough”.

As a result, students and workers acted with respect for and in concert with one another. Deliwe Mzobe, a worker-activist at Wits, described how “the workers look up to the students. They give us support, we give them support” (Lockett and Mzobe 2016, p. 96). Hamilton (2017, pp. 182, 190) argues that this was a form of class solidarity which was able to challenge the atomised and individualised norms on campus that had separated outsourced workers from the rest of the university community. As I discuss further in Chapter 6, these were not only strategic, but also emotional relationships which which broke through the alienated relations on campus. Deliwe, a worker-leader at Wits, argued for example that “the workers support the students because of the care and the love we get from the students” (Lockett and Mzobe 2016, p. 96).

In Brazil, student and teachers’ interests coincided, providing an important platform from which to build new forms of solidarity. In São Paulo, for instance, Talita, a teacher at Diadema, argued that the school reorganisation also threatened teachers’ livelihoods. As a result, students and teachers were positioned as allies. She argued that, “whether they meant to or not, the students joined the teachers’ struggles. When they decided to occupy the school, it wasn’t just the student’s struggle... it was also the teacher’s struggle”³²⁹ At the same time, students’ relations with teachers and *funcionários* depended significantly on their political positions, specifically whether such workers were in favour

³²⁹Interview, Talita, 8 June 2017

of strikes and occupations.³³⁰ Where such alliances developed, however, solidarity between teachers and students enabled new forms of relationship to emerge. During my fieldwork, in each school I visited, students and teachers alike emphasised their appreciation for this solidarity,³³¹ and how this had started to change how they saw themselves in relation to one another. In particular, this ruptured hierarchical teacher-student relationships, and students and teachers began to see themselves as a family, which informed how they reimagined education, as I discuss in Chapter 6.

In practice, student-worker solidarity took multiple forms. Most visibly, students and workers protested together from the beginning, and sat side-by-side in meetings. These spaces enabled workers and students to share their experiences, learn from one another, and discuss alternative possibilities and pathways forward (Hamilton 2017, p. 188). In South Africa, it was often difficult for outsourced workers to participate in these spaces, and they sometimes had to undertake “unprotected strikes for a few hours each day” to be “part of students’ activities” (Luckett and Pontarelli 2016). The result, however, were powerful acts of solidarity. One student at Wits described the university gates during the first campus shutdown in mid-October 2015, where workers “stood steadfastly with us, without fear” (ibid.). Similarly, Deliwe described how “in some instances the students risked their degrees for us, for example the MJL case where students occupied the Vice Chancellor’s office” (Luckett and Mzobe 2016, p. 96).

Some of this solidarity was built behind the scenes. In South Africa and Brazil, students and workers fundraised for one another, including for strike funds, bail money, and supplies. In Brazil, teachers also facilitated conversations between schools, assisting with transport and communication. Brazilian teachers were also on call to aid students against incursions by the state, particularly the police. As Gabriel, a teacher in Rio state recalled,

because I live close to the school, my phone was on 24 hours a day, waiting for anything to happen, especially at dawn. We feared that at any moment, the police could arrive at the school to take the kids away³³²

Interview, Gabriel, 19 September 2016

In South Africa, the new student-worker alliances also offered a space for new forms of solidarity amongst educational workers who had been fragmented across different industrial sectors (Luckett and Pontarelli 2016), between different outsourced companies (Hamilton 2017), different trade unions (Callaghan 2018), and between ‘core’ and ‘non-core’ staff.

³³⁰Interview, Francisca, teacher in Rio, 18 August 2017

³³¹Despite, in numerous instances, teachers being victimised for supporting their students by the state or their school administration, often having to request their trade union to prevent them from being punished

³³²Technically, the Secretariat of Security had a legal instrument to ‘reintegrate the possession’ of schools, which entailed the use of police to forcibly vacate a building and return it to its legal owner. According to Gabriel, this had only been prevented in his school because the school board refused to call for it

Although not extensive, the alliances even built links between community organisations, social movements, and trade unions beyond the university (Luckett and Pontarelli 2016).

4.2.3 Conscientisation and Mutual Learning

Student-worker alliances not only catalysed the student-led mobilisations and shifted their relational terrain. It also broke apart existing pedagogical relationships and assumptions, enabled mutual learning, and hence enabled students to become quickly conscientised, rapidly radicalising their demands. This was not only a rupture in their ideas, but also ensured that their mobilisations as a whole were more radical, thus posing more of a disruptive threat to their educational institutions.

In Brazil, these alliances were primarily between students and teaching workers. Students thus learned politically from their teachers, as teachers were to learn from their students. During their strikes, teachers explained to their students the causes of the dispute and their motivation and reasons underlying their collective action. Matheus, a teacher at Diadema in São Paulo, argued that as a result, this built a connection that made it “easier for you to have the students’ support”.³³³ In turn, when students occupied Diadema, Matheus and other teachers were “on their side, because we had this exchange”. While not unanimous, Matheus emphasised that teachers helped their students because, “after all, it was the fruit of our critiques that were being put into practice, right?”.³³⁴

In addition, these alliances enabled a form of inter-generational learning and historical continuity (Dyke 1998). For students, particularly those without extensive experience in activism or organising, the interactions with workers were essential. In cases where trade unions were present, or where workers had prior experience organising within them, unions could function as “learning organisations” and repositories of knowledge learned in struggle (Cooper 2006; Hamilton 2017). In South Africa, for instance, outsourced workers could share their own histories of struggle and activist knowledge amongst new generations of students. This was because workers’ struggles continued even when students “returned to normal” after previous waves of protest.³³⁵

In Brazil, teachers could go beyond the narrow pedagogy present in ordinary schooling, to provide a broader perspective on immediate issues facing students, as well as strategic advice grounded in their own experiences of student activism. Gabriel, a teacher in Rio, argued that the initial organisation of the occupations was challenging. At the start, students thought

that it would be like a great camping holiday. So... we had some problems making the whole thing work. Teachers’ participation was really important, because some

³³³Interview, Matheus, 8 June 2017

³³⁴Interview, Matheus, 8 June 2017

³³⁵Interview, Aisha, 15 September 2017

teachers already had experiences of occupations in Brazilian Universities

Interview, Gabriel, 28 August 2017

In many of these cases, young teachers like Gabriel who had been at Brazilian universities between 2007-2009 had mounted a wave of occupations and protests against university reforms under Lula.³³⁶ They had, according to Gabriel, been “formed” by the experience, and shared these experiences with their students.³³⁷ As a result, from the earliest *secundarista* mobilisations and occupations, teachers had a “much broader pedagogical role than we usually have in our day to day work”.³³⁸

From the earliest phases, students who worked closely with workers underwent a major shift in their focus, moving from struggles in their own interest towards significantly more radical demands and actions. Students and workers quickly developed a more radical understanding of what they were challenging, towards structural conditions that produced the problems they experienced (Freire [1970] 2006).

In South African universities, students not only developed their demands as a result of what they had learnt from workers’ struggles that preceded the #FMM mobilisations. They also prioritised ways of undertaking struggles that moved beyond critique, towards changing the conditions around them. A student at Wits, for instance, argued that students’ experiences of the #Oct6 actions changed their views on what forms of struggle were required,

because the collection of people included outsourced workers, it was very clear that you can’t just talk and write. We actually have to *do* something because our material conditions are fucked up and we need to change them. It was this interesting combination of pressure towards radical praxis. Not just talking – talking *and* action

Interview, Patricia, 22 March 2017

Student-worker alliances thus meant that those involved were both thinking and reflecting on their actions and the conditions they found themselves in, while also preparing and undertaking actions to change those conditions.

These radicalised demands and praxis-oriented modes of struggle created a space in which student-worker alliances broke with existing hegemonic social arrangements, creating a moment of possibility that pointed towards different futures. Garba (2017),³³⁹ for instance, argued that, “in the hands of the workers movement”, #FMM

can be turned into an essential transitional part of the struggle... It means decisions about all social services including education been brought in the hands of a new workers’ movement... based on [human] needs.

³³⁶Thanks to A. Khoury and M. Rocha for discussion on this

³³⁷Interview, Gabriel, 28 August 2017

³³⁸Interview, Gabriel, 28 August 2017

³³⁹See also Garba (2015)

The centrality of outsourced workers in South Africa was crucial for challenging one final aspect of the existing educational system. Their importance as part of mutual learning networks from the earliest stages of the mobilisations ruptured the pattern of knowledge valorisation in existing educational institutions, making visible questions of what counts as knowledge and whose knowledge counts. Crucially, teachers/academics had been situated at the pinnacle of knowledge, with students learning from them, and supposedly “non-core” staff outside of those who are supposed to be knowledgeable. This was challenged by the mobilisations, thereby deconstructing hierarchies of knowledge which had been constructed in the interests of capitalist-colonial control (Garba 2015).

Students recognised the importance of outsourced workers’ knowledge from early on. In Johannesburg, for instance, the #Oct6 group contacted UCT workers to request a Workers’ Charter they had developed in 2004-5 (Barry 2015).³⁴⁰ The charter opposed outsourcing, and called for a living wage, decent pensions, secure jobs, decent working conditions, democratic collective organising, institutional financial transparency, childcare, and paid time for workers’ education, union work, and parental leave (Feminist Alternatives 2011, p. 50). Students in Johannesburg affiliated to the #Oct6 group wanted to know what UCT workers had already argued were the problems with outsourcing, and “what they wanted in replacement”.³⁴¹

Students’ desires to learn from outsourced workers shook the ‘hidden curriculum’ that implicitly taught university students that white academics were knowledgeable and black manual labourers were not, and normalised such conditions (Hamilton 2017, p. 182).³⁴² This returns knowledge to the status of something that *all* people can have and should have access to (Garba 2015; Neocosmos 2017c).

4.3 Disruptive Tactics

Ruptures are periods in which existing patterns of behaviour and belief are broken apart, enabling new possibilities to emerge. In this section, I argue that the tactics that students adopted were crucial in producing such a rupture in their institutions.³⁴³ While students adopted a variety of tactics, there were two that were particularly important for instantiating ruptures: shutdowns and occupations. Occupations and shutdowns matter because they were the most common political tactics employed across all four cities,

³⁴⁰The UCT Charter’s own roots may lie in further intergenerational workers’ learning, with attempts to develop a sectoral workers’ charter by the South African Clothing and Textile Workers’ Union (SACTWU) in the early 1990s (Sherratt 1990), and the 1989 Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) Workers’ Charter, with links to debates in the 1970s-80s on the significance for workers of the 1955 Freedom Charter (South African History Online 2017)

³⁴¹Interview, Patricia, 22 March 2017

³⁴²Identified by a student interviewed in Desai (2018). See also Grange (2016)

³⁴³It is worth noting that choosing to focus on different tactics will generate highly variable portrayals and normative assessments of what the mobilisations were “really like” (Isdahl 2016)

spreading rapidly from campus to campus, with a dramatic impact on their institutions. These tactics emerge in both regions from a particular historical conjunction, both global and contextual.

Occupations and shutdowns were able to produce a rupture because they quite literally brought to a halt the everyday social practices that produce and reproduce educational institutions, and their associated forms of knowledge and ignorance (Wa Bofelo 2017). Occupations that target the specific institutions that are required to reproduce capitalism, such as the labour force or state power, go beyond symbolism.³⁴⁴ Instead, they assert public ownership of social life while specifically prioritising those who are disenfranchised and relatively powerless (Flacks 2004; Silva 2017a). They also emerge from the “power of the powerless”, which “is rooted in their capacity to stop the smooth flow of social life” (Flacks 2004, p. 141). In this sense, they can be read as a challenge to foundational questions of property and authority, on which capitalism and the nation-state rest. By asserting popular ownership of established institutions, such as schools and universities, the wave of occupations may come to represent, in their best manifestations, a turning point in the tactical repertoire of counter-hegemonic politics (Nişancioğlu and Pal 2016). Occupations are not simply about demanding a share the benefits of the status quo, but in their more radical forms are the practical assertion of being able to take over and run institutions without mediation.

4.3.1 Tactical Repertoires

Students in both South Africa and Brazil exhibited relatively wide-ranging tactical repertoires. According to Tarrow (1993a,b) and Tilly (1978, 1986, 1993), these are the set of learned, shared, and acted routines of protest, both what people know how to do and what they actually do.

Some actions were intended to boost the mobilisations’ visibility, drawing attention and highlighting injustice, such as demonstration marches and ‘die-ins’, where students pretended to be killed *en masse* in public spaces (Macleod et al. 2018). Interwoven with these were actions designed to inform observers, potential allies, each other, and sometimes even antagonists, such as holding public rallies with speeches and placards, writing petitions, manifestos, lists of demands, or letters to media houses. In some instances, specific creative tactics were adopted to address particular issues, such as the 2016 Shackville protest at

³⁴⁴This confrontational, disruptive element is a significant difference between these occupations and the ‘square’ occupations and Occupy Movement of the late 2000s to early 2010s. While Occupy challenged the reproduction of neoliberal capitalism and bureaucratic management in primarily *spectacular, symbolic* ways (Debord 1992), they were often difficult to sustain without diverting resources from elsewhere (Chibber 2017a). Students’ occupations are thus in some ways more akin to workers’ factory occupations and self-administrated workers’ councils (Ness and Azzellini 2011), such as those in Argentina in the 1990s-2000s responding to mass closures of factories under neoliberal reforms (Atzeni and Ghigliani 2007; Ranis 2006; Rossi 2014), or in the Italian ‘Hot Autumn’ of 1969 (Tarrow 1989; Virno and Hardt 1996)

UCT, where students erected a shack in the centre of the university's main campus to draw attention to the lack of student housing, as well as the bifurcated worlds between the 'settler-colonial'/'white' space of UCT and South Africa's black townships (Dhlamini, Charlie, and Dougan 2018; Gillespie and Naidoo 2019; Mkhabela 2016).³⁴⁵ In other cases, such as in the *Rouba Merenda* (Stolen Snacks) scandal of 2016, students mass flyposted "silent agitators",³⁴⁶ trying to create public outcry by publicising how the São Paulo state government had stolen money assigned for a school feeding scheme (Alves and Santos 2016; Fukushima and Queluz 2016). In Johannesburg, the Hoopoe Collective³⁴⁷ created public artwork to draw attention to issues, including the workers' struggles (Fikeni 2016; Mkhwanazi 2016; Mupotsa 2017).

Beyond awareness-raising, students adopted tactics that aimed at shifting balances of power, or attempting to force negotiations on favourable terms. This included blockading campuses and preventing police or other authorities from accessing the space, such as by locking school gates in Brazil or burning tyres at the entrance to university campuses in South Africa. While these were primarily spatial tactics focused on reshaping power relations, because they involved concentrated gatherings of activists, they could also serve as spaces of learning (Harley 2014b; Moyo 2017; Stovall 2016). Many of the tactics adopted, however, were intended for those within the mobilisations. Some involved creating communities of care and support, such as peer counselling and experience-sharing in a trusted environment (Mahali 2017). Others were celebrations of collective joy and creations of *communitas*, an ecstatic and profound sense of connectedness and commonality arising beyond the "regular structures of life" (Segal 2018; Turner 2012). These joyous occasions manifested, for instance in Brazilian students' *saraus*, cultural mini-festivals of music, dancing, poetry, and similar forms of creative expression (Doyle and Bezerra 2016; Marinho 2018). Some of these internal tactics were also more overtly political, such as decision-making structures like assemblies, which I discuss Chapter 5.

These tactics enabled students to build the mobilisations, frame their demands, expose injustice, and support one another. However, they did not, in themselves, directly prevent "business as usual", and thereby rupture the educational systems and practices that students were opposing. There were, however, several tactics that students adopted aimed at preventing the continued, ordinary functioning of what students perceived to be an oppressive structure in their educational institutions. Such tactics included interrupting meetings of university Vice-Chancellors, protesting at awards ceremonies, or in some cases preventing classes from taking place.

³⁴⁵See <https://fb.com/RhodesMustFall/posts/1676179165990908>

³⁴⁶Stickers or posters designed to raise political consciousness without active intervention (Juravich 2011, p. 144; Konopacki 2002)

³⁴⁷See <https://www.instagram.com/projecthoopoe/> and <https://twitter.com/projecthoopoe>

4.3.2 Shutdowns and Occupations

The two most important tactics that students adopted which ruptured education institutions, however, were *shutdowns* and *occupations*. These should not be seen in isolation, however, as they often overlapped with, emerged from, or fed into the tactics described above. In particular, there was extensive overlap between the tactics of occupations and *assemblies*: many of the assemblies took place within occupied spaces, and many of the occupations arose from assemblies of students who took the decision to occupy. Notably, students often shifted from relatively ‘spectacular’ modes of protest to more overtly disruptive ones, in a process that Flacks (2004, p. 140) describes as “striving to maximize the power they can bring to bear”.

In both South Africa and Brazil, students undertook numerous occupations and shutdowns over the course of 2015-16. In some cases, they targeted administrative buildings and management offices within the educational institutions themselves, such as the administrative Bremner Building (renamed Azania House) in March 2015 during #RMF, and again in April 2017, and Senate House (renamed Solomon Mahlangu House) at Wits in January 2016 (Liphosa and Dennis 2017).³⁴⁸ Elsewhere, students targeted the state’s administrative centres. In May 2016, for instance, students occupied the *Centro Paula Souza* in São Paulo, the administrative centre of Universities of Technology (Faculdades de Tecnologia, Fatecs) and Technical Schools (Escolas Técnicas, Etecs). In Cape Town, students attempted to shut down the Department of Home Affairs in a protest against Xenophobia and Afrophobia, but were unable to as they were assaulted by private security.³⁴⁹

The most common aspect of this, adopted from the earliest period of the mobilisations, was for Brazilian students to occupy their entire schools and South African students to occupy significant hubs on university campuses. Because occupying a school is relatively easier than occupying a part of a larger university campus, students’ experiences of *occupation* was more central in Brazil than in South Africa.

The adoption of shutdowns and occupations had a broad historical basis in post-2008 struggles against privatisation of the commons, as I discussed in Chapter 3. However, they had rarely been used in South African and Brazilian students’ repertoires of struggle, and their adoption was therefore a break from existing patterns of protest and challenge. Students’ use of occupations had specific contextual roots in both Brazil³⁵⁰ and South

³⁴⁸Bremner/Azania House was occupied again in April 2017, and Senate/Solomon Mahlangu House was occupied again in January 2019. See https://twitter.com/Wits_SRC/status/1092651495898705921

³⁴⁹Interview, Annika, UCT, 7 April 2017

³⁵⁰In Brazil, early forms included people who had escaped slavery setting up autonomous Quilombo communities (Leite 2015). Land occupations have more recently been adopted by social movements and marginalised groups, including in rural land occupations often under the banner of the MST (Sigaud, Hernandez, and Rosa 2010), to squatting and urban land occupations (Holston 2009; Stevens 2019; Wittger 2017). Recent urban occupations, particularly under the MTST, challenge top-down urban planning

Africa.³⁵¹ To understand why students prioritised these tactics, it is necessary to examine each case in turn.

4.3.2.1 “Vamos ocupar a escola!”: Brazilian Students Turn to Occupations

The first school occupied in São Paulo was E.E. Diadema, a school in a working-class neighbourhood. The students and teachers I interviewed at Diadema described their adoption of occupations being grounded in local conditions and a political analysis of the existing forms of struggle. Diadema itself, one student told me, “was always a city partially constructed through occupations”, with migrant workers building homes for themselves on unused land in the area south of central São Paulo, and local students knew this from their families and surroundings.³⁵² These practices formed part of the local understanding of possibility of *occupying space* as part of the available tactical repertoire (Alonso and Mische 2016; Tarrow 1993a; Tilly 1993; Traugott 1994).

Occupying a school, however, was a new tactic for Brazilian *secundaristas*. Students at Diadema had heard about this, specifically, through the pamphlet *Como Ocupar Seu Colegio* (How to Occupy Your School), a Portuguese translation of the Chilean students’ guide, produced by the autonomist student collective *O Mal Educado* (The Badly Educated), discussed in Chapter 3. Student activists distributed the pamphlet in person amongst students in various schools and on students’ Whatsapp groups (Campos, Medeiros, and Ribeiro 2016, p. 54). Initially, many students in São Paulo thought the idea would not work. Their early protests against the state’s reorganisation had been ignored, and students felt frustrated. Some felt like they had run out of other options, and, according to Luis, a student at Diadema, “we decided to occupy, literally, because we had no other choice”.³⁵³ Others thought the idea was “crazy”, but still wanted to try in case it was possible (ibid., p. 82). Some saw it as a valuable tactic, recognising its success in Chile, and decided to try confronting the state on similar terms. On the 9th of November 2015, “we entered to have classes and didn’t leave again. That lasted until the 23rd of December [2015], which was about 42 days”, according to Carol, a student at Diadema.³⁵⁴ This was rapidly replicated. Hours after the E.E. Diadema occupation, students at E.E. Fernão Dias Paes occupied their school in the wealthier Pinheiros suburb of central São Paulo.

relating to the 2014 FIFA World Cup and 2016 Olympics (Boulos and Silva 2014)

³⁵¹In South Africa, there is a long history of land occupations and squatting in urban fringes (Makhulu 2015). Since the 2000s, popular movements have undertaken urban land occupations, particularly by Abahlali baseMjondolo (2018) in KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape (Pithouse 2006), the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign, and Symphony Way Pavement Dwellers (2011), often in alliance in the Landless People’s Movement (Hart 2006). Like in Brazil, these were partially in opposition to state prioritisation of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa (Patel 2011)

³⁵²Group Interview, Diadema, 8 June 2017. See also Stevens (2019)

³⁵³Interview, Luis, 8 June 2017

³⁵⁴Interview, Carol, 8 June 2017

The first school occupied in Rio was E.E. Mendes de Moraes on the 21st of March 2016. Mendes is located in Ilha do Governador, a densely packed island suburb dominated by military and commercial airports, composed of a mix of working and middle-class neighbourhoods and poor favelas. According to Francisca, a teacher there, the school was “not accustomed to occupations”, and students and staff alike were largely unfamiliar with the tactic.³⁵⁵ Nevertheless, some students had been following the occupations in São Paulo, and when students created a mass assembly in the first month of the teacher’s strike, they voted to occupy the school, in defiance of state threats of legal action against them and their guardians (Cerqueira et al. 2016). Lucas, who arrived later in the day for the second *turno* (afternoon classes), found the school already occupied, and decided to join and strengthen the occupation.³⁵⁶ Occupations were frequently endorsed by an elated, emotionally charged mass assembly which collectively decided to adopt the tactic.³⁵⁷ According to Fernanda, a student at one of the CPII schools in Rio, the highly politicised students who initially called the assembly were eager to occupy, but

We decided not to mention the occupation. We left the idea to come from them, so as to not have this pressure of indoctrination, none of that bullshit. . . we arrived there and started talking about what was happening, to see what people’s position was, and suddenly everyone started shouting “Occupy! Occupy! Occupy!”, like hundreds of people. We had more people than we needed to make it legitimate. The auditorium was packed.

Interview, Fernanda, 24 August 2017

Once the first schools had been occupied, students at other schools in the state were quick to adopt the tactic themselves. In doing so, Brazilian students broke with existing patterns of organising, and presented a new challenge to state and institutional authorities.

4.3.2.2 “Guys, we’re going to shut down the University on Thursday”: South African Students Turn to Occupations

University occupations in South Africa were also rare prior to 2015.³⁵⁸ In the 2000s, students at Wits had “occupied a manager’s office because of twenty-seven workers being fired”, but the tactic had not become an integral part of South African students’ tactical repertoires.³⁵⁹ The early 2015 “black student movements”, particularly #RMF at UCT, changed this, as #RMF students first occupied the Bremner Administration Building

³⁵⁵Interview, Francisca, 18 August 2017

³⁵⁶Interview, Lucas, 22 August 2017

³⁵⁷See Chapter 5 for further discussion of the political form of the Assembly

³⁵⁸Although in the 1960s-70s, students had occasionally used the tactic. As discussed Chapter 3, for instance, students at UCT briefly occupied the administration building during the Mafeje Affair (Hendricks 2008; Ntsebeza 2014, 2016)

³⁵⁹Interview, Patricia, 22 March 2017

on 20 March 2015 (#RhodesMustFall 2015a).³⁶⁰ According to Ahmed (2019, pp. 29–30), a short occupation was pre-planned, but it had quickly taken on a different shape once students took control of the space. For the most part, students had no idea of any planned occupation (ibid., pp. 28–30). One student at UCT described this first occupation as being “almost by accident... we were protesting outside, and suddenly students had stormed the building”.³⁶¹ Once students had occupied at UCT, the tactic quickly spread to other universities (Godsell and Chikane 2016). It also influenced the tactics that students at UCT adopted throughout 2015, including the #FMM rupture in late 2015 (#RhodesMustFall 2015d; Ahmed 2017; Chikane 2018a).

October 2015 saw students adopting new tactics across the country. With the momentum of the #Oct6 workers’ struggles, students began organising against the proposed fee increase for the 2016 academic year. The Wits SRC had tried to negotiate against the increase with university management, but were unsuccessful. A small group of students, some linked to the SRC, decided to call for a shutdown of the campus. Tasneem, a student at Wits, described how,

I was sitting with the nine people that supposedly started the movement at Wits. We were basically just friends and we were all sitting there... and they were like ‘guys, we’re going to shut down the University on Thursday’ *laughs*

I looked at them and I was like... are you mad? Can you even hear what you’re saying? That’s not even possible. I didn’t pitch up here early on Thursday morning, but then when I got here, I realised they actually shut this place down.

Interview, Tasneem, 22 March 2017

Like in Brazil, the first suggestions of shutting down and occupying a campus was met with incredulity, even amongst supporters of the movement. Nevertheless, they were carried out and quickly changed the balance of power, forcing concessions from authorities. Shortly after the first day of the Wits shutdown on the 14th of October, protests erupted at other universities. At times, these mirrored the tactics students used at Wits and UCT. In many cases, however, they were coordinated through direct networks of communication that had been facilitated since the “black student movements” of early 2015. Annika, a student at UCT, highlighted that students across the country had converged on the idea of a National Shutdown after meeting at the National Higher Education Summit on the 15th of October.³⁶² The National Shutdown was set for the 19th of October, which one UCT student described as being,

a decisive and important moment in our movement. It was the first time we experienced heightened levels of violence from the university, middle-class white students, academics and parents etc. That contributed to a radicalisation.

³⁶⁰Later renamed the Pan-Africanist ‘Azania House’ (Chikane 2018a)

³⁶¹Interview, Paballo, 20 March 2019

³⁶²Interview, Annika, 7 April 2017. See also (Chikane 2018a, p. 157; Peters, Ndebele, and Ntanzi 2015)

The extent of country-wide coordination, the adoption of institutional shutdowns and occupations, and the speed and scale at which students pursued these tactics all contributed to rupturing a sense of normality in October 2015. However, shutdowns and occupations were also particularly important as they prevented the continued functioning of the institution, created a confrontation between the student-led mobilisations, on the one hand, and management and the state on the other, and finally, created spaces for alternative imaginaries.

4.3.3 Tactical Disruption

The purpose of occupations was in part to disrupt the functioning of educational administration. Underlying this was an understanding that existing authority reproduced a normalised injustice, framed in technocratic and bureaucratic terms, and the conditions they were opposing.³⁶³ Students across the country thus coalesced around an emergent ideology of ‘Fallism’, in which their primary task was to disrupt what existed, such that something else could emerge (Ahmed 2019; Kotze 2018; Wa Bofelo 2017). As one student at Wits put it, “you’re disrupting the status quo with an analysis of what that status quo looks like. You are insisting that this has to stop”.³⁶⁴

The impact of the earliest occupations and shutdowns was dramatic, causing massive disruptions to institutional and state authorities. Such confrontation was used to draw attention to students’ struggles and force authorities to engage with students’ concerns. At times, this was also able to shift the balance of power, demonstrating, in the words of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), that “direct action gets the goods” (Milstein 2000). In Brazil, for instance, students in São Paulo were ultimately able to prevent the school reorganisation policy. However, their initial protests were ignored, and the state only acknowledged students’ demands once they had occupied their schools (Campos, Medeiros, and Ribeiro 2016). Similarly, in Rio, the “State Government’s Secretary of Education went to the school to try negotiate with [the students]” only once students had occupied E.E. Mendes de Moraes, according to a teacher at the school.³⁶⁵ This was already significant, as the normally unresponsive state bureaucracy rarely spoke directly to protestors. Moreover, it brought results, as students managed to get the authoritarian school director to resign, and created an *acordo* (accord) with the state to increase funding for the school and invest in its infrastructure.³⁶⁶ In South Africa, occupations and shutdowns were often

³⁶³That is, oppressive structures are at least in part reproduced because of human activity that, in each action, instantiates their operations anew (Sartre [1960] 2004a)

³⁶⁴Interview, Patricia, Wits, 22 March 2017

³⁶⁵Interview, Francisca, teacher in Rio, 18 August 2017

³⁶⁶Interview, Francisca, teacher in Rio, 18 August 2017

initially framed as a tactic of frustration, an attempt to get an intransigent university administration to listen by disrupting their daily business and forcing them to engage (Naidoo 2016b). As one worker at Wits argued, “shutting down the university made management listen in the first place” (Luckett and Mzobe 2016).

These disruptions varied in scope and scale. In South Africa, generally speaking, it was harder to shut down educational institutions. University campuses, generally, were much larger-scale than Brazilian schools, which made it difficult to maintain a full-scale campus shutdown. Even when such disruptions were somewhat successful, they were not always able to prevent the reproduction of existing forms of authority. Patricia, for instance, argued with reference to Wits and UCT that “in the early stages the radical disruption was not a complete shutdown. Even as when we shut down the management *building*, the *function* of management could continue”.³⁶⁷ At universities where access to campuses is through choke points, often a residual of apartheid-era spatial planning, students tried to shut down the campus by blockading entrances and gates (Moyo 2017). These were thus attempts to “produce the maximum amount of disruption with the minimum expenditure of resources” (Tarrow 1993a, p. 296).

However, maintaining occupations and control of university space in South Africa was significantly more difficult due to intensive policing and securitisation, particularly in Historically Black Universities (HBUs) (Duncan 2016; Duncan and Frassinelli 2015; Kamanzi 2017; Manzini 2017).³⁶⁸ In fact, at many HBUs, the shutdown was *de facto* accomplished by the authorities, who called off classes while calling in police and private security to prevent campus access. One lecturer at UJ reflected that “the securitization here was something else, nowhere in this country have I seen anything like that. Everyone was subjected to searches, you can’t enter UJ”.³⁶⁹ Management and security forces reasserted their own authority over campuses, making it difficult for students to act. Aisha at UJ reflected that,

We attempted occupations but UJ, they were brutal. They never let us hold a space - apart from the SRC offices, which were later attacked when we weren’t even occupying the space. When students who were basically homeless would sleep there, there was a confrontation with private security who came in and literally threw people into the streets in the middle of the night. They were forced off campus. A very dangerous situation.³⁷⁰

Interview, Aisha, 15 September 2017

Occupations and shutdowns also forced a confrontation with powerful actors attempting

³⁶⁷Interview, Patricia, Wits, 22 March 2017

³⁶⁸This is part of a global trend of focusing on youth and students as security threats (Gearon 2017; Sukarieh and Tannock 2017), while in the process of securitisation, creating insecurity (Gledhill 2018)

³⁶⁹Unknown Conversant, in discussion with Leonard, 29 June 2018

³⁷⁰Aisha mentioned that further information was posted to the UJ #FMF twitter account, <https://twitter.com/ujfmf>. See also Appendix C

to preserve the status quo, as well as with what has been kept ‘out of view’ (Pennington 2015). These tactics are, essentially, the assertion of authority over a space, confronting and substituting existing authorities. In extreme cases, confrontational disruptions included the destruction of property and led to physical clashes between students and authorities. Brazilian Military Police attempted to forcibly evict students who had occupied their schools, for instance, while South African student protesters were shot at and teargassed by police while shutting down their campuses. South African students protesting outside the seat of the Executive at the Union Buildings in Pretoria, for instance, entered into running battles with the police, and attempted to destroy police vans.

Fine-grained analysis of these particular situations is necessary to understand their complexity. This cannot be captured by the generalised “violent, destructive students” narrative that was popularised in most media and public discourse. Indeed, particularly in the earliest moments of protest, widespread characterisations of “violence” were questionable. When students attempted to shut down and occupy their campuses, many of the disruptions were in fact pedagogical opportunities. In South Africa, students entered classes, explained the reasons for the protests, engaged in dialogue with other students and staff, and requested the cessation of ordinary practices (Durandt 2016).

Where students were involved in altercations in the early stages of protests, however, it is important to understand why they acted as they did. Such altercations generally involved white students or lecturers, or involved students targeting symbols of authority, whether in the form of university management or the state. For many students, such authorities and powerful individuals represented the reproduction of injustice. As Thandolwethu, a student at Wits, observed, “destroying something that belongs to the state” is not vandalism, but rather a confrontational political act, because the “one direct way for you to attack the state is to attack its properties”. Drawing on history, argued that “that’s something that they did in the Apartheid era, they just [burnt] administration buildings of the government”.³⁷¹ Such confrontational tactics have historically been adopted by subaltern groups across the world (Della Porta 2006, 2013). Understanding their symbolism, however, makes intelligible how students situated themselves in confrontation with an intransigent authority, attempting to redraw the power imbalance between them. As one student argued,

Management here does not understand table talk, my brother. They just don’t. It is when you start burning this bus or these buildings that they realize that students are serious. You can talk and talk and they won’t listen to you. Then the media comes and think we are just criminals.

Anonymous student, quoted in Ndlovu (2017c, p. 50)

³⁷¹Interview, Thandolwethu, 27 March 2017

4.3.4 Opening Possibility

Occupations and shutdowns also played a crucial *epistemic* role. They created the space for dialogue and exchange, as well as new activities and creative production, which in turn developed participants' imagination and enabled the emergence of new ideas (Aitchison 2011; Moore and Smart 2015; Motimele 2019; Naidoo 2016b). Naidoo (2016a) argues that in South Africa, the practice of occupying space “creates a new space-time”, which is thrown into relief by the “pain that comes from being forced back into the present world after a premonition of a different one”. Similarly, one graduate student at Wits argued that occupations offered an “important educational methodology”.³⁷² She argued that,

the genius and the beauty of what the students did was to say ‘no more’... To shut down where they were at. And by disrupting the status quo, creating a possibility for something new to emerge

Interview, Patricia, 22 March 2017

As discussed in Chapter 2, this was firstly because they revealed how existing social structures functioned, exposing and disrupting ideological positions that had become settled “common sense” (Gramsci 1971). This entailed the denaturalisation and denormalization of social reality, in which students stopped taking for granted or seeing as desirable existing social relations.

In both contexts, one of the clearest examples of this was in representations of students and youth. Prior to the 2015 mobilisations, youth representations had often been paternalistic, of children unable to think for themselves and in need of guidance (Lesko 1996), or fearful of delinquent youth that threatened the established order (Coe and Vandegrift 2015; Comaroff and Comaroff 2006; Honwana and Boeck 2005; Kaulingfreks 2015), or cynical of apathetic youth that cared more for material possessions than politics (Bosch 2013, 2016; Chikane 2018b; Coe and Vandegrift 2015; Ribeiro, Lânes, and Carrano 2005; Sofiati 2008). These threads converge in critiques of student activism, where students are framed as ignorant, dangerous, self-destructive, and easily manipulated by others (Kurczy 2016). These are common globally. During the 2012 Canadian student uprisings, for instance, Choudry (2015, p. 6) argues that

there was no shortage of commentary about how... thousands of striking students did not really care about their education, did not want to learn, and were wasting their lives by not attending classes.

Critics of the #FMF mobilisations in South Africa responded similarly, saying things like, “these kids, they don’t want to learn” or that protesting students prevented others from getting an education.³⁷³

³⁷²Interview, Patricia, 22 March 2017

³⁷³Interview, Thandolwethu, 27 March 2017

However, this representation was false. In the process of social struggles, students broke with existing stereotypes of youth and student activism, proving themselves deeply invested in their futures, considering and contesting the context in which they found themselves. According to one observer of the occupations in São Paulo and Rio, students “think about school, they have expectations [and] proposals. . . they have critical views on what’s happening, and they are willing to fight for their rights” (Kurczy 2016). Similarly, lecturers like Leonard at UWC reflected that most students during the #FMF period valued education and wanted to learn, and were trying to improve the conditions in which that took place.³⁷⁴

In South Africa, student mobilisations also revealed numerous inadequacies of the post-1994 political settlement. In addition to exposing the role of state violence in maintaining the existing social order, and how the myth of meritocracy had become pervasive in such an obviously stratified society, the most significant rupture in South African hegemonic discourse was in students challenge to the post-apartheid “Rainbow Nation” consensus (Chigumadzi 2015; Chikane 2018a,b; Lester, Osborne, and Smith 2017). This social imaginary, students argued, was white cultural hegemony masked as diversity, overlaying a political economy of *de jure* deracialised capitalism (Luckett and Pontarelli 2016; Motimele 2019).³⁷⁵ For students in South Africa, the 2015 #FMF moment was,

like someone just came with a pin and just popped something and we all became aware of what it is. The conversation is about what happened in 1994, what was promised then, and what is going on now. It’s like someone came and removed the curtain and we are seeing that ‘actually this is not what we were promised’, or ‘this is not how we thought it was going to be’.

Interview, Thandolwethu, 27 March 2017

In Brazil, the early period of mobilisations similarly called into question the myth of meritocracy, as well as the presumed benevolence of the state and police. Crucially, from the earliest moments, students’ experiences of occupying their schools and running their own classes broke with the presumption that the education system in place was necessary or beneficial. Matheus, a teacher at E.E. Diadema in São Paulo, suggested at a discussion held at the school that this had been a “paradigm rupture” for students who “didn’t have adults to determine what they would do”.³⁷⁶ He argued that the occupations,

broke with the school routine. . . A group of students, who held lectures, debates, meetings, discussions, that wasn’t done before. Many people came to the school, who wouldn’t have come if the educational process was the traditional one. There was a rupture in that.

³⁷⁴Interview, Leonard, 29 June 2018

³⁷⁵As discussed in Chapter 2, this was primarily a deracialisation of an elite caste, rather than of wealth or employment as a whole

³⁷⁶Group Interview, Matheus, 8 June 2017

Interview, Matheus, 8 June 2017

In both South Africa and Brazil, students who took part in the mobilisations thus began to ask fundamental questions *en masse* about how their societies and education systems had been constructed, the injustices that were reproduced within them, and began looking for alternatives. In Brazil, for instance, one student at CPII in Rio recollected that during the occupations, students

started to perceive that there were a lot of things wrong that we didn't notice every day because we're just so used to it. We started to research and debate, started to learn.

Interview, Fernanda, 24 August 2017

Central to moments of rupture is a radical challenge to existing patterns of social relations, without necessarily creating clear alternatives. In 2015, this left students with sense of *aporia*, motivating them to search for new ideas and practices that made sense in their political conjuncture, unconstrained by the weight of tradition (Barker 2016; Burdick, Sandlin, and O'Malley 2013; Gordon 2006; Nash 1996). As one student at Wits argued, students' actions were a

disruption of what we *understand* to be pedagogy, in a university context... where students, quite disruptively and in some instances rudely, take on the 'learned professor', whether black or white, creating a completely uncomfortable environment... where people go like 'Shit, do I know what's going on here? What the fuck is going on here?'. Which is a very good environment for people to recognise that they don't know shit!

Interview, Patricia, 22 March 2017

This sense of uncertainty fertilises the ground for people to start thinking differently about education and society, as well as their experiences and roles therein.

In the earliest moments of mobilisation, students and workers had no ready-made alternative imaginary or blueprint of the future available. However, the mobilisations developed their politics and imaginaries over time. As Barker (2016, p. 9) argues, "the outcomes of these moments are not given in advance, but depend on who does and says what, who intervenes and how, and what impact their interventions turn out to possess".³⁷⁷ The uncertainty engendered by the early period of rupture created a moment of possibility which required the mobilisations to undertake "practical collective social inquiry" (*ibid.*, p. 7). This led students and workers to investigate the world around them, reflecting on

³⁷⁷As a result, *time* and *temporality* become important political categories, although I do not engage with this further here. See (Abbott 2001; Aminzade 1992; Bauman 2012; Harris 2004; McAdam and Sewell 2001; Mills 2014; Motimele 2019; Sewell 1996)

how their social worlds came to be constructed as they did (Freire [1970] 2006; Wolpe 1970).³⁷⁸ At CPII in Rio, for example, one student described how during the occupations,

we started to worry a lot about *why* things happened in the way that they were happening, because only by understanding that could we change what was happening

Interview, Fernanda, 24 August 2017

4.4 Conclusion: Ruptures and Possibility

In 2015-16, the South African and Brazilian student-worker alliances, particularly through occupations and shutdowns, ruptured the educational-political status quo.

Heterogeneous groups of activist students drew in large numbers of new participants, whose inclusion in the mobilisations brought new ideas and experiences into contact with one another. Because the mobilisations encompassed a wide cross-section of South African and Brazilian society, students were able to develop both a radical politics while securing access to resources and attention. While forming alliances with their teachers, academics and operations workers, students gained a deeper appreciation for broader analysis that went beyond their own experiences. Workers' struggles not only catalysed many of the students' struggles, but their new affective relationships and forms of solidarity supported students and enabled rapid political conscientisation and mutual learning. Although students adopted a wide variety of tactics, occupations and shutdowns were particularly important. They enabled students to break with existing patterns of education and authority, while confronting state and institutional authorities which made clear and overt the problems with the existing system.

The composition of the mobilisations, their alliances, and their tactics were all crucial factors in enabling the student-led mobilisations to rupture their educational institutions. Because of these, the student-led mobilisations were able to quickly secure changes that other social forces had been unable to achieve. In Brazil, students kept schools in São Paulo open, and forced the Rio state government to negotiate with the teachers' union and accede to some of their demands. In South Africa, the initial "two weeks in October" (Booyesen 2016b) ruptured the ANC's post-apartheid hegemony, ensured that some workers were insourced, and secured a 0% fee increase while challenging the economic logic of university fees. These have proved to be critical moments in Brazilian and South African educational struggles.

³⁷⁸This differentiates the political moment of rupture from other political processes, such as party-political elections where already-organised, roughly coherent entities present 'finished product' policies for public selection, resembling a "marketplace of ideas" rather than "collective social inquiry" (Larmer, Dwyer, and Zeilig 2009)

They also laid the groundwork for participants to think differently about themselves, their education and society, denaturalising and denormalising the status quo and thereby enabling new imaginaries to develop. Occupations specifically were nexus points of education, political activism and conscientisation. Because they were concentrated periods of self-activity and movement learning, they were thus central in understanding how activists reimagined education.

Barker (2013, p. 7) suggests that ruptures present cyclical patterns of “breach-crisis-mitigation-resolution”. In some cases, they are “neutralised” and “absorbed into the pre-existing structures” (Sewell 1996, p. 843), becoming moments of difference that serve to reinforce existing social relations. In other cases, however, the moments of rupture are extended as participants maintain pressure on existing structures and are successful in changing them or generating their own alternatives (Badiou [1988] 2007; Harley 2012). This moment of contingency and uncertainty is resolved over time by successive interactions between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces (Barker 2013). In the struggles over how the rupture expands or is neutralised, a new set of possibilities unfurl, individually, collectively, and institutionally (ibid., p. 9). The following chapter thus discusses how student organising was reconfigured over time and in relation to other actors. I argue that, after the period of rupture, the ways in which students mobilised enabled new social formations to emerge, and hence the networks of social relations that enabled students to reimagine education.

Chapter 5

Reconfiguration: Mobilisation Dynamics

Individuals and groups... develop and transform themselves and their capacities through the very processes that also transform situations and structures.

Barker et al. (2013, p. 9)

[There is a] long tradition of mass struggles in South Africa which began by asserting often fairly minimalist, immediate demands - and precipitately found themselves in full-scale confrontation with the power of the state.

First (1978, p. 96), on the 1976 Soweto Uprising

5.1 From Ruptures to Mobilisations

Periods of upheaval and rupture do not last forever, and mobilisations exhibit relatively similar “cycles of contention” (Tarrow 1998). Throughout these cycles, the character of the mobilisations shift over time. Tarrow (2011, p. 13), for instance, argues that,

once a cycle of contention is triggered, coalitions are formed, campaigns are organized, and the costs of collective action are lowered for other actors, and master frames and models of activism become more generally available

Within the South African and Brazilian mobilisations of 2015-16, students coalesced around varying forms of organisation and different political ideologies, learnt from their experiences in trying to sustain the mobilisations, and from relations with other campuses. Externally, they were pressured by the state and institutional authorities, often in complex relations with existing organisations like political parties and education trade unions, while attempting to frame their struggle for public audiences.

Many commentators misread these complex dynamics and caricatured the mobilisations in both South Africa and Brazil as a disorganised mass, lacking coherence.³⁷⁹ For example, Jansen (2017, p. xiv), a university vice-chancellor in South Africa at the peak of the mobilisations, described the #FeesMustFall (#FMF) mobilisations as an “amorphous mass of protesters priding themselves on the fact that there is no one leader”. While it is often difficult to understand or theorise movements as they are ongoing and shifting (Barker 2016; Della Porta 2014),³⁸⁰ mischaracterising movements as fundamentally incoherent or disorganised masks the complex internal political struggles and implicitly misreads them as fixed and unchanging over time.³⁸¹ More importantly, this reading obscures the fact that movements learn from their actions and grow in relation to evolving conditions.

These dynamics raised questions of how best students should organise and achieve their demands. Their forms of self-organisation were interwoven with attempts to identify the causes of students’ grievances. The reconfiguration of the mobilisations matters because students and their institutions were, in the process, reshaped over time. Relationships between students and education workers shifted, and conflicts with education institutions and the state laid a new social-relational groundwork for a change in epistemic activity (Haslanger 2017), giving rise to “new constellations of ideas and identities” (Barker 2016, p. 7). As a result, students were able to reimagine education in new ways.

Outline This chapter examines the cycle of student mobilisation in both Brazil and South Africa, focusing on the processes which followed the period of rupture. In the first section, I discuss the organisational form of the mobilisations and how this evolved over time, focusing on questions of institutional versus autonomous struggle, organising hierarchically or organising horizontally, and whether the movements were reformist or radical. In the second section, I discuss how students maintained their mobilisations over time, focusing on how decision-making was undertaken, how individual, collective and social reproduction was addressed, and how coalitions were built and sustained. The third section discusses the decomposition of the mobilisations, largely due to factionalism, repression, and exhaustion.

In this chapter I argue that the mobilisations in both South Africa and Brazil followed similar patterns of organisation and faced similar challenges as a result of the neoliberal logic which dominated political and economic structures in both countries. These conditions moulded and constrained their activism (Della Porta 2017), as well as the available sources of learning about alternative counter-hegemonic projects (Choudry and Vally 2018; Foley 1999; Tilly 1978). The evolving processes of organising proved crucial to how ideas and

³⁷⁹See, for instance, (Glenn 2016; Konik and Konik 2017)

³⁸⁰See Chapter 1

³⁸¹This point of group dynamics and crowd composition is not new; See (Barker 2016; Ndlovu 2017d; Rudé 1959)

imaginaries about education developed over time.

5.2 Questions of Organisation

Debates over organisational forms relate directly to a crucial question of what *kind* of power mobilisations and movements seek to wield and whether they are capable of exercising this power (Flacks 2004; Piven and Cloward 1979). In South Africa and Brazil, three key debates over how to organise the mobilisations dominated, while shifting over time. These were whether the mobilisation should be autonomous or link with existing institutions, what role leadership and hierarchy should play in the movement and the reformist versus radical nature of the “proposed mechanisms for change” (Flesher Fominaya 2014, p. 66).

These are not new questions.³⁸² Since the late 19th century, similar debates have largely resulted in a division between institutional-hierarchical organisations, such as communist parties, and autonomous-horizontal collectives, such as anarchist federations (Foster 2014; Novack, Frankel, and Feldman 1974; Wallerstein 2002). However, as Flesher Fominaya (2014, p. 67) argues, these are not always neat divisions, as demonstrated by the complex dynamics in both South Africa and Brazil. As discussed in Chapter 3, radical social and political movements in South Africa and Brazil at the end of the 1980s increasingly turned towards reformist politics which were unable to address the profound problems in society, particularly in their education systems. The failures of these centralised groups “created this deep suspicion among members of later generations of social movements” (Abdelrahman 2015b, p. 7), leading them to search for alternative forms of organisation and more radical demands.

5.2.1 Institutional/Autonomous Organising

The first question that shaped the student mobilisations was whether students ought to organise within existing institutional structures like student councils, and political and youth organisations, or whether their mobilisations should be entirely autonomous. The institutional-autonomous divide is, as Flesher Fominaya (2014, p. 5) argues, a “key cleavage in many contemporary progressive movements”, because it draws attention to important issues around political participation, legitimacy, and strategies and tactics.

The basic distinction, according to Flesher Fominaya (*ibid.*, pp. 67–9), is that institutional organisations are generally formal, “vertical structures”, in which decision-making is done through voting or representatives’ decisions and members are generally ideologically

³⁸²See, for instance, early socialist discussions on the role of the state, through the idea of a transitional ‘Dual Power’ (Debray 1967; Lenin [Apr. 9, 1917] 1974) to contemporary questions of socialist strategy in contexts as diverse as Mexico (Day 2003; Gunderson 2018; Mora 2007; Zugman 2008), Venezuela (Ciccariello-Maher 2013; Webber 2015), and Rojava/Syria (Dirik 2018; Knapp, Flach, and Ayboğa 2016)

coherent. The strength of institutional organisations is believed to be their collective unity, and their struggles are often over control of social institutions. Autonomous collectives, by contrast, tend towards direct democracy and consensus-based political participation, thereby overcoming their individualisation (ibid., pp. 69–70). The strength of these collectives is taken to be their diversity and multiplicity, and their struggles often extend into the “private” realm of daily life. Their praxis is often prefigurative, refusing to subordinate the movement’s means to its ends and instead attempting to “build the new world in the shell of the old”.³⁸³

In general, students moved between varying strategies, courses of action and forms of organisation throughout the mobilisations. When students believed that existing institutions could be used to achieve their demands, they tended to organise through formal channels to communicate with institutional and state elites. However, when they believed that their interests were fundamentally opposed to existing organisations, they turned to autonomous organisation, outside of existing institutional structures such as student unions. Debates around institutional or autonomous trajectories entailed not only questions of organising within political mobilisations, but also about basic questions of social organisation and the role of the state. The centrality of these principles led to significant polarisation and sometimes conflict among students. Students inclined towards institutional forms of struggle generally saw the state as a site of struggle which could be won over towards progressive ends. For example, supporters of the African National Congress (ANC) and *Partido dos Trabalhadores* - Workers’ Party (PT) in 2015-16 generally adopted this view in light of previous generations of struggle.³⁸⁴ By contrast, autonomous or politically unaffiliated students tended to see institutions like the state as an obstacle that would inevitably inhibit progressive movements.³⁸⁵

In South Africa, the Fallist mobilisations were characterised by students attempting to create a new, autonomous space that was primarily student-oriented and run, rather than a space for political parties to pursue their partisan agendas.³⁸⁶ At the University of Johannesburg (UJ), for instance, party youth organisations had been focused on the Students’ Representative Council (SRC) elections, while autonomous “independents” had organised the Fallist mobilisations.³⁸⁷ However, activists affiliated to institutional parties

³⁸³The phrase comes from the 1905 Preamble of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) Constitution. See <https://www.iww.org/culture/official/preamble.shtml>

³⁸⁴It is interesting to note the relative absence of PT-affiliated students, particularly in São Paulo. Their presence was more widespread elsewhere, such as in Paraná

³⁸⁵Students affiliated with opposition parties, such as the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) or *Partido Socialismo e Liberdade* - Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL), generally viewed institutional change as possible but something the ANC and PT had abandoned

³⁸⁶Although Cf. Lenin ([1903] 1977), who argues that “talk about this or that institution being non-partisan is generally nothing but the humbug of the ruling classes, who want to gloss over the fact that existing institutions are already imbued... with a very definite political spirit”

³⁸⁷It was only once the events were certain to occur that the Progressive Youth Alliance (PYA)-controlled SRC stepped in to “appear like they were supporting us all along”. Interview, Aisha, UJ, 15 September

also had participated throughout the Fallist period in their capacity as individuals rather than representatives of political parties.³⁸⁸ In general, the construction of Fallist spaces was largely autonomous and independent throughout 2015. Politicians from several parties were refused entrance to students' meetings (Chikane 2018a), for instance, while at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), students "prohibited people from coming to the meetings with T-shirts of their political organisations".³⁸⁹ Chikane (ibid., p. 174) highlights a similar dynamic at a major student protest in Cape Town in 2015, where a Pan Africanist Student Movement of Azania (PASMA) leader replaced his party-affiliated clothing with #RhodesMustFall (#RMF) and non-partisan apparel.³⁹⁰

However, this changed over time, as national political parties saw an opportunity to either influence or claim credit for the mobilisations. Students affiliated to the PYA,³⁹¹ and hence to the ANC, often saw themselves as bearers of a long-standing revolutionary tradition of class struggle and anti-racism, while the Economic Freedom Fighters Student Command (EFFSC) contested this legacy, claiming the EFF as the true heirs of that radicalism. Other organisations, such as PASMA, offered a contrasting vision, centring questions of racism and drawing on African Nationalist and Pan-Africanist traditions.³⁹²

Students from these parties specifically clashed over 2015 and 2016 for hegemony within the mobilisations, although the dynamics depended on the institution. At Wits, for example, after the initial moment of rupture in late 2015, the ANC reportedly pressured PYA-aligned students on the SRC to use their institutional influence to demobilise students and ensure that they returned to classes.³⁹³ Autonomous, EFFSC and PASMA affiliated students saw this as the dead-end of the ANC's politics, and argued that the PYA could not be trusted with students' struggles.³⁹⁴

In Brazil, most students in São Paulo had organised autonomously, often supported by autonomous youth collectives like *Levante Popular da Juventude* - Popular Youth Uprising (*Levante*).³⁹⁵ These 'autonomous' students were generally protective of the

2017

³⁸⁸Interview, Aisha, UJ, 15 September 2017

³⁸⁹Interview, Isaac, 23 March 2017

³⁹⁰PASMA is affiliated to the nationally marginal Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC)

³⁹¹Depending on the campus, this could include the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL), South African Students Congress (SASCO), Young Communist League (YCL), and Muslim Students' Association (MSA)

³⁹²Although PASMA did not have as clearly developed internal ideological position, according to Aisha at UJ. Interview, 15 September 2017. Fringe parties sometimes also attempted to sway the student mobilisations, such as the Black First Land First (BLF) at the University of Cape Town (UCT) (Chikane 2018a)

³⁹³Interview, Anonymous Student at Wits, March 2017. See also Chikane (ibid., p. 205)

³⁹⁴At UCT, by contrast, #FMF was largely shaped by the autonomous #RMF and to some extent PASMA, both often hostile to the ANC (ibid., p. 117)

³⁹⁵Other semi-autonomous organisations, like *Juntos! Movimento Juvenil Anticapitalista* - Youth Anticapitalist Movement (*Juntos!*), were also supportive, although technically affiliated with PSOL. See <https://esquerdasocialista.com.br/sobre/>

student movement and were quick to distinguish it from institutionalised organisations, known as *Entidades* (Entities), which ranged from party-political youth leagues,³⁹⁶ to institutional-representative student unions like *União Nacional dos Estudantes* - National Union of Students (UNE) and *União Brasileira dos Estudantes Secundaristas* - Union of Brazilian Secondary Students (UBES). In Rio, by contrast, the student movement was to a significant extent galvanised by student affiliated to existing *entidades*.³⁹⁷ In both cities, ‘affiliated’ students claimed that the *entidades* were already representative of all students, and hence the organisations could be the ‘leaders’ of the mobilisations. ‘Autonomous’ students, by contrast, rejected this as ‘hijacking’ and ‘vanguardism’, arriving at the last minute to take credit for others’ efforts and imposing an organising model unsuitable to students’ needs.³⁹⁸

Students’ turn towards autonomous organisational forms was crucial for Brazilian social movements more widely. In her critical assessment of the left in Brazil, Fernandes (2017a, p. 59) notes that the success and non-partisan struggles of high school students (*secundaristas*) “reinvigorated the left and taught lessons of dialogue and resistance amidst [broader left] fragmentation”. Similarly, Matheus, a teacher in São Paulo, argued that autonomous student organising “will leave a historic mark... they contributed to the organisation of social movements in our country”.³⁹⁹

This position, however, changed over time as students reshaped their political views because of their experiences of struggle. After the occupations in São Paulo subsided, for instance, many students reassessed the political terrain and decided to continue their struggles by “affiliating with some of the formal associations”.⁴⁰⁰ Moreover, numerous students highlighted how even these existing political organisations and institutional bodies had themselves been transformed by the autonomous student struggles and occupations, becoming significantly less rigid and hierarchical. They thus argued that joining and changing the *entidades* from within would be a way to ensure students’ political energy could live on and expand. In other cases, however, students remained highly critical of the *entidades* and insisted that “the student movement is *autonomous*”.⁴⁰¹

At times, autonomous and institutional groups managed to work together. Carlos, an autonomous student in São Paulo, argued that although “to this day they still pick fights with us”, there was “less friction” and both kinds of movements “can relate more”.⁴⁰² In March 2016, for instance, São Paulo students exposed cases of corruption in the state

³⁹⁶Such as *União da Juventude Comunista* - Union of Communist Youth (UJC) or *União da Juventude Socialista* - Union of the Socialist Youth (UJS)

³⁹⁷Interview, Gabriel, Rio de Janeiro, 28 August 2017

³⁹⁸Interview, Maria, 5 June 2017

³⁹⁹Interview, Matheus, 8 June 17

⁴⁰⁰Interview, Maria, 5 June 2017

⁴⁰¹Interview, Maria, 5 June 2017. See also (Capai 2019)

⁴⁰²Interview, Carlos, 29 May 2017

education system, with the state governor and president of the Legislative Assembly accused of embezzling money from the *Merenda Escolar* (school feeding scheme) (Agência Estado 2017; Melo 2018).⁴⁰³ Carlos highlighted how both autonomous collectives and *entidades* formed a *Cadê Minha Merenda?* (Where’s My Lunch?) campaign.⁴⁰⁴ Initially, autonomous students occupied the *Centro Paula Souza*, the central administration for *Escolas Técnicas Estaduais* - State Technical Schools (ETECs), quickly followed by students at ETECs occupying their institutions, and *entidades* like UNE and UBES occupying the state Legislative Assembly. Although they were relatively short-lived, Carlos described these occupations as “gigantic”, with other activists and artists supporting them.⁴⁰⁵ The combined efforts of autonomous and institutional groups forced the state to create a Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry (CPI) into the theft of funds for school meals, and secured additional funding for school feeding schemes in ETECs (Agência Estado 2017).⁴⁰⁶

5.2.2 Hierarchical/Horizontal Organising and Leadership

Questions of leadership and decision-making are often shaped by the type of institutional or autonomous organising. Generally, traditional student organisations tended to be more hierarchical, whereas autonomous collectives tended to organise more horizontally. Horizontal organising, historically associated with anarchism, has had a global resurgence since the 1990s. Recent movements across the world have been largely decentralised, egalitarian, participatory, prefigurative, and ad hoc (Buechler 2013; Maeckelbergh 2011; Melucci 1989), expressing “loose organisational structures, [a] rejection of traditional leadership and interchangeable membership between different groups” (Abdelrahman 2015b, p. 6). The South African and Brazilian student mobilisations similarly looked to “challenge the boundaries of traditional politics and to establish decentralised alternatives”, rather than simply seizing institutional power (*ibid.*, p. 7). Crucially, where it took root, horizontal organising was grounded in an affirmation of equality amongst participants in struggle, which in theory precluded any individual from being a ‘more important’ member of the mobilisation and hence from having any claim on leading or directing it.⁴⁰⁷ This contributed to questions of social relations within education: whether existing hierarchies between teaching workers and students would be maintained, and how decision-making in

⁴⁰³This combined with a separate issue, namely that Technical Training Colleges were not part of the *merenda* system. Interview, Maria, 5 June 2017

⁴⁰⁴Interview, Carlos, 29 May 2017. He similarly pointed to mass protests in Brasília during the General Strike (28 April 2017) against Temer’s reforms to labour laws (Gasparini, Bretas, and Abrantes 2017; RBA 2017), with “all the autonomous movements, all the institutional entities, unions, parties, all together”

⁴⁰⁵Interview, Carlos, 29 May 2017

⁴⁰⁶The *CPI da Merenda* was, however, closed at the end of 2016 without taking any action, although a concurrent legal case found several prominent politicians and bureaucrats guilty of corruption in 2018 (Melo 2018)

⁴⁰⁷While the mobilisations could thus be portrayed as ‘leaderless’, students sometimes preferred to call them ‘leaderfull’, with every participant a crucial actor

imagined educational institutions would function.

In Brazil, and particularly in São Paulo, students explained to me that they disavowed party-political practices of hierarchical structures.⁴⁰⁸ Their horizontalism took the shape of “everyone discussing, resolving, and applying” their decisions to daily life.⁴⁰⁹ This recognised the agency of students as a whole, rather than a select group of representatives or leaders, rejecting the legitimacy of others making decisions about them or on their behalf. By emphasising that all students could participate in decision-making, the *secundaristas* created the sense that their collective political activity shaped how their education system was changing. This networked solidarity was based on a common identity as *students* and around common demands, as well as a rotational system of representation (Barreto 2016, p. 87), captured in the slogan *nós por nós* (us for us), which demonstrates the importance of both daily practices and psychological autonomy.⁴¹⁰

In South Africa, the relationship between hierarchical and horizontal forms of organising were less clear-cut. While there was a push towards leaderless, flat structures, particularly emerging from the #RMF campaign, institutionalised, hierarchical organisations like SRCs played ambivalent roles. As discussed in the previous chapter, SRCs like that at Wits had been crucial centres for galvanising the earliest protests. However, by 2016, they were seen as an “arbitrary hierarchy” and critiqued as “an impediment to the desired horizontal leadership structure espoused by the movement” (Chikane 2018a, p. 203), because they could easily ‘sell out’ to management or the state, and limited the more radical forms of action adopted within the mobilisations. In contrast, students’ autonomous collectives and horizontal approaches were emphasised as democratic, taking decisions based on their own needs rather than institutional obligations, with the participation of all (black) students.⁴¹¹ One student at Wits argued that the mobilisations were “experimenting with different kinds of accountability and leadership”, which entailed “serious critique of leadership and representative democracy in word and in action”.⁴¹² Like in Brazil, mass participation in political decision-making was an important aspect for the development of students’ collective agency, and also drew in students who were put off by rigid, established hierarchies.⁴¹³ Horizontal, leaderless structures also meant that authorities were less able to co-opt and “demobilise the group” or target and “remove the leadership”, as UCT Vice-Chancellor Max Price conceded (Jansen 2017, p. 58). This can, as Schaumberg (2013, p. 378) argues, be a useful “organisational tactic to confront the power of highly organised

⁴⁰⁸Group Interview, *Escola Estadual* - State School (E.E.) Diadema, São Paulo, 8 June 2017

⁴⁰⁹Group Interview, E.E. Diadema, São Paulo, 8 June 2017

⁴¹⁰Reminiscent of the South African Black Consciousness Movement’s injunction, “Black man [sic], you are on your own”; Cf. (Gqola 1999, 2001; Moodley 1993)

⁴¹¹Interview, Patricia, 22 March 2017

⁴¹²Interview, Patricia, 22 March 2017

⁴¹³Interview, Patricia, 22 March 2017. See also Flesher Fominaya (2015, p. 143)

repressive state institutions”.⁴¹⁴

Recent literature on horizontal movements celebrates their flat, leaderless, egalitarian nature (Day 2005; Graeber 2002; Holloway 2005), with authors arguing that “today’s social movements consistently and decisively reject traditional, centralized forms of political organization”, alongside “charismatic or bureaucratic leaders, hierarchical party structures, vanguard organizations, and even electoral and representative structures” (Hardt and Negri 2017, p. 6). However, closer examination suggests a less clear-cut reality, whether in European anti-austerity movements (Flesher Fominaya 2014, 2015), the Egyptian revolution (Abdelrahman 2015a,b), or the 2013 Brazilian uprisings (Larrabure 2016).⁴¹⁵

Although horizontal forms of organisation in each of these cases often emerged out of dissatisfaction with existing institutions and hierarchical organisations, they nevertheless developed new forms of hierarchies. One such example is the rise of a “tyranny of structurelessness”, in which authority in within allegedly leaderless and horizontal mobilisations is simply displaced from a formally-recognised leader or committee to “invisible” leadership, an implicit or unacknowledged shadow hierarchy (Freeman 2013; Glaser 2017). In South Africa, for instance, students like Chikane (2018a) and Funde (2015) at UCT describe how a “political elite” within the mobilisations directed the Fallist struggles at key moments, deciding on tactics and demands in advance of mass meetings, and pushing these priorities through plenary sessions. Similarly, at UJ, Aisha described how the most articulate students tended to already be active in political organisations, sometimes resulting in horizontal and autonomous organising falling back on pre-existing hierarchical organisations.⁴¹⁶ In other cases, leadership was more overt. Horizontalist students critiqued those who were represented as the ‘face’ of the movement, uneasy with such symbolic power being invested in specific individuals. At Wits, for instance, this was particularly targeted at figures like Nompandolo Mkhathshwa, an ANC-affiliated student whose appearance on a national magazine cover wearing her characteristic ANC *doek* incensed students frustrated with the ANC, and led to critiques of her leadership within the mobilisation (Chikane 2018a, p. 206).

A second key challenge to horizontal forms of organising is that without a clear structure, the composition of a mobilisation can quickly change as some participants leave or others take over. This vulnerability means that, as VC Max Price argued, a movement is “easily hijacked by groups that come and join and form a larger number... [it] is continually fracturing and re-forming” (Jansen 2017, p. 58). For students, this was often an advantage as it limited institutional authorities’ capacity to control the mobilisations’

⁴¹⁴See also (Flesher Fominaya 2015, p. 143; Gunderson 2018, p. 552; Larmer, Dwyer, and Zeilig 2009)

⁴¹⁵Even in what are arguably the most important sustained horizontalist polities are influenced by hierarchical organisations and charismatic leaders, such as the CCRI-CG and Subcomandante Marcos/Galeano amongst the Zapatistas (Gunderson 2018) or the historical PKK and Abdullah Öcalan in revolutionary Rojava. Thanks to A. Polat for this point

⁴¹⁶Interview, Aisha, 15 September 2017

dynamics and forms of contentions. However, it also became a problem over 2016 for many students, particularly those who had taken part in the earlier phases of 2015 and who disagreed with the direction that was being taken under the name of #FMM (Chikane 2018a, p. 216).⁴¹⁷ Similar problems had emerged in Brazil with the shift from the largely autonomous, left-wing mass protests of the 2013 *Jornadas* to the right-wing protests of 2014 (Saad-Filho and Boito 2016). Brazilian students in 2015-16, by contrast, were generally better able to maintain the integrity of their mobilisations, particularly because they grounded their organising in face-to-face local decision-making at the scale of a school, which then federated into a larger mobilisation (Bookchin 2015).

More fundamentally, however, horizontal forms of organising may become difficult to maintain or may be limited to particular phases of struggle, being less suited to longer-term, sustainable organising (Abdelrahman 2013, 2015b). In South Africa, for example, Piper (2017) draws on Hamilton (2015) to argue that although Fallists were able to disrupt existing institutional arrangements, they were unable to create or reshape democratic institutions to carry forward a longer-term struggle. In some cases, South African students tried to take up this challenge. At UJ, students “turned to the SRC because we no longer had any stable foundation to continue building our own flat structure”.⁴¹⁸ However, this gave rise to serious ideological debates which, because the campus had been shut down, were largely conducted over WhatsApp. These limitations meant that UJ students were unable to “engage in dialogue in a more patient space”, which led to the movement fragmenting.

Autonomous, horizontal forms of organising and independent direct action could at times be combined with institutional politics, entailing a political rejection of some forms of representation, while strategically using representatives in formal institutions that were accountable to localised, deliberative, and directly democratic structures like assemblies (Bookchin 2015; Hamilton 2015; Hardt and Negri 2017). This combined form of political organising, akin to what Cox and Nilsen (2014, p. 200) describe as an “*instrumental* rather than a *committed* engagement” with dominant institutions, was often effective, and has become prominent across several student mobilisations globally (Bal 2015; Donoso 2017; Pettinicchio 2012; Talachian and Koutsogiannis 2015). Although relatively unusual in Brazil and South Africa, it played an important role. After the occupations ended in Brazil, for example, many students saw a need to institutionalise their gains. They ran for and were elected as student representatives in their school’s High School Student Council (*Grêmio*), arguing that autonomous and horizontal struggles had built student power which could be converted into institutional leverage. In Rio, for instance, students at Mendes argued that “now with the *Grêmio*, if we say [to management] ‘we have some proposal’, and we keep

⁴¹⁷Interview, Patricia, 22 March 2017

⁴¹⁸Interview, Aisha, UJ, 15 September 2017

pressuring them, they won't be able to say no".⁴¹⁹ Even though many students at Mendes disagreed with the *Grêmio* in principle, as a hierarchical, representative, institutional body, they recognised that autonomous and horizontal forms of organising could work alongside the institutional weight of the *Grêmio* to amplify students' demands. Similar processes were undertaken throughout the Brazilian mobilisations, where students effectively used quasi-'dual power' arrangements to best benefit themselves (Barreto 2016, pp. 86–7).

Throughout my fieldwork, students argued that their best experiences of the mobilisations were when students were able to organise horizontally.⁴²⁰ This often meant that students' voices were being heard and considered by their peers, the mobilisations were more effective, and fissures were minimised, particularly from leadership contests or party-political influence. Such horizontal organising was not only internally democratic and an effective political tactic, but it also offered an important educational experience for students. Fernanda, a student in Rio, argued that this was because

we had to learn to deal with the differences. . . Not just ignoring the existence of the other. We had to learn to work with the other. To say, 'let's sit here together, resolving our differences, because that will be best for the collective'.

Interview, Fernanda, 24 August 2017

5.2.3 Reformism/Radicalism

Students also experimented with different mechanisms for change, which varied between *reformist* and *radical* demands and tactics. They debated three central issues, focusing on their education institutions but with ramifications for broader society. The first concerned whether existing institutions, with their historical legacies, could be changed and transformed, or whether they were so inert and path dependent that new institutions would have to be set up outside of, perhaps in opposition to, existing structures. From this followed the question of whether activists have an interest in maintaining existing structures, or whether they wish to be rid of them entirely. The third question was whether activists have the power and capacity to affect dramatic changes, only induce minor adjustments, or can change power relations completely in their favour. At the intersection of these issues lies the perennial debate of reforming existing structures within their limits, versus revolutionary change that replaces an existing system with something radically different (Luxemburg [1900] 2008; Wolpe 1970; Wright 2010, 2015a).

In South Africa and Brazil, students held complex, dynamically-shifting positions on what the central purpose and strategy of their struggle was. By and large, those who worked within existing political parties and representative bodies were often more reformist,

⁴¹⁹Interview, Lucas, Mendes de Moraes, 22 August 2017

⁴²⁰Although the common complaint that collective, horizontal decision-making slows or even halts action was present as well (Flesher Fominaya 2014, p. 69)

tailoring their demands to what was viable and sanctioned within the existing system.⁴²¹ Particularly those with access to power attempted to use those to achieve their goals. Thus, students adopted both ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ strategies depending on their access and effectiveness relative to the extent of their demands (Donoso 2017; Flesher Fominaya 2014; Pettinicchio 2012).

In South Africa, for instance, students affiliated with the ANC tended towards advocating for smaller-scale reforms within the existing political system. At Wits, PYA affiliated students allegedly used their contacts in the ANC to privately negotiate a resolution to the fee increase.⁴²² This was, however, largely ineffective, and only a few elite students could access this narrow channel (Bénit-Gbaffou 2008; Ndlovu 2017c, p. 62). In some cases, such students were accused of sacrificing student radicalism for the sake of career advancement within the ANC at a national level (Chikane 2018a; Habib 2019). Indeed, since 1994, ANC-affiliated student groups had been limited in their demands and tactics. Isaac, a lecturer at Wits, argued that such student movements “always stop short of decisive action because they were controlled by PYA, and therefore those issues were best addressed through the structures of the ANC, the alliance, and therefore in government”.⁴²³

Political affiliation was not the only factor that had a bearing on students’ demands and strategies. Class centrally shaped both what tools and resources students had available to them, as well as their investment in maintaining or challenging the status quo. In South Africa, for example, students who could afford fees - but not a fee increase - often left the organising space after 2015 once the president promised a zero-percent fee increase for the following academic year. Moreover, middle-class students who had secured their specific demands tried to call off the protests in general.⁴²⁴ However, class position did not totally determine political position. At Wits, many middle class students continued protesting to show that the main issue was not just tuition fees and that other demands were being ignored.⁴²⁵

The shifting dynamics from 2015 to 2016 suggested that the mobilisations as a whole became less a vehicle for material concerns, and shifted focus towards cultural questions and issues of alienation.⁴²⁶ Seabe (2017), for instance, argues that #FMMF became a “bourgeois”, “pseudo-revolutionary” phenomenon that focused more on middle-class concerns than on the material concerns of the poor and working class.⁴²⁷ For many students, this “bourgeois”

⁴²¹With the notable exception in South Africa of EFF and PAC aligned groups, which largely rejected anything the ANC had a role in

⁴²²Interview, Tasneem, 22 March 2017

⁴²³Interview, Isaac, 23 March 2017

⁴²⁴Interview, Thandolwethu, 27 March 2017

⁴²⁵Interview, Thandolwethu, 27 March 2017

⁴²⁶In this sense, there was a ‘return’ to the form of radicalism of the early 2015 #RMMF mobilisations, on questions of racism and coloniality while downplaying questions of class exploitation and elitism (Chikane 2018a)

⁴²⁷See Chinguno et al. (2017, p. 27), Ndlovu (2017c, pp. 49, 70, 74)

character of the mobilisation became about personal branding. As one student at Wits explained, the mobilisations became “great for everyone who wanted to have cool Instagram profiles, taking selfies at all the protests”.⁴²⁸ Potentially because of its heterogenous class composition, the mobilisations over 2016 failed to reach levels of organisation or critical interrogation necessary for the kinds of structural changes that working-class students and campus workers demanded.

As the state and education institutions made concessions to students and tried to demobilise them, particularly in Rio and across South Africa, workers’ struggles became central to shaping student radicalism. In South Africa, for instance, many students who became involved on the question of fees had not until then been aware of struggles against outsourcing. A student at Wits explained how the students’ struggle gained momentum thanks to the support from workers, and realised there was a “bigger problem here - it’s not just about students, it’s about workers”.⁴²⁹ Postgraduate students and left-wing academics particularly drew out the links between workers’ and students’ struggles (Mabasa 2017, p. 132). Patricia, a graduate student at Wits, for instance, argued that outsourcing “links well with fees” by drawing the issue into a broader struggle against “the corporatisation or privatisation of the university”.⁴³⁰ Despite this, some students focused entirely on their immediate interests, and were unwilling to support the workers once these had been catered to. Other students, however, were radicalised when they realised that such divisions could be exploited to undermine their movement-building. Tasneem, for instance, recalled that her political preferences shifted drastically when the PYA were “hailed as heroes” for just securing a 0% fee increase. She had turned instead to the EFF, which blamed the PYA for “selling out” the workers and continued organising with them.⁴³¹ She was among a large number of students who “refused to halt their protests before winning insourcing” (Luckett and Pontarelli 2016). Some students were even directly involved in negotiations around insourcing with management, and later in institutional Insourcing Task Teams (Kgoroba 2017, p. 128).

The radicalism of students’ demands and tactics thus shifted over time. The 2016 mobilisations in South Africa, for instance, saw increasingly desperate and extreme tactics from smaller groups of protesters. Those remaining in the organising space tended to advocate for more dramatic changes than the concessions the state had offered, including the abolition of tuition fees, along with other demands like decolonising education and insourcing workers.⁴³² The shifting, heterogenous coalition of 2015 thus tended towards a more radical core group throughout 2016, embracing more disruptive tactics. Ndlovu

⁴²⁸Interview, Tasneem, 22 March 2017

⁴²⁹Interview, Tasneem, 22 March 2017

⁴³⁰Interview, Patricia, 22 March 2017

⁴³¹Interview, Tasneem, 22 March 2017

⁴³²Interview, Patricia, 22 March 2017

(2017c) argues that in 2016,

the shutdown of [universities] was comparatively longer. Some universities and/or faculties did not complete the 2016 academic calendar year or write end-of-year exams.⁴³³ The destruction of property was severe. . . . Police and university-hired private security were brutal towards students.

5.3 Maintaining Mobilisations, Sustaining Struggles

Cada escola é um microcosmos da sociedade
Each school is a microcosm of society

Interview, Maria, 6 June 2017

Students in South Africa and Brazil combined tactics that put pressure on their institutions and the state, both through institutional channels and direct action, following modes of autonomous self-organisation. Similar to many recent global movements (Foran 2014; Gumede 2016), students in South Africa and Brazil challenged neoliberal pressures to privatise the commons and public space (Harvey 2005, p. 186); and were generally engaged in modes of struggle conditioned by contemporary capitalism and the pressures it produces (Gunderson 2018; Tarrow 2010).

To sustain their multifaceted strategies, students had to maintain their self-organisation in difficult circumstances over weeks and months. Occupations presented spaces where students had to organise daily to reproduce their struggles, while working out decision-making procedures and hosting educational programmes. Occupations thus became centralised spaces for the discussion of political strategies and tactics, often through general assemblies. As a result, occupations became a concentrated “microcosm” of broader socio-political dynamics,⁴³⁴ interpolated with students’ attempts to create a space outside of and different from the broader context in which they lived (Alvim and Rodrigues 2017; Campos, Medeiros, and Ribeiro 2016; Naidoo 2016b). The complex interplay between recreating their everyday lives internally to the occupations, while also experimenting with alternative ways of organising social life, was a rich seam of experiences that students learnt from.

When students were able to occupy institutions and maintain these occupations, their mobilisations were generally more successful, unified, and internally developed than those where occupations were prevented or quickly evicted. The prevention or inhibition of occupied spaces also had negative effects for processes of strategizing and learning. Several

⁴³³Exams were cancelled at, for instance, the Historically Black Universities (HBUs) of the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) (Naidoo 2016a, p. 188)

⁴³⁴Interview, Maria, 6 June 2017

students in Rio, for example, argued that the São Paulo occupations had been more successful and impactful for participants because they had been unexpected, and São Paulo authorities were thus slower to regain control. In Rio, authorities had anticipated the occupations and were more prepared to suppress them.⁴³⁵ Similarly, in South Africa, students at UJ argued that heavy police repression left

no space to reflect and understand, where we can all meet, engage, debate, so we couldn't discuss and decide strategies for the best way forward

Interview, Aisha, 15 September 2017

As a result, she argued, “it became a mess”, as the mobilisations became “headless” instead of “leaderful”, which was when students were strongest.⁴³⁶

Crucial to maintaining occupations and the mobilisations at large were issues of political decision-making, specifically through assemblies; social reproduction, through students' ‘commissions’ and ‘subcommittees’; and expanding the movement, particularly through coalition-building.

5.3.1 Decision-making: Assemblies

The South African and Brazilian student mobilisations have tended towards flatter, horizontal modes of organising. The primary political decision-making mechanism in which this was realised was the “assembly” (Alegria 2018; Alvim and Rodrigues 2017; Barreto 2016; Booyesen 2016a; Ferreira 2017; Naidoo 2016b; Silva 2017b). Students' assemblies were large-scale gatherings of all those who were welcome in the mobilisations. They were temporally- and spatially-bounded political meetings, in which all those who are affected by decisions were, in principle, able to be present and take part. Decisions were made collectively through debate and consensus-building, which were then binding. The assemblies mattered because they were central to students' self-organisation and self-direction and to building their collective capacity, while also being educational.

In post-authoritarian South Africa and Brazil, the state and dominant social institutions have largely retained a bureaucratic, top-down form of control, with a distance between decision-makers and those whose lives are shaped by those decisions. Representative democracy became no more than a buffer between public need or dissent and the interests of elites (Davis 1999; Hamilton 2014a; Larrabure 2016; Reddy 2016). The shift towards public assemblies as a form of political interaction, often during occupations of public space (Butler 2015; Vodovnik and Grubacic 2015), present a different kind of political

⁴³⁵Discussion Group, “Do Brasil à África do Sul: as ocupações estudantis pelo mundo”, *Colégio Pedro II* - Pedro II College (CPII) Tijuca, 11 August 2017. <https://fb.com/events/107924886572517/>

⁴³⁶Interview, Aisha, 15 September 2017

logic: that of *autogestão*, or collective self-governance (Bookchin 2015).⁴³⁷ While aspects of these radically-democratic assemblies preceded the 2000s,⁴³⁸ these tactics have proliferated amongst counter-hegemonic activists globally since the 2000s (Bookchin 2015; Hardt and Negri 2017).

In the South African and Brazilian mobilisations, students attempted to form assemblies as part of their political practice, even when political party influence was strong. These egalitarian, democratic moments were important for students' experiences, pointing towards broader alternative institutional arrangements in which people have more control over decisions that affect their own lives.⁴³⁹ In Brazil, schools occupied for lengthy periods of time were conducive for students to host assemblies almost daily. In these, students set their own agendas, took decisions, and acted on the range of issues that the movement faced. They did so without a single person leading or facilitating, instead creating ad-hoc roles where they were needed,⁴⁴⁰ akin to anarchist practices of "task rotation" (Ehrlich [1979] 2012).

Being declared open to all, in which everyone had a chance to speak, assemblies were particularly significant openings for students whose identities are regularly marginalised in Brazilian or South African society, such as those identifying as black, women, and LGBTI+ (Platzky Miller 2017b, p. 28).⁴⁴¹ By concentrating students' debates, assemblies often served as a locus for building a counter-power that served their collective interests. In South Africa, for example, public meetings and assemblies enabled students to constitute themselves as a 'counter-public' in the face of co-option from existing authorities.⁴⁴² In one notable case in October 2016, Wits management tried to host the first University Assembly in decades to discuss students' demands, but this platform was dictated by management's interests.⁴⁴³ Thandolwethu argued that this was an example of "a tendency

⁴³⁷Within academic literature in the last decades, these themes have been filtered through the label of 'New Social Movements' (Buechler 2013; Day 2005; Flesher Fominaya 2014). Amongst political collectives, these discussions have generally taken place around direct or radical democracy, anarchist federalism, communes and communalism, libertarian municipalism, and democratic confederalism (Bookchin 1991, 2007; Öcalan 2011; Silva 2017b; Sitrin and Azzellini 2014; Tarinski 2016; Tonder and Thomassen 2005), and various forms of council democracy including workers' councils and soviets (Arendt [1963] 1990; Byrne and Ulrich 2016; Cohen and Moody 1998; Kuhn 2012; Lenin [1918] 2014; Marx [1847] 2000c)

⁴³⁸Such as in the community-based democracy organised under the slogan of "People's Power" / "People's Democracy" in 1980s South Africa, particularly under the banner of the UDF (Bond 2012; Byrne and Ulrich 2016; Morobe 1987; Walt et al. 2017), and extensively theorised in the Italian 'autonomism' of the 1970s (Virno and Hardt 1996)

⁴³⁹See Marx ([1844] 1988)

⁴⁴⁰Group Interview, Diadema, São Paulo, 8 June 2017

⁴⁴¹At the same time, they could be fraught with the same social hierarchies as existed outside of the mobilisations. As Habib (2019, p. 212) argues, for instance, "the mass meeting was as much a mechanism of silencing ordinary, pragmatic voices as it was of mobilising others". Habib's perspective here, however, is that of an authority, and thus it is a political act in itself to emphasise the "silent majority" who may have agreed with him

⁴⁴²Interview, Thandolwethu, 27 March 2017

⁴⁴³Wits management later unilaterally cancelled the University Assembly, which students nevertheless hosted (Wits Students Representative Council 2016)

of people saying they want to fix something for us, but they don't want to fix the problems that *we* say we have, only what they think is our problem". Students' assemblies, by contrast, were more genuinely democratic spaces in which participants were "trying to imagine how to change the status quo", not merely "negotiate with management and talk about things on their terms".⁴⁴⁴

Finally, assemblies were crucial sites of learning in struggle.⁴⁴⁵ The dynamics within assemblies were as heterogeneous as the mobilisations and, as a result, students learnt much about political organising, conflict and cooperation from them. Within assemblies, students also discussed what kind of education they wanted. Apart from a general experience of taking part in collective decision-making, students started to understand better the complex relationship between individual will and collective action. Fernanda, a student in Rio, for instance, noted how difficult it was to disagree with the direction the collective was moving in, and yet emphasised how even when she had not personally agreed, it was important to remain part of that collective and hence contribute to the group's actions.⁴⁴⁶ Despite the difficulties, Fernanda affirmed that "dealing with things from a collective perspective was the best and only way".⁴⁴⁷ Through those discussions, students were able to change their minds and persuade one another, and even in cases where individuals remained at odds with the group's inclination, they nevertheless valued continuing the process of collective decision-making more than they valued their specific view.⁴⁴⁸

5.3.2 Social Reproduction and Occupations

Throughout the mobilisations, students in South Africa and Brazil had to deal with numerous pragmatic issues of running a political movement. Particularly within occupied institutions, questions of individual and collective reproduction and practical self-organisation became crucial (Hardt and Negri 2017, p. xv). Students' organising was grounded both in their own practical needs, while also drawing inspiration from forms of self-organised collective mutual aid found in sources like indigenous Brazilian practices of *mutirão* (Caldeira 1956; Marcondes 1948; Stevens 2019) and anarchist praxis (Kropotkin 1902; Silva 2017b).

Although conditions within each occupation varied considerably, students generally organised themselves into subgroups to deal with practical, daily tasks. These *comissões* (commissions), 'committees' and 'task teams' were responsible for a wide range of concerns, including occupation security, creating legal teams, media and communications, fundraising

⁴⁴⁴Interview, Thandolwethu, 27 March 2017

⁴⁴⁵They were not the only site, of course; political debates, dialogue, and learning took place throughout the mobilisations, and notably also online

⁴⁴⁶Interview, Fernanda, 24 August 2017

⁴⁴⁷Interview, Fernanda, 24 August 2017

⁴⁴⁸This was not always the case: in some cases, the divergence within the group was significant enough and rigid enough that the group split, a process discussed in further detail below

and entertainment. At Wits, students further organised a “task team to educate students and workers”, as well as a “direct action” team that was “responsible for devising strategies of protest, depending on what kind of resistance or repression [occupations] were met with”.⁴⁴⁹ Subgroup membership tended to be relatively stable when the skills required were more specialised or their projects longer-term (such as in writing and press relations), and more variable – albeit with a few persistent core members - when more easily performed by a wider pool of people (such as cleaning and cooking). Subgroups sometimes had the authority to direct students more widely, for instance when *comissão de limpeza* (cleaning commission) directed large numbers of students towards reproductive labour through *mutirões*.⁴⁵⁰

Students had to create their own lives through living in occupied spaces, organising to eat, sleep, clean, and host activities. These daily tasks, ordinarily invisible, became important aspects of the mobilisation’s political contestation, and a central aspect of students’ autonomy. For Maria in São Paulo, for example, students put into practice the “idea of the collective, of *autogestão* (self-management)”.⁴⁵¹ *Autogestão* was thus not an abstract political theory, but was viscerally felt and lived by students in their actions. Maria highlighted how, “it’s you who’s cleaning the school, often it’s you who’s painted the walls that haven’t been painted in ages”, and it is by doing these tasks that students embodied the idea that *A Escola é Nossa* (The School is Ours).

Once the student mobilisations began, authorities attempted to discredit them by claiming they were destroying or vandalising public property. Public opinion varied, but, according to Patrícia, a student in Rio state, many initially viewed students as “just some adolescents that wanted to invade the school simply to sleep and do ‘teenage things’ inside”.⁴⁵² The reality was that students maintained and cared for their immediate living environments more than ever, particularly when they lived in occupations for extended periods. Many students emphasised how they preserved their schools, taking care of them “as if it really were our home”.⁴⁵³ Even in short-lived protests, students often ensured that they cleaned up after themselves. In South Africa, for instance, Hendricks (2018), a lecturer at UWC, observed that #FMF had “public meeting where students would clean up afterwards”, until repression made this impossible.⁴⁵⁴

Such collective practices not only developed in-group solidarity and sense of togetherness in a shared project, but also had an important impact on broader perceptions of the mobilisations. In a small city in Rio state, for instance, the relationship between the city’s

⁴⁴⁹Interview, Thandolwethu, 27 March 2017

⁴⁵⁰Group Interview, E.E. Mendes de Moraes, Rio, 22 August 2017

⁴⁵¹Interview, Maria, 29 May 2017

⁴⁵²Interview, Patrícia, 29 May 2017

⁴⁵³Interview, Patrícia, 29 May 2017

⁴⁵⁴Similar processes have been documented at Wits (Kgoroba 2017, p. 126) and in street protests until police repression increased (Chikane 2018a)

residents and student occupiers improved when the media reported on students' cleaning routines and filmed them "sweeping the bathrooms".⁴⁵⁵ As a result, "people could see from within their own homes what was happening in the occupied schools... we had the opportunity to talk about what we were thinking and change people's minds". After the media coverage, the occupations started to receive donations and visitors interested in learning more about students' struggles.

Managing social reproduction within the mobilisations taught students several practical and relational skills. Fernanda, a student at a CPII campus in Rio, recalled that learning to cook for "three hundred people" was already a significant new experience for her, but in the process she also "learnt to deal with differences, to live with people that we'd cross paths with in the corridors every day but never spoke to".⁴⁵⁶ Students also emphasised the sense of interconnection arising from collectively cooking and eating, bringing participants "together as a family".⁴⁵⁷ In the process, however, students also challenged hegemonic divisions of social-reproductive labour. Cleaning work in South African universities had historically been done by poorly-paid, outsourced black women. Brazilian schools similarly hired working-class women as *tias* (aunties) to work in school cafeterias and kitchens. These taken-for-granted arrangements were challenged throughout the mobilisations, as students took up the tasks for themselves. Students thereby learnt about what it takes to reproduce social life on a daily basis (Bhattacharya 2017).⁴⁵⁸ In some Brazilian schools, for instance, female students argued that men should be the ones in the kitchen learning to cook for and support the collective, and male students often cooked meals for the occupations in their school cafeterias, gaining critical insights into how a gendered division of labour functions.⁴⁵⁹ Many students viewed the explicitly-educational and social-reproductive aspects of the occupations as deeply entwined, arguing that they

left the occupation completely differently, learning how to clean the bathroom, to make food; learning to have their own opinions, to question more things

Interview, Patrícia, 29 May 2017

In developing new relations, students had to build trust amongst one another, which was facilitated by living alongside one another in the occupations. In most occupations, a core group of students slept in the school each night, with many more joining during the days. Students turned classrooms or offices into male and female dorms, and arranged

⁴⁵⁵Interview, Patrícia, 29 May 2017

⁴⁵⁶Interview, Fernanda, 24 August 2017

⁴⁵⁷Interview, Patrícia, 29 May 2017

⁴⁵⁸Interview, Maria, 5 June 2017

⁴⁵⁹Interview, Fernanda, 24 August 2017. Similarly, in South Africa, an off-campus space known as 'Black House' in Soweto had "comrades... engaging in discussion, sharing domestic work equitably, with men doing domestic work". Interview, Aisha, 15 September 2017. See also (Blackhouse Collective 2017; Sipuye 2016)

makeshift accommodation with sleeping bags and mattresses, or in rare cases outside in camping tents.⁴⁶⁰ At Diadema in São Paulo, one student described having slept on the floor of the school every night for 42 days.⁴⁶¹ Because students were in close proximity to one another for extended periods, the occupations in particular provided a space in which even deeply ingrained prejudices could be challenged and trust built between people despite their differences. Carlos, a student in São Paulo, for instance, argued that people he called “complete homophobes and racists” in his school were “remoulded” within the occupation.⁴⁶² This, he argued, was because, they had a genuine experience of diversity and living a “collective life”, ordinarily lacking from the school. For some students, staying together overnight was “the best part of the occupation”.⁴⁶³ Mariana, a student in Rio who had done so, described how it “most unified people” because “you were there, sleeping with people you wouldn’t have known, having to trust them”.

Through these processes, students developed close friendships and affective bonds among themselves and with the teachers who supported them. These relational connections enabled students to experience a sense of equality (Badiou [1988] 2007; Piper 2017; Ranciere 1999), with such egalitarianism a prerequisite for “genuine political activity” (Harley 2012, p. 325). According to Maria in São Paulo, “Everyone felt equal. A family, even. A good family”.⁴⁶⁴ In Johannesburg, Thandolwethu described the shift as producing a “sense of belonging” that came with the occupations.⁴⁶⁵ This was clear even to those marginal to the occupations. One student in Rio State who visited the occupation at *Colégio Estadual* - State School (C.E.) Euclides da Cunha recalled,

I didn’t take part, sleep or study here. I just came during the day sometimes. But I saw all the interactions between everyone, everyone respecting each other, self-organising and learning to live together, convivially.

Interview, Beatriz, 29 May 2017

5.3.3 Building and Sustaining Coalitions

While they organised on individual campuses, students also realised that their mobilisations were trying to grapple with broader issues, and hence built coalitions and organised across campuses. Forging solidarity across difference cannot be taken for granted (Chibber 2017b; Cox and Nilsen 2014; Foran 2014). As Mohanty (2003, p. 7) argues, solidarity

⁴⁶⁰Many of these supplies were brought by external supporters. Brazilian teachers’ unions facilitated drives for supplies for students’ occupations, while Kgoroba (2017, p. 126) recalls “arriving one evening to see Wits alumni and other charity organisations providing supper to students who stayed in university residence”

⁴⁶¹Group Interview, E.E. Diadema, São Paulo, 8 June 2017

⁴⁶²Interview, Carlos, 29 May 2017

⁴⁶³Interview, Mariana, 28 August 2017

⁴⁶⁴Interview, Maria, 5 June 2017

⁴⁶⁵Interview, Thandolwethu, 27 March 2017

is about “communities of people who have chosen to work and fight together” and is “always an achievement, the result of active struggle”. These connections enabled mobilisations to learn from one another, provide material support from one another, and provide “diversionary support” by displacing the strength of repressive forces against the mobilisations (Wallerstein 1983, p. 70; Barker 2016, p. 3).

In Brazil, for example, students organised ‘assemblies of assemblies’ – with recallable, variable representatives of local assemblies from a single school meeting their peers to work out ways of cooperating and ensuring the movement’s success.⁴⁶⁶ These resemble the anarchistic ‘spokescouncils’ that emerged across global social movements over the last decades (Graeber 2002, p. 71), or the ‘consiliar system’ proposed by Hamilton (2015, p. 202).⁴⁶⁷

In South Africa, by contrast, students largely met through campus-to-campus networks, such as through the #October6 (#Oct6) space between UJ and Wits. Students also met one another at key public protests, such as at Parliament in Cape Town.⁴⁶⁸ Over the course of 2016-17, students took part in country-wide meetings, although these were largely organised by authorities and directed towards absorbing critique and reinforcing the existing socio-political paradigm (Sewell 1996, p. 844). The South African Higher Education National Convention (18 March 2017), for instance, was organised by elites in the state and civil society, and was disrupted by clashes between student supporters of the EFF and PAC, on one side, and ANC on the other.

In both South Africa and Brazil, students used these links to build relations of solidarity through “acts of redistribution”, from media attention to financial assistance, as well as “water, food, medical supplies and bail money” (Ndelu, Dlakavu, and Boswell 2017, p. 22).⁴⁶⁹

Coalitions were essential for the success of the mobilisations because they reduced the capacity of authorities to suppress the movements. Students in both countries visited one another’s campuses, shifting organising meetings to prioritise the needs of vulnerable students, and enabling them to take “refuge on each other’s campuses, away from the brutal clashes between protesters and police on their home campuses” (ibid., p. 22).⁴⁷⁰ Moreover, each new campus that began their own mobilisation displaced state repression. Mendes, the first school occupied in Rio, for example, was in a precarious position for ten days before students at another school occupied.⁴⁷¹ A teacher at Mendes recalled that,

we started to get apprehensive because we knew that as the only occupied school,

⁴⁶⁶Interview, Maria, 5 June 2017

⁴⁶⁷Although in São Paulo they adopted the hierarchical, militaristic name, *Comando das Escolas em Luta* (Command of Schools in Struggle)

⁴⁶⁸Interview, Annika, 7 April 2017

⁴⁶⁹Interviews, Aline, *secundarista* at Fernão, São Paulo, 6 June 2017; Maria, 5 June 2017

⁴⁷⁰Interview, Maria, 5 June 2017

⁴⁷¹Interview, Francisca, 18 August 2017

the focus would be here and it was dangerous for the students. We were praying for another school to occupy, in order to alleviate the pressure a bit here. As other occupations started, the government started negotiating

Interview, Francisca, 18 August 2017

5.4 Decomposition and Demobilisation

Students in 2015-16 were not always successful in maintaining their mobilisations. Like social movements generally, cycles of student movements either institutionalise themselves or begin to fray and decompose (Bond 2015; Tarrow 1993a; Traugott 1994). Tarrow (2011, p. 190) identifies five ways in which decomposition generally takes place: through repression, exhaustion, radicalisation, facilitation, and institutionalisation. Authorities might deal with movements through attempting to undermine or inhibit them, often through state violence, or they may attempt to placate them by acceding to certain demands (ibid., p. 209). Doing either of these may lead to unintended or contradictory outcomes: violent repression may “push radicals into more sectarian forms of organization and more violent forms of action” (ibid., p. 209), radicalising those who remain while further alienating possible supporters who disagree with the direction of the movement. Facilitation, on the other hand, may enable further claim-making by non-institutional actors (Tarrow 2011, p. 207; Goldstone 1998), but may also draw less-committed activists away from the movement as they feel their demands met. Facilitation may also lead to co-optation of some prominent leaders while pushing more radical activists away from the movement as it becomes integrated with existing institutional structures (Tarrow 2011, p. 207).⁴⁷² Simultaneously, as time goes on, the costs of maintaining contentious activity begin to wear down activists, with many leaving because of exhaustion (ibid., p. 206). In addition, student movements specifically are shaped by the regular loss of activists through graduation, and the changing shape of the movement as new students enter (Altbach 1989a, p. 99). The decomposition of a collective often returns its members to “seriality”, a dissociated assortment of alienated individuals, although they may yet retain some relations to one another developed through their collective organising (Sartre [1960] 2004a).

In South Africa and Brazil, most students demobilised over 2016. In São Paulo, this was largely in early 2016, once the state announced it would stop the reorganisation programme. In Rio, this was around the mid-year, particularly as repression intensified. In South Africa, the combination of repression, selective concessions from the state, divergent internal tendencies and pressures to complete the academic year undermined the mobilisations over the course of 2016. In these cases, the main causes of demobilisation were factionalism,

⁴⁷²This dynamic points to the difficulty of institutionalising the gains of the movement

where fractures within the mobilisations eventually sundered group formation; violence and repression, significantly by police and private security; and exhaustion, as students attempted to return to their ordinary lives.

5.4.1 Factionalism

Factionalism was the first major reason for the dissolution of the mobilisations, particularly in South Africa. The heterogeneity that had initially been an important strength of the mobilisations became a point of conflict as time went on. Although demands had dynamically intersected with one another, cleavages arose around different issues, mainly gender and sexuality; class and race; and political ideology and party affiliation. When factions became more important than the mobilisation as a whole, students withdrew from general organising spaces into their “caucuses”, sometimes in acrimonious exchanges between former comrades.⁴⁷³ Because students did not have significant institutional power, being unable to mobilise *en masse* undermined student power and reduced their primary mechanism for inducing change. At the same time, factions, as sub-coalitions within a broader movement, became important in developing new political ideas and practices.⁴⁷⁴ Differing strands can be organised into unity that embraces rather than erases internal difference, drawing on the strengths of several approaches rather than relying on a political monoculture (Khan 2016; Lorde [1979] 1993b). The difficulty, according to Patricia, a student at Wits, was when “that doesn’t have a collective to come back to”.⁴⁷⁵ The absence or destruction of collective political fora inhibited students’ political development, and meant that students simply “disrupted each other, withdrew from collectives, and critiqued whoever was left behind”.

Uncritical unity was a often problem during the mobilisations because some students felt like they were forced to organise under terms they disagreed with or found harmful. This was particularly important within the gendered dynamics of the mobilisations. In South Africa, for instance, while women and LGBT+ students had been central in organising the Fallist mobilisations, the internal dynamics shifted over 2015-16 towards prioritising blackness as a mobilising identity, and marginalising issues of gender and sexuality, which had been labelled as a “distraction” (Ndelu, Dlakavu, and Boswell 2017; Pilane 2015; Ramaru 2017), or even “counter-revolutionary” or a “western imposition”.⁴⁷⁶ This varied by campus, however. In institutions like the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT), Mavuso (2017, p. 3) argues, the mobilisations were led almost entirely by men. Elsewhere, such as the University Currently Known As Rhodes (UCKAR), gendered issues were a primary driver of student mobilisations, for instance during the #RURReferenceList

⁴⁷³Interview, Patricia, Wits, 22 March 2017

⁴⁷⁴Interview, Patricia, Wits, 22 March 2017

⁴⁷⁵Interview, Patricia, Wits, 22 March 2017

⁴⁷⁶Interview, Aisha, UJ, 15 September 2017

protest in April 2016 (Macleod et al. 2018; O'Halloran 2016). In some cases, the forms of hegemonic masculinity within the mobilisations, particularly after internal incidents of gendered violence, put overbearing pressure on women and feminists (Matandela 2017, p. 4; Ndelu, Dlakavu, and Boswell 2017, p. 2).⁴⁷⁷ At times, they decided to leave, and began organising separately in alternative, internally-supportive communities (Khan 2016, 2017; Manzini 2017). These alternative spaces were possible because the broad Fallist mobilisations had drawn thousands of new students into activism, and enabled a broader reconfiguration of the politicised ecosystem (Khan 2017; Mansbridge 1996).⁴⁷⁸ At UCT, for example, the Trans Capture protests challenged the “trans-antagonism” and “erasure of trans activists” within #RMF and #FMF, challenging patriarchal forms of movement organising despite the spaces being claimed “intersectional”.⁴⁷⁹ This was captured, for instance, in the famous placard, still the icon of the #RMF Facebook page,

Dear history, this revolution has women, gays, queers & trans. Remember that
#RhodesMustFall

The UCT Trans Collective (2017, p. 27), the group organising the protest, argued that students should make the mobilisation the “Fallist space of our dreams”, where “no one should have to choose between their struggles”. In this case, however, the Trans Collective chose to “submarine from active membership” and hold the Fallist mobilisations accountable from outside.

In other cases, feminists remained within and contested the Fallist space, often under the banner of #PatriarchyMustFall (Matandela 2017; Pilane 2015). They shaped the repertoire of tactics, adopting gendered forms of protest, such as nude protests against police violence (Ndlovu 2017b), while also attempting to do the “intentional, protracted work” of consciousness-raising within the mobilisations (Ratele 2017, p. 55). For White (2017), black feminists centred the question of safety for *all*, particularly for “those of us who are in the ‘margins within the margins’”. This extended beyond external violence, such as from policing, and to how students were to be safe even amongst each other. However, tensions with more patriarchal students led to internal conflicts,⁴⁸⁰ resulting in what Ramaru (2017) observed as a group of Black men who left Fallist organising because it had in their view lost its focus on anti-racist struggle by also emphasising gendered issues. At times, these fractures played out along and intersected with other lines, such as political parties. Chikane (2018a, p. 119), for instance, argues that PASMA tended to be less sensitive to “violent forms of patriarchy that exist within its ideology”.

⁴⁷⁷Interview, Beverley, 6 April 2017

⁴⁷⁸Interview, Patricia, 22 March 2017

⁴⁷⁹Interview, Annika, 7 April 2017. See also Ndelu, Dlakavu, and Boswell (2017) and UCT Trans Collective (2017)

⁴⁸⁰While this was largely directed from men against women, it also included some self-identifying African Women who saw a specific gendered roles based on an assertion of a particular form of ‘African Culture’ (Sipuye 2016)

In a noticeable difference, gendered dynamics in Brazil were prominent but less divisive than in South Africa.⁴⁸¹ One reason for this was that women and LGBTI+ people had, from the start, not only led the mobilisations, but also had stronger forms of self-organisation.⁴⁸² As a result, throughout the mobilisations, they were able to maintain their collective power to shape the broader movement in a gender-equitable way, in a model resembling democratic confederalism (Dirik 2015; Öcalan 2011).⁴⁸³ In Rio, for instance, Marcia recalled that her school's occupation had "self-organised spaces for women", where they "were thinking about issues of safety and security, and how to make the rest of the occupation listen to what girls were saying".⁴⁸⁴ Feminist *secundaristas* devoted significant energy to raising feminist consciousness within the occupations, sensitising their fellow students to challenges that women and LGBTI+ people faced (Alegria 2017a, 2018; Castilho and Romancini 2017). Some teachers also worked with students to create programmes and debates challenging homophobia, *machismo* and similar forms of discrimination. Francisca, a teacher in Rio, described how her school's directorate resisted such discussions, but the alliances between students and teachers were able to overcome this, and they ran a course challenging gendered discrimination.⁴⁸⁵ Similarly, at CPII, students and teachers began organising an annual Gender Diversity Week, now in its fifth iteration.⁴⁸⁶ Although the impact of these dynamics at a broader, societal scale was limited, it was nevertheless important within the mobilisations and ensured that they did not fracture along gendered lines.⁴⁸⁷

In both countries, the mobilisations also fragmented around class and race. In South Africa, class structure shaped the emergence of some factions. Middle class students faced pressure from fee increases, but could still afford fees. Working class and poor students, however, often demanded more concessions than a 0% increase, but were most at risk from police violence and had fewer options if they could not complete their education.⁴⁸⁸ After the state strategically "capitulated" to some demands, attempting to "quieten students back to class" (Ndlovu 2017c), Middle-class students tended to demobilise relatively quickly, calling for a return to the ordinary educational programme.⁴⁸⁹ Other students, however, advocated for continuing the mobilisations until more radical demands were met, particularly workers' insourcing, and were subject to state repression (ibid., p. 139).

⁴⁸¹See, in particular, Capai (2019) and Colombini and Alonso (2016)

⁴⁸²Interview, Francisca, 18 August 2017

⁴⁸³Discussion, *Reunião do Grupo de Estudos da Diversidade de Gênero*, CPII São Cristóvão, Rio de Janeiro, 9 August 2017

⁴⁸⁴Interview, Juliana and Marcia, 10 August 2017

⁴⁸⁵Interview, Francisca, 18 August 2017

⁴⁸⁶See <https://fb.com/estudosdegenerocp2sc>

⁴⁸⁷Interview, Antonia, *Instituto Superior de Educação do Rio de Janeiro* - Higher Education Institute of Rio de Janeiro (ISERJ), 19 September 2016

⁴⁸⁸Interview, Tasneem, 22 March 2017

⁴⁸⁹Interview, Tasneem, 22 March 2017

A second significant fracture related to the question of racism. “Charterists”, like ANC affiliated students, usually took the 1955 Freedom Charter’s commitment to non-racialism as their guide, while others adopted Black Consciousness and African Nationalist positions, advocating for Black self-organisation (Naidoo 2016a).⁴⁹⁰ Some students were also influenced by the US-originating Afropessimism, which emphasised “what it is to be a black body in an anti-black world”,⁴⁹¹ highlighting the institutional nature of racism and sometimes arguing for an essential conflict between ‘races’ (gamEdze and Gamedze 2017; Mthunzi 2017).⁴⁹² These positions were polarised between viewing social institutions as products of social struggle, which could be changed and where one might need to “build from within”, against seeing those institutions as irredeemably anti-black, with Fallism thus meaning that “everything must fall in order to rebuild”.⁴⁹³ The smaller groups that continued to organise throughout 2016 and beyond tended to be relatively more influenced by Afropessimism and harder-line variants of African Nationalism, which further divided students, homogenising the previously-heterogeneous collectives (Ndelu 2017, p. 72). At this stage, individual power struggles became more prominent as smaller groups increasingly “revolved around personalities” (Ntsebeza 2019).⁴⁹⁴ Students became less willing to accept advice, critique, or guidance, instead consolidating power in cliques.⁴⁹⁵ As a result, these small groups’ radical tactics became “detached” from broader strategies and collectives, and “violence became a principle of struggle”.⁴⁹⁶ Those who remained within Fallist organising spaces thus become more extreme and hierarchical, further distanced themselves from alternative ideological positions that did not cohere with a vanguardist Afropessimist perspective, and attempted to impose their views on the broader campus community (Mabasa 2018a; Ndelu 2017).⁴⁹⁷

In the Brazilian student mobilisations, questions of class and race were less dramatic than in South Africa. Brazilian working-class students did not usually critique others for their class position as such, over which they had no control, but critiqued the framing of the movement’s demands as being driven by the experiences of middle-class students at relatively privileged schools. Rather than split the mobilisations, however, students called for a unified student movement that prioritised working-class students’ needs and

⁴⁹⁰For theoretical justifications and critique, see e.g. Lamola (2017) and More (2009)

⁴⁹¹Interview, Annika, 7 April 2017

⁴⁹²For theoretical justifications, see works by Wilderson, Spillers, Hartman, and Sexton (racked & dispatched 2017); for critique, see e.g. (Gordon et al. 2017; Haider 2018; Kline 2017)

⁴⁹³Interview, Isaac, Wits, 23 March 2017. See also Thomas (2018, p. 298)

⁴⁹⁴Interview, Paballo, 2 July 2018

⁴⁹⁵Interview, Tasneem, 22 March 2017

⁴⁹⁶Interview, Patricia, 22 March 2017. This is akin to the dynamics of “fraternity-terror” and internally-directed control through fear that Fanon ([1963] 2004) and Sartre ([1960] 2004a) identify

⁴⁹⁷Reflecting debates around the supposed “iron law of oligarchy” (Michels [1911] 2001), wherein movements become a “tool for the immobilization of the people” (Bernasconi 2010, p. 41) from Social Movement Theory (Tolbert 2013; Tilly 1978, pp. 150–1) to Anarchist studies (Gordon 2006)

interests.⁴⁹⁸ A similar dynamic played out with regards to racism.⁴⁹⁹

However, race and class divisions affected whether and how students would pursue longer-term organising. While many students felt they had achieved their primary goal and demobilised, the students who continued their activism throughout 2016 tended, like in South Africa, to hold more radical views of society and education, and advocated for more far-reaching changes than the 2015 mobilisation. In both Rio and São Paulo, students who continued their activism had shifted towards wider-ranging struggles. In São Paulo, for instance, numerous working-class students like Maria began organising in 2016-17 with the *Movimento Passe Livre* - Free Fare Movement (MPL) against bus fare increases and for free public transport, which middle-class students could either afford or did not use.⁵⁰⁰ As a result, middle-class students tended to return to class, although at times organising in other spaces, such as feminist collectives.⁵⁰¹ Amongst black students, many became involved in anti-racist organisations and organising against police violence.⁵⁰²

The third axis around which divisions and factions emerged in the mobilisations was political ideology and party identification. In South Africa, party-political divisions were one of the most important factors in the decomposition of the Fallist moment, unravelling the mobilisations over 2016-17. Isaac, a lecturer at Wits, argued that as “ideological and party-political fissures re-emerged in 2016”, Fallism lost its status as a broader banner under which students could mobilise and “transcend the ideological and organisational divides”.⁵⁰³ Party divisions were sometimes underpinned by ideological divisions, notably students supporting non-racialist “Charterist” organisations such as SASCO, or supporting African nationalist formations like PASMA. The limitations in each of these organisations in acknowledging the ideological weight of their counterparts, Chikane (2018a, pp. 118–9) argues, led to deep divisions which could not be overcome over the course of 2016. In some cases, the internal contradictions of these very organisations, such as PASMA’s ambivalence towards questions of class, undermined their capacity to function effectively as part of a broader movement (ibid., p. 119). More importantly, there was a near-total “re-politicisation of the movement along party-political lines” in 2016, which undermined student mobilisation on the basis of a broader mandate or set of demands.⁵⁰⁴ Although political party affiliates had been present from the start of the mobilisations (Khan 2017, p. 7), over 2016 students affiliated to the EFFSC and PYA in particular were “no longer interested in retreating from their robust campaigning as party-political

⁴⁹⁸Presentations: *Seminário: As Ocupações Estudantis e a Reforma do Ensino Médio*; and *Educação, conflito e autogestão: as experiências das ocupações estudantis*

⁴⁹⁹Interviews, Carlos, 29 May 2017; Maria, 5 June 2017

⁵⁰⁰Interview, Maria, 5 June 2017

⁵⁰¹Interview, Aline, São Paulo, 6 June 2017

⁵⁰²Interview, Carlos, 29 May 2017

⁵⁰³Interview, Isaac, 23 March 2017

⁵⁰⁴Interview, Isaac, 23 March 2017

activists” and prioritised party interests above movement-building.⁵⁰⁵ Students aligned to national political parties often attempted to maintain their standing within their parent organisation, securing their own funding, legitimacy or career (Maringira and Gukurume 2017, p. 37). In some cases, national political parties pressured campus-based youth leagues to gain hegemony within the mobilisations and shape student activism towards their interests.⁵⁰⁶ At UWC, for instance, Maringira and Gukurume (ibid., p. 37) argue that ANC-aligned students withdrew from #FMF in 2016 because they could not “bite the hand that fed them”, and were criticised for “selling out” or as “cowards whose agenda was to thwart the students’ movement”.⁵⁰⁷ Party-political allegiances thus reshaped the South African mobilisations, often subordinating other, divergent, creative, and important tendencies. Isaac, for instance, observed that the re-assertion of party-politics “drove out and marginalised politics like intersectionality, black feminist politics, and LGBT+ issues”.⁵⁰⁸ This also led to bitter exchanges. At UCT, for instance, ANC-aligned students in #FMF would “leak bank account details and WhatsApp conversations, claiming they were evidence key figures in #RMF were working with foreign agencies to bring regime change to South Africa” (Molefe 2016, p. 35).

Unlike in South Africa, Brazilian students had largely downplayed party-political affiliation in São Paulo and, to some extent, Rio. Across Brazil, tensions within the movement arose more often between students inclined towards communism or anarchism. These were, however, rarely significant enough to fracture student mobilisation.⁵⁰⁹ Issues of political parties became more salient in 2016 during Dilma’s impeachment and Temer’s presidency, where students had to grapple with their relationship to the PT. Although division along national political lines thus became relevant, it nevertheless was largely kept secondary, with students prioritising the main challenge against state austerity.⁵¹⁰ Once the student mobilisations themselves had subsided, however, many students looked towards organisations with ideological similarity to continue their activism. Carol, for instance, began working part-time in the parliamentary office of PSOL, a party on the radical left.⁵¹¹ In Rio, several students had continued working with local socialist and communist youth organisations, including *Levante*, UJC and UJS, while others participated in other social movements, including against the Olympics, Dilma’s impeachment, and Temer’s education reforms.⁵¹²

⁵⁰⁵Interview, Isaac, 23 March 2017

⁵⁰⁶Interview, Isaac, 23 March 2017

⁵⁰⁷This strategy of co-optation, which Gramsci (1971, p. 80) calls “corruption”, occurs “when it is hard to exercise the hegemonic function, and when the use of force is too risky”. Authorities offer selective concessions and try to sway leaders to “sow disarray and confusion”, dividing and weakening mobilisations

⁵⁰⁸Interview, Isaac, 23 March 2017

⁵⁰⁹Interview, Maria, 5 June 2017

⁵¹⁰This may be because Brazilian *secundaristas* were younger than South African university students, and hence less embedded in existing political networks or less invested in careers through political parties

⁵¹¹Interview, Carol, 8 June 2017

⁵¹²Group Interview, E.E. Mendes de Moraes, 22 August 2017; Interviews, Juliana and Marcia, 10 August

5.4.2 Violence and Repression

Both Brazil and South Africa are founded on variegated violence and the repression of dissent and popular movements (Gledhill 2018; Mkhize and Madumi 2017; Willis 2015). These tactics were reproduced against the 2015-16 mobilisations. Authorities in both countries have a long history of using a mutually-constitutive “combination of force and consent” to maintain control (Gramsci 1971). These tactics played a major role in fragmenting the mobilisations. While state and institutional elites attempted to persuade or buy off sections of the student mobilisations, they also used more overt force as well as covert forms of repression (Choudry 2018). External threats, including police repression as well as occasionally hostile community members, left students demoralised, injured, or traumatised. This had a detrimental impact on students’ capacities to organise, and contributed to how the mobilisations changed over time and eventually decomposed (Bernasconi 2010, p. 46fn22).

Across mobilisations in both South Africa and Brazil, state and private security physically and verbally abused students, who were kicked and punched, beaten with batons, pepper sprayed and teargassed, had their clothes torn off, and shot with rubber bullets.⁵¹³ Students were threatened, intimidated, and arrested, often on spurious charges which were later dropped or criminalised and forced through tortuous legal proceedings, and their legal representatives were harassed.⁵¹⁴ Students’ residences were raided and their personal property stolen, particularly cellphones when recording evidence.⁵¹⁵

In Brazil, *Polícia Militar* (Military Police) physically assaulted students, both at protests with teargas and occasionally rubber bullets, as well as invading occupied schools, beating and arresting students. Physical violence against students was more prevalent in poorer, marginalised areas like *favelas* and *periferias* than in wealthier suburbs, matching broader policing patterns (Gledhill 2018; Willis 2015).⁵¹⁶ Even without direct confrontation

2017; Fernanda, 24 August 2017

⁵¹³In at least one case, a student, Kelvin Baloyi at UJ, was shot and killed by private security on 5 November 2016, linked to the securitisation of educational institutions, although not to the mobilisations directly (Rahlaga 2016; Schutte 2016)

⁵¹⁴In two notable cases, students arrested in South Africa were initially charged with High Treason before charges were dropped (Chikane 2018a, p. 178), and authorities used legal interdicts to justify repression of students unrelated to the interdicts, including through what might be a legal precedent in interdicting a hashtag (#FeesMustFall) (Duncan and Frassinelli 2015, p. 7; Naicker 2015). Several years after the protest cycle had ended, court cases were ongoing for over 500 Fallists, including some who had been initially sentenced and imprisoned like Bonginkosi Khanyile or Kanya Cekeshe (Brooks 2018; Kalla 2018; Khanyile 2019; Macupe 2019; Shushwana 2018)

⁵¹⁵These instances have been widely documented, for instance in Brooks (2018) and Duncan and Frassinelli (2015)

⁵¹⁶Students and teachers argued that state securitisation had taken place under the PT in the name of “class conciliation”, where the state had started to “militarise and repress” popular movements. However, these pressures were worse in cases where more right-wing governments were in power at a state level (Cunha Júnior and Lemos 2016; Gledhill 2018), and repression increased significantly over 2016 as Temer took power federally. Interviews, Júlia, Mendes de Moraes, 22 August 2017; Francisca, 18 August 2017

or physical violence, authorities attempted to instil fear amongst students within their occupied schools. Police used several surveillance techniques to spy on students and target particular individual organisers.⁵¹⁷ In some instances, police discussed adopting “guerrilla tactics” to “demoralise” the students (Romancini and Castilho 2017, p. 94).⁵¹⁸ School administrators attempted to cut electricity or water to schools, pressuring students to leave,⁵¹⁹ while *desocupa* groups attempted to evict students, at times physically assaulting and cutting them, supported or overlooked by the state (Long 2016a).

South Africa followed similar patterns, with securitisation largely taking place under Public Order Policing as well as unaccountable private security companies that operated in a legal grey zone.⁵²⁰ State repression and violence was more intense at poorer HBUs than at wealthier Historically White Universities (HWUs) (Duncan and Frassinelli 2015). Like in Brazil, state securitisation has also increased significantly since the 2000s in the neoliberal period (Duncan 2014, 2016). Additionally, police violence against students was also racialised and gendered, reproducing broader societal injustices (Ndlovu 2017c, p. 50; Brooks 2018). Throughout, women were more frequently subject to threats or acts of sexual violence than men (Khan 2017; Manzini 2017). Similarly, white students and lecturers were sometimes allowed through police blockades onto campus, being read as “harmless”, while black colleagues were refused access or racially abused (Duncan and Frassinelli 2015, p. 10). However, the violence was also often indiscriminate, with white students and academic staff subject to abuse, arrest, and intimidation. This generalised violence indicated that the state saw the student mobilisations as a genuine threat to its own stability, and sought to prevent the uprising from spreading.

In South Africa and Brazil, the state, education institutions, and dominant media companies presented a strikingly similar justification for repression, portraying students as a threat to social order that needed to be stopped, violently if necessary.⁵²¹ In South Africa, students were characterised from the earliest period as “violent protesters” or “hooligans” (Duncan and Frassinelli 2015, p. 3; Beukes 2017, p. 204).⁵²² In Brazil, students were represented as “vagabonds” who would do “damage to public property” (Januário et al. 2016, p. 12; Miranda 2017, p. 291; Pinheiro 2017, p. 271).⁵²³

In both contexts, state repression increased from 2015 to 2016, largely because institu-

⁵¹⁷This was visible at protests, and was recounted by several students

⁵¹⁸See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=68qbymS6Xvc>

⁵¹⁹Interview, Carlos, 29 May 2017

⁵²⁰Universities invited police and private security onto campuses, which was historically significant in some institutions that had, under Apartheid, banned police from entering. Interview, Aisha, UJ, 15 September 2017

⁵²¹This is hardly novel: similar discourses were deployed to justify repression against students across Africa (Munene 2003), and in Latin America against Chilean school students in 2011. Castillo-Carniglia et al. (2017), for instance, show how occupying students in Chile were manipulatively misrepresented as drug users to turn the public against the movement

⁵²²See e.g. news24.com/MyNews24/feesmustfall-journalism-is-about-uncovering-the-truth-20161005

⁵²³In some cases, police even lied about protesters attacking them (Antunes 2016a)

tions were no longer “caught by surprise” and hence were better prepared, often heavily securitising campuses.⁵²⁴ While in some instances, students came out in larger numbers in “backlash” protests against police violence (Aytaç, Schiumerini, and Stokes 2017),⁵²⁵ police violence usually had a dampening effect on student organising as students lost central, accessible spaces in which to meet and discuss strategies and tactics.⁵²⁶ This in turn contributed to the fragmentation and dispersion of activists. In Rio in 2016, for instance, the Military Police invaded occupied schools and forcefully “reintegrated” them into the state’s control (Tavolari et al. 2018, p. 293), which courts had declared illegal in São Paulo in 2015 (Medeiros, Melo, and Januário 2017, p. 11). As a result, student organising was disrupted, and the mobilisations were less able to mount a collective challenge to the state. On South African campuses, police and private security were permanently stationed to instil fear and chill protest (Chikane 2018a, p. 227; Naidoo 2016a, p. 188). The apartheid-era disciplinary architecture of HBUs like UWC and UJ meant that it was easy to control campus entry and exit through securitised checkpoints,⁵²⁷ while at Wits, police waited on campus in riot-ready vans (Manzini 2017).⁵²⁸ When students protested, police responded with teargas, *Nyalas* and *Casspirs*, infamous apartheid-era vehicles designed for use in warzones. In some cases, these confrontations became so intense that police indiscriminately fired rubber bullets at students in campus residences.⁵²⁹

Over time, security agencies and education institutions management in both South Africa and Brazil infiltrated the student mobilisations, pre-empting students’ actions and sometimes detaining student activists (Chikane 2018a, p. 146).⁵³⁰ Infiltration was designed to discredit opposition to the state while destroying trust amongst activists (Choudry 2018; Ellis 1998), and was, according to Aisha at UJ, simply “Apartheid era tactics”.⁵³¹ While these tactics have long been used across Africa, Europe and the US (Munene 2003, p. 123; Choudry 2018), they are a new development in post-authoritarian South Africa and Brazil.

In South Africa, infiltration was not only through so-called *impimpis* (informants),⁵³² but also a “third force” that would shape the movement (The Presidency 2018, p. 65). Off the record, several interviewees told me that these infiltrators had in fact promoted violence amongst students (Ndlovu 2017c, p. 57).⁵³³

⁵²⁴Interview, Aisha, 15 September 2017

⁵²⁵Interview, Beverley, 6 April 2017

⁵²⁶Interview, Aisha, UJ, 15 September 2017

⁵²⁷This meant that for students at UJ, the #Oct6 collective became the only broad organising space still available to activists, who could meet on Wits campus. Interview, Aisha, 15 September 2017

⁵²⁸Interview, Leonard, 29 June 2018

⁵²⁹Interview, Annika, 7 April 2017

⁵³⁰Interviews, Aisha, UJ, 15 September 2017; Aline and Ana, *Fernão*, Rio, 6 June 2017

⁵³¹Interview, Aisha, UJ, 15 September 2017

⁵³²Interview, Aisha, 15 September 2017

⁵³³Infiltrators were rumoured to operate via Zuma’s connections to the BLF

However, state violence could also create a violent reaction among some students, who reacted to the suppression of their mobilisations with property destruction or “guerrilla tactics”, which in turn escalated militarised suppression (Duncan and Frassinelli 2015, p. 13; Khan 2017, p. 9; Xaba 2017a). For some, this was a strategy to increase tensions to a point where police brutality would incite a broader uprising against the state (Mahapa 2016). In other cases, students adopted more vindictive tactics, like burning student buses or artwork at UCT during the Shackville protest (Chikane 2018a, pp. 214, 221; Ndebele 2017).⁵³⁴ Moreover, according to Beverley at UWC, some students, particularly male undergraduates, seemed simply to “enjoy” being “sparring partners” with the police.⁵³⁵ This too became a point of fragmentation within the mobilisations, with feminist students critiquing the violent masculinity of confrontational protests that necessitated physical fights with police (Manzini 2017; Xaba 2017a).⁵³⁶

Under conditions of violence, hostility, and mistrust, campus relations became more tense. The mobilisations saw what some students called a “gradual transformation into a tyranny of informality and lack of transparency”, which inhibited internal learning as students retreated into defensive self-preservation.⁵³⁷ Collective organising and learning spaces “fragmented and collapsed under the weight of the violent conflict that erupted in 2016”.⁵³⁸

5.4.3 Exhaustion and Reintegration

The third key factor for demobilisation was because participants moved into other parts of society or had to complete their qualifications. For these reasons, student movements generally are particularly susceptible to short-term waves of activism (Altbach 1989a; Martins et al. 2012). While students can and do organise inter-generational links between waves of mobilisation (Bosi, Giugni, and Uba 2015; Dyke 1998; Holland and Cable 2002; Taylor 1989), experienced activists often leave and newer, inexperienced organisers cannot maintain continuity. The South African and Brazilian mobilisations are no exception, with many students having left their institutions and moved elsewhere (Dhlamini, Charlie, and Dougan 2018; Molefe 2016).⁵³⁹

In some cases, this was because students graduated, but in other cases it was an assertion of university authority once the mass mobilisations had subsided and students were less able to protect one another. Aisha, a student at Wits, described how some students had been suspended or expelled from their universities as “a lesson to the rest of

⁵³⁴Interview, Annika, 7 April 2017

⁵³⁵Interview, Beverley, 6 April 2017

⁵³⁶Interview, Annika, 7 April 2017. See also hooks (2006)

⁵³⁷Interview, Aisha, 15 September 2017

⁵³⁸Interview, Isaac, 23 March 2017

⁵³⁹Although, as I discuss in Chapter 8, it is too early to tell what the important biographical and political consequences of this cycle will be (Bosi, Giugni, and Uba 2015; Vestergren, Drury, and Chiriack 2017)

us. . . so we know the risks that come with action”.⁵⁴⁰ Many students remained within their institutions, but became exhausted with activism and left organising spaces, some because they had been made to feel unwelcome or “had been hurt” within the mobilisations and preferred not to continue.⁵⁴¹ In other cases, the mobilisations lacked room for disagreement and debate, and students had taken their distance to try better understand what was happening, rethinking their understanding of politics and strategy. At UWC, for instance, Beverley described how several students “had become very withdrawn, wanting to develop their critical skills”.⁵⁴²

Moreover, over time, students’ tactics began to lose effectiveness, particularly as authorities learnt how to respond more quickly, and students were unable to institutionalise or maintain alternatives over a longer period (Piper 2017). Once students had lost the element of surprise, their organising against well-resourced institutions and the state became a battle of attrition. Many student activists who had joined in the early moments of rupture became exhausted, demoralised and began to withdraw from organising.

In Rio, for instance, Francisca, a teacher, mentioned that students initially wanted to occupy in response to everything and anything that happened, but had learnt over time that different tactics had value in different circumstances.⁵⁴³ By the time of Temer’s austerity and education reforms in late 2016,⁵⁴⁴ for instance, students in São Paulo could no longer mobilise. Despite the mass wave of over 1,000 occupations across Brazil, Maria described how “there was almost nothing here in São Paulo”, with only 14 schools briefly occupied.⁵⁴⁵ This was because “here we were heavily repressed, we had already had our struggles and the police had already learned how to deal with it and knew how to *desocupar* (‘de-occupy’) us quickly”.

Similarly, in South Africa, students found it increasingly difficult to maintain shutdowns and occupations. Although students had been committed to these important tactics initially, these were also limited. Isaac, a lecturer at Wits, argued that,

to shut down universities successfully, you can’t depend on two or three, four, five hundred students. You can do it occasionally, when authorities are not prepared, but you know once authorities try to stamp their authority, and control over the space, it became more difficult for that tactic to work

Interview, Isaac, 23 March 2017

Students needed larger numbers of activists to continue, but repression made this less viable and activists were unable to “do the hard, political work. . . to mobilise the majority

⁵⁴⁰Interview, Aisha, 15 September 2017

⁵⁴¹Interview, Aisha, 15 September 2017

⁵⁴²Interview, Beverley, 6 April 2017

⁵⁴³Interview, Francisca, 18 August 2017

⁵⁴⁴The *Reforma do Ensino Médio*, or ‘deforma’, as students argued (Pureza 2016; Ribeiro 2016)

⁵⁴⁵Interview, Maria, 5 June 2017

of the students".⁵⁴⁶ As a result, students' tactics lost their effectiveness.

Moreover, while a small contingent of students could sometimes relatively successfully shut down a campus over 2016, this could drive a wedge between them and other students who disagreed with shutdowns. While this was contentious from the first moments of rupture, in the initial phases it had often been taken as a worthwhile sacrifice as part of a collective struggle. During 2016, however, the smaller groups that pursued radical tactics often lost support when institutions were shut down, as cohorts of students were less able to study.⁵⁴⁷ Particularly for poor and working class students, being unable to study, write exams and graduate made it difficult to find employment, pay off student loans, or support themselves and their families.⁵⁴⁸ In the absence of mass mobilisation, students' tactics, initially designed to disrupt the inegalitarian operations of the university, themselves became increasingly inegalitarian and harmful for other marginalised students.⁵⁴⁹

5.5 Conclusion

After the moment of rupture that created the possibility of dramatically reshaping social relations and epistemic norms, students and workers sustained their organisations over time.

In this chapter, I argued that the organisational form of the student mobilisations in South Africa and Brazil tended towards being autonomous, horizontal, and radical, although this was dynamic over time in interaction with existing political formations and was interwoven with contextual concerns. Students were nevertheless able to maintain their mobilisations through self-organised political decision-making, largely in the form of assemblies, as well as reproducing their individual and collective needs, particularly within occupied spaces. In addition, students recognised the need to go beyond their immediate conditions and form coalitions with others, which not only enabled horizontal learning between campuses and organisations, but also assisted in material support and reduced authorities' capacity to target individual collectives. Finally, I argued that this cycle of mobilisations largely decomposed because of factionalism, repression, and exhaustion. Over the course of 2016, students could not sustain many of the fragile coalitions they had created, leading to the dissolution of non-partisan organising.

As the mobilisations shifted over time, students formed new relationships with one another and with educational workers. In the process, they won several victories, insourcing

⁵⁴⁶Interview, Isaac, 23 March 2017

⁵⁴⁷University authorities also began responding with online education, raising questions of access and digital inequalities. Interview, Interview, Annika, UCT, 7 April 2017. See also (Adam 2019)

⁵⁴⁸Synthesised from various interviews and conversations

⁵⁴⁹In at least some cases, students were able to learn from that, to recognise the limits of their initial actions and shift tactics towards alternatives such as working through SRCs. This was, however, rarer and remained fraught with difficulties

workers in South African universities and keeping schools open in São Paulo. The ways in which the mobilisations reorganised over time had an important bearing on how students reimagined and practised education. They became the experiential and relational basis through which students collectively reimagined their education and society, as I discuss in the following Chapters, 6 and 7.

Chapter 6

Education Reimagined: Disalienation and Agency

It's one thing to say, 'Another world is possible'.
It's another to experience it, however momentarily.

Graeber (2002, p. 72)

You learn more about politics in a week of occupying a school than in years of regular classes... now young people know they can force change

Degvison, Student, Rio (Prengaman and Dilorenzo 2016)

Although schools and universities are central nodes for social reproduction, they do not necessarily *replicate* society (Connell 2019, p. 98; Nash 2006). They are sites of social contestation and, in key moments of rupture, they become sites of challenge and disruption to different forms of hegemony (Barreto 2016).

A crucial theme across the South African and Brazilian mobilisations of 2015-16 was that of alienation, understood as a “relation of relationlessness” (Jaeggi 2014), wherein individuals are inhibited from having a sense of and enacting their own agency, individually and collectively; from relating to their immediate environment and having a sense of control thereover; and from forming meaningful relations with one another, whether between students, students and education workers, or students and broader society (Bowles and Gintis [1976] 2011; Fanon [1952] 2008, 2018; Illich 1973; Marx [1844] 1988). The source of these forms of alienation varied, but was largely underpinned by educational institutions that continued to create and maintain forms of social stratification, privilege and difference, inclusion and exclusion (Connell 2019, p. 98; Barreto 2016, p. 90).

Students' mobilisations created time and alternative spaces in which students could grapple with these questions (Naidoo 2016b), creating a period of reflection and experimen-

tation while “challenging the way education can reproduce inequalities”.⁵⁵⁰ The struggles that students and educational workers undertook was thus *itself* an educational experience, ordinarily inaccessible within the confines of hierarchical institutions. Unlike reactionary claims that students’ struggles prevented education from taking place, such struggles are instead educational in a different way. Freire (2018, p. 9) recalls Prof. Gumercindo Milhomem, the former head of *Sindicato dos Professores do Ensino Oficial do Estado de São Paulo* - São Paulo State Teachers’ Union (APEOESP), arguing that “striking teachers were in fact teaching their students an important lesson by giving them concrete testimony of the substantive meaning of struggle and other lessons in democracy”.

Through the course of and as a result of the student-led mobilisations, students became politically conscientised and developed a sense of their collective agency, thereby reimagining the role of education and the kinds of people it could form. They also contested the power relations within their schools and universities, developing alternative, more democratic forms of institutional organisation and decision-making which could address the problems they faced. Finally, they built new social relations, thereby reimagining what relationships between students, teachers, and other educational workers ought to be like. In general, students looked towards imaginaries of education that would better enable their *liberation* from oppressive and exploitative structures. In the tradition of critical pedagogy scholars and activists like Freire and Shor (1987), hooks (1994), and McLaren (1998), students emphasised the need for a kind of learning that would enable them to interpret and understand the world and be able to change it (Marx [1845] 1969).

Outline In this chapter, I address three sets of issues relating to students’ new imaginaries of education. In the first section, I examine how students shifted from a sense of their own powerlessness towards a collective understanding of their capacity to shape the world around them, and thus imagined a different education system which enhanced rather than inhibited their agency. In the second section, I discuss how students’ powerlessness in part derived from their incapacity to shape their own institutions, particularly when institutions acted against their interests. Looking at who has the power to shape their immediate environment, through issues of institutional culture, physical infrastructure, and safety and wellbeing, I argue that students and workers envisioned an education system in which their collective agency could be institutionalised rather than disregarded. In the third section, I argue that students and workers overcame interpersonal alienation and were able to create new campus communities, as well as relations with off-campus communities. As a result, they imagined an education system which did not systematically alienate and atomise individuals from one another, but rather enabled and enhanced strong social relations.

⁵⁵⁰Interview, Aisha, the University of Johannesburg (UJ), 15 September 2017

6.1 From Powerlessness to Collective Agency

Nobody wants to know or talk about how we grew up as human beings, and how much that was important to us

Fernanda, Student, Rio, 24 August 2017

We were becoming alive to our own abilities, and own limitations.

Anele Nzimande (2015), Student, Johannesburg⁵⁵¹

6.1.1 Alienation in Education

The existing educational systems in South Africa and Brazil did not enable students to see themselves as agents of social change. Students *en masse* did not have a sense that they could shape the world around them in significant ways. When educational processes undermine students' autonomy and agency in such ways, they also form part of a broader pattern of disempowering people throughout their lives (Illich 1972; Stefanou et al. 2004). Students in both countries expressed a core sense of alienation in their education systems by articulating an educational experience that was often no more than a training regime into reproducing existing capitalist labour relations.⁵⁵²

In South Africa, students challenged the entanglement of their education institutions with colonial-capitalism, which pressured workers and students to become a “cog in a corporate machine” and was particularly dehumanising for people racialised as black (Hotz 2017, p. 125).⁵⁵³ Education was seen as being “instrumental”, serving the needs of a white-supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist system by “creating cheap wage labour”, rather than the needs of participants in the process.⁵⁵⁴

In Brazil, students perceived the school system as a factory for producing machines who would reproduce hegemonic discourses. As Carlos, a student in São Paulo commented, schools turned students “into recorders. Just record and repeat, record and repeat”, while commodified education simply turned students into consumers.⁵⁵⁵ Similarly, Paulo argued that schools like his, in the *Fundação de Apoio à Escola Técnica* - Foundation of Support for Technical Schools (FAETEC) network, were “not what education should be”, because

⁵⁵¹Law Student at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), member of Decolonizing Wits and Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) during #FeesMustFall (#FMF)

⁵⁵²The sense of feeling irrelevant, disconnected, and indifferent is a central feature of alienation (Jaeggi 2014)

⁵⁵³Interview, Annika, the University of Cape Town (UCT), 7 April 2017

⁵⁵⁴One student gave the example of Structural Adjustment Programmes which had, across Africa particularly, created a marketized education system in the interests of capital. Interview, Aisha, UJ, 15 September 2017. See also (Mamdani 2007, 2016)

⁵⁵⁵Interview, Carlos, 29 May 2017

“FAETEC doesn’t produce citizens, it produces cheap labour”.⁵⁵⁶ Paulo’s assessment is particularly interesting because schools in the FAETEC network are designed as technical schools, often understood as training for a working class, distinctive from ‘intellectual’ institutions like universities. During the mobilisations, even in such institutions, students challenged the division between manual and mental labour reproduced by a class-based schooling system (Browne 1981; Kuenzer 2000; Sohn-Rethel 1977).

It is important to recognise the depth of the sense of alienation, and how it cuts across class and institutions. Students as different as Hotz (2017), a law student at a prestigious university in South Africa, Carlos, a working-class student at a school in a favela; and Paulo, a high school student (*secundarista*) at a technical training college, all speak of a common experience. Each described a sense of alienation and frustration with society and labour under capitalism (Marx [1844] 1988), rejecting a form of education that supports and enables this kind of labour market.

Moreover, students identified their education not only as training to become cheap labour, but as a way to discipline them into becoming pliant subjects for elite control, and workers who would uncomplainingly reproduce existing unequal and exploitative social relations (Foucault [1975] 1977; Mahmud 2012). For Fernanda, a student in Rio, her education was “making people thoughtless”, which she argued was intentional, because “when fewer people think, it’s easier for elites to do what they want with our country”.⁵⁵⁷ She argued that these processes were becoming more common, particularly through *Escola Sem Partido* - School Without Party (ESP) and PEC241, a constitutional change proposed in 2016 to mandate austerity measures in education and other social services that would last a decade.⁵⁵⁸ As a result, Fernanda argued, the Brazilian education system was being shaped to “control us, leaving our minds engaged and transforming us into cheap labour, not thinking beings”.⁵⁵⁹

Students’ sense of alienation from their academic institutions was compounded by the failure of institutional authorities to engage with students’ sentiments and demands. The denial of students’ demands, ideas, and agency was an important factor that pushed students to mobilise in 2015-16 in an effort to have an influence on their immediate conditions (Campos, Medeiros, and Ribeiro 2016). Despite the significance of the mobilisations and students’ clear grievances, authorities continued to deny or trivialise students’ demands and efforts to make themselves heard. In South Africa, for example, Minister of Higher Education,⁵⁶⁰ Blade Nzimande responded to early #FMMF mobilisations in October 2015

⁵⁵⁶Group Interview, Paulo, *Instituto Superior de Educação do Rio de Janeiro* - Higher Education Institute of Rio de Janeiro (ISERJ), 19 September 2016

⁵⁵⁷Interview, Fernanda, 24 August 2017

⁵⁵⁸In late 2016, students nationally resisted PEC241, including occupying over 1,000 educational institutions across Brazil. See e.g. <https://bit.ly/32895w1>

⁵⁵⁹Interview, Fernanda, 24 August 2017

⁵⁶⁰And Secretary-General of the South African Communist Party (SACP)

by announcing to a press conference that students would have to accept a fee increase, saying “if the students don’t accept this, we’ll start our own movement – Students Must Fall”, laughing at his own joke. Students confronted the minister, forcing him to publicly apologise (Shange 2015). Similarly, in Brazil, the São Paulo state government responded to the student mobilisations’ concerns by initiating a programme on *Gestão Democrática* (Democratic Management) in schools.⁵⁶¹ However, rather than addressing any of the mobilisations’ demands or underlying conditions that gave rise to them, the Education Secretariat ‘included’ students in decision-making – by creating a competition to design a new departmental mascot (Governo do Estado de São Paulo 2017). For students, this trivialisation of their agency and superficial engagement with their concerns further undermined the state’s credibility.

6.1.2 Reading the World: Agency During Mobilisations

Numerous discussions and practices in the mobilisations addressed this kind of alienation. In the process of rupture and reorganisation, through their protests and occupations, students come to see themselves and the world differently. In contrast to the sense of powerlessness, students and workers achieved forms of political conscientisation that indicates a newfound sensibility of their own capacities, particularly in relation to questions of power, agency, and authority. The shift from alienation to agency was not simply about external structures – whether broadly socio-political or specifically educational. Crucially, it involved the realisation of students as the protagonists, whose self-activity could and would bring about changes in those structures and their own lives. This agency was shaped through two channels: firstly, the direct experience of reshaping educational processes, such as by hosting educational programmes within occupied spaces; and secondly through what students learnt over the course of their struggles about how their institutions were structured and what their power was to change them.

Students’ experiences of creating and maintaining their own spaces gave them insights into how they could collectively undertake a different kind of educational practice. Their self-organisation therefore gave them a sense of their own capacity to act in and affect the world. In South Africa, Patricia, a student at Wits, argued that the mobilisations had been “an experiment with radical praxis” and self-empowerment, which developed their understanding of themselves, their context, and how to change it. She recalled that during the mobilisations, students had collectively discussed questions like,

what is my experience of this place? How and why am I alienated? How did my personal experience link to the institution and the structural conditions of the university I’m in? How do I collect, how do I find a space, make a space to meet

⁵⁶¹See <http://www.educacao.sp.gov.br/gestaodemocratica>

with other people who have a similar experience as me? And then, where do I go from here... how do we plan to change this?

Interview, Patricia, 22 March 2017

These kinds of discussions often took place in insurgent spaces, such as discussion groups in occupied buildings, as well as in more formal public seminars. In these spaces, students drew on each other's experiences to generate an understanding of the kind of society and institution they had been shaped by. Such discussions were able to quickly capture students' attention, drawing them in and piquing their curiosity by speaking to their lives and experiences.⁵⁶² In Cape Town, for example, the occupations at UCT had been crucial for students to "collectively name those nameless feelings of alienation, and fight for change" (Dhlamini, Charlie, and Dougan 2018). Against such alienation, "appropriating one's role as a student entails a level of agency that makes it possible to take control of one's education" (Nyamnjoh 2017, p. 261).⁵⁶³ As a result, students were able to experience, and thereafter imagine, education as something engaging rather than deadening.

These discussions and reshaped senses of self were not privately held, but became part of students' everyday lives as they became politically conscientised (Fricker 2007; Hull 2016a). Being drawn into political organising at one level, such as keeping one's school from being closed or ensuring one's teachers were paid decently, students came to recognise and become more interested in the broader political questions that shaped their lives. Questions of power, the state, and social organisation thus became salient issues in students' lives. For Sethembile, an activist in #RMF, education "sits at the centre of [social-political] awareness", as a way of "defining self in relation to the society around us" (Pathways to Free Education Collective 2017a, p. 1). In Brazil, students who learnt from one another's experiences during the mobilisations emerged with "another idea of politics", one which they shaped themselves.⁵⁶⁴ At Mendes, the first school occupied in Rio, students reflected on how the occupation "changed the lives of everyone who participated".⁵⁶⁵ One student, Gabriela, said that after occupying their own school, students "started participating in other occupations" and "supported and understood the teachers' strike more". Luiz, another student, reflected that this was because "the practice gave us a bigger consciousness of what is happening in our country, and even our world".

In some cases, the concentrated experiences within occupations had such an important formative effect on students' sense of agency that they attempted to recreate this as a

⁵⁶²Interview, Patricia, 22 March 2017

⁵⁶³Nyamnjoh, a student at UCT at the time, writes in the context of #RhodesMustFall (#RMF), but the analysis can be extended to #FMM and the Brazilian context

⁵⁶⁴Interview, Patricia and Beatriz, 29 May 2017

⁵⁶⁵Group Interview, *Colégio Estadual* - State School (C.E.) Mendes de Moraes, 22 August 2017

part of their daily life outside of their institutions. For two friends in Rio, for instance, their conversations during the mobilisations,

opened my eyes to feminism and Brazilian education, about fighting for our rights. I had no idea about that. I always thought that it was an issue that was for adults to solve. With the occupation, she helped me open my eyes so that I could run after my rights.

Interview, Patrícia and Beatriz, 29 May 2017

Through the mobilisations, students thus created new social spaces that could be a focal point for youth activism, such as the *Casa de Juventude de Perus*,⁵⁶⁶ in Campanha, São Paulo (OcupaPerus 2017), or the *Black House* in Soweto, Johannesburg (Blackhouse Collective 2017).

A crucial aspect of how students became conscientised over the course of their mobilisations was in recognising their own capacity to create alternatives, seeing themselves as authors of reality rather than passive recipients of others' actions (Jaeggi 2014, p. 51). However, they also learnt about the political character of education and how political-economic conditions shaped educational processes. In realising that educational experiences are shaped by broader political conditions, students recognised that *education is a political act* (Freire 2016, 2018; Freire and Shor 1987). This contrasts to a technocratic vision of education which is, as education scholar Henry Giroux (2017, p. 179) argues, “removed from its political, moral, and ethical registers - stripped down to a machine of social and political death for whom the cultivation of the imagination is a hindrance”. Because institutions are the product of collective human action, however, an important kind of humanised, disalienated education involves learning about institutional change, social dynamics, and power relations. Students, as well as workers, thus conscientised themselves by explicitly reflecting on the structures of power that shaped their world (Delpit 1988, p. 295).

In the course of their struggles, South African and Brazilian students and educational workers came to better understand the conditions which had conditioned their experiences. Interviewees across all four cities discussed how state legislation was undertaken, particularly in relation to the education sector, what new policies were being proposed and by whom. In Brazil, for instance, Beatriz argued that students had “started to turn their eyes towards what was happening, towards their own rights, to education, where there’s a decline here in Brazil because of the lack of investment”.⁵⁶⁷ This “small explosion of politics amongst the youth”, as she put it, was directly attributable to their participation during the school occupations. Similarly, Francisca, who had only been a teacher for a short time in Rio, reflected that through the strike and student-teacher alliances, “I

⁵⁶⁶A ‘Youth House’ in the neighbourhood of Perus

⁵⁶⁷Interview, Beatriz, 28 August 2017

understood my rights better”.⁵⁶⁸ In South Africa, students learnt about policy-making process that created certain educational conditions, ranging from fee structures, to how curricula are formed, change over time, and who it is that changes them. Thandolwethu at Wits argued that the student movement “will get to influence the policies that our governments end up adopting”, rather than what she argued was the existing pattern of “our government officials going to international events organised by your World Bank”, which are “not working out” because they are just “models applied in the North that now we want that to incorporate in the South”.⁵⁶⁹ For Annika at UCT, campus struggles had taught her that making changes even on a single campus was difficult because,

that would mean fundamental changes within the political organizing and dynamic of the country. It would mean that we’re talking about a shift in economic policy. . . You would fund free, decolonised education by taxing the rich and multinational and transnational corporations, like the mining companies.

Interview, Annika, 7 April 2017

Against the background of alienation and a rising sense of agency, students began to imagine education in a different way from the reality of their existing institutions. The future of education for these students was one which worked towards liberation, participation, and restructured social relations within and outside of schools.

6.1.3 Reimagining Education for Liberation

For many students and workers in the mobilisations, education systems were reimagined as spaces which would enable them collectively to liberate themselves and their societies. They thus imagined education as the “the practice of freedom” (hooks 1994), in which learning enhances students’ capacity to think critically about the world and act freely to shape the conditions by which they were themselves shaped (Freire [1974] 2005, [1970] 2006). Indeed, in Brazil, students in Rio argued that “education should serve to liberate, not to imprison us”.⁵⁷⁰ Similarly, Beatriz, another student in Rio, described what they received at school as “the minimum - this crumb of education” which was of no use to them.⁵⁷¹ Instead, Beatriz argued that education has to be “what we need”, which she envisioned as *libertadora* (liberating).

For many students, the shift from imprisoning education to liberatory education necessitated challenging the powerful interests that shaped inegalitarian education and hence social organisation. They also realised how difficult this would be. Carlos, a student in São Paulo, argued that governments fear real education because it is necessarily

⁵⁶⁸Interview, Francisca, 18 August 2017

⁵⁶⁹Interview, Thandolwethu, 27 March 2017

⁵⁷⁰Interview, Fernanda, 24 August 2017

⁵⁷¹Interview, Beatriz, 28 August 2017

liberating, and an educated, conscientised population would be more difficult to control.⁵⁷² His argument resonated with Biko (1987)'s famous phrase that "the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed". Central to these claims is the idea that educational systems are not value-neutral sites of transmitting knowledge, but shape people in contingent and particular ways (Bourdieu 1986; Passeron and Bourdieu [1970] 2000). Carlos thus argued that "school is a reflection of what people will turn into".⁵⁷³ For Beatriz, this was because schooling shaped students' desires and imaginaries of how to live and act. Drawing on Freire ([1970] 2006) and Freire and Shor (1987), she argued that,

When education isn't liberating, the dream of the oppressed is to be the oppressor. It's what happens. The dream of many people here is to be a grand bourgeoisie, there on top of the pyramid of oppression.

Interview, Beatriz, 28 August 2017

Liberation, by contrast, meant that education would shape people towards being competent, conscious political agents who had control over their lives, thinking and acting in concert with others for the general good. By forming and empowering political agents capable of addressing salient social problems, education would shift from being an alienating experience that rendered them politically inert, unable to undertake their own formative processes or reshape their world (Jaeggi 2014), and instead become *disalienating* (Angu 2018; Fanon [1952] 2008, 2018). Disalienating education would, as Fanon ([1963] 2004, p. 137) argues, "elevate the people, expand their minds, equip them, differentiate them, and humanize them".

One of the more unusual ways in which students envisaged education as a tool for liberation was in challenging rigid disciplinary boundaries between subjects (Centre for African Studies 2017b; Grange 2017; Malherbe, Helman, and Cornell 2016). Several students expressed a desire to go beyond ordering education around subjects like mathematics and science, and should instead, as one student in Rio put it,

focus on teaching people to be citizens, thinkers, who think more about the current context of their country and the world... To think as a collective, as all people. To be a better person following a direction in life.

Interview, Beatriz, 28 August 2017

In the South African context, education as liberation was deeply linked to local historical experiences. For many students, higher education had long been a space of struggle where "African intellectuals and progressives would be thinking about struggles for liberation, independence, anti-Apartheid".⁵⁷⁴ Liberation in the context of Africa had

⁵⁷²Interview, Carlos, 29 May 2017

⁵⁷³Interview, Carlos, 29 May 2017

⁵⁷⁴Interview, Aisha, 15 September 2017

specific meanings due to racialised social realities. Drawing on lessons from Zimbabwe, education for liberation meant that black people would no longer be “serving the white minority” (Mayaba, Mandeya, and Tshuma 2017, pp. 74, 76). More generally, students argued that education for liberation “allows us to imagine creating the lives we want to live” (Singh 2016, p. 5).⁵⁷⁵ However, liberation for South African students was a loaded term because of its historical link and uncomfortable proximity to official African National Congress (ANC) discourses of the “national liberation struggle” (Gillespie and Naidoo 2019). For some, this made “education for liberation” merely another symbolic aspect of ANC political hegemony.⁵⁷⁶

In place of “education for liberation”, *decolonisation*, which will be discussed in the following chapter, emerged as a framework that signified a quest for true liberation, specifying *coloniality* as the limit-condition of that freedom (Mabasa 2018b; Neocosmos 2017c; Swartz and Nyamnjoh 2018).⁵⁷⁷ One student at Wits, for instance, highlighted how students prioritised questions of “who is going to free us, how you are going to free yourself, and what is the role of the oppressor in this”. These were unresolved questions, but which spoke to what the content of freedom would be in relation to education.⁵⁷⁸

6.2 Institutional Democracy and Autogestão

A central reason for why the mobilisations had erupted in the first place was the inability of students and workers to directly address their needs in practice, or to influence decision-makers, who acted problematically as “trustees” of students’ interests (Hamilton 2015, pp. 141–2). Decisions that affected their lives were taken without students and workers having adequate power to shape those processes (Fanon 2018; Hamilton 2015; Illich 1973). Because of their exclusion from key decision-making process that shaped their experiences, students and often workers were further alienated from their institutions, become disillusioned and disidentifying with them (Nyamnjoh 2017, p. 261; Jaeggi 2014). In place of any meaningful, substantive decision-making power, students were often given no more than a symbolic voice to contribute superficial ‘inputs’ that barely affected the system through which they passed. In many ways, students’ and education workers’ institutional conditions became inhospitable *because* they lacked the decision-making power to shape their institutions in their interests. By contesting power within their institutions, and experiencing alternative forms of popular democracy during the mobilisations, students and workers came to reimagine their institutions on more democratic terms, and themselves

⁵⁷⁵These imaginaries are present in students’ own publications, notably Pathways to Free Education Collective (2016, 2017a). See also (Christie 2005; McKernan 2008; Waghid 2005)

⁵⁷⁶Despite non-ANC historical debates about “education for liberation” (Alexander [1990] 2013a; Pape 1997; Reagan 1989)

⁵⁷⁷Nyamnjoh (n.d.) develops this theme

⁵⁷⁸Interview, Patricia, Wits, 22 March 2017

as actors who could reshape their institutional conditions.

6.2.1 Institutional Powerlessness to Self-Governance

Democratisation for students was not a free-floating value or an empty signifier. Instead, it was a concrete aspect of institutional change, grounded in specific institutional problems. Through their experiences of autonomous and institutional organising during the mobilisations, students generated new ideas of how their institutions ought to be structured, demanding and enacting new ways of ordering their surroundings to address questions of health, wellbeing, ownership and belonging. At the heart of these questions was a vision of *autogestão*, or democratic self-management, of educational institutions. As discussed in Chapter 5, students approached questions of democratic self-governance primarily through their own autonomous self-organisation, particularly in occupations and assemblies, and scaling up this form of organising to city- and region-wide levels through coordinating forums like the *Comando das Escolas em Luta* in São Paulo. At the same time, many students worked to reshape and influence existing official structures, demanding deeper and broader participation in institutional bodies and making claims thereon to meet their needs (Alegria 2017b, 2018; Barreto 2016; Booyesen 2016a; Piper 2017). In several instances, students put democratic self-governance on the institutional agenda, in place of institutional subservience to the state, colonial legacies, or the market (Hamilton 2017; Naidoo 2016b), or even instituted new bodies as channels for this self-governance.

In Brazil, students spoke of both the state and their school directorates as “authoritarian” and unresponsive (Kurczy 2016).⁵⁷⁹ Across numerous schools, a central demand was for *Gestão Democrática* (democratic management).⁵⁸⁰ At C.E. Amaro Cavalcante in the centre of Rio, for example, Leonardo highlighted that before the mobilisations, he had never seen his school’s director, who had been “chosen and imposed” by the government and done nothing for the school, while effective and sympathetic staff were “arbitrarily fired” (Long 2016a). Students’ anger with these undemocratic forms of governance galvanised students and, through the mobilisations, they pressured the state to pass legislation that gave students the right to vote for school directors who had previously been unaccountable and selected by the state (Vieira 2016).

While the student-worker mobilisations in South Africa did not often frame their demands in terms of ‘democratic self-governance’, these issues were at the heart of the movement and underpinned several key issues and demands that students and workers made. At UJ, for instance, one student recognised that their problems were fundamentally political and economic, and these were necessarily linked to decision-making processes, or in her

⁵⁷⁹Interviews, Francisco, 16 September 2016; Marcia, *Colégio Pedro II* - Pedro II College (CPII), 10 August 2017; Antonio, Group Discussion, ISERJ, 19 September 2016

⁵⁸⁰Group Discussion, Antonio, ISERJ, 19 September 2016

words, “it’s about who gets to decide what, and how so”.⁵⁸¹ The question of institutional decision-making in South African universities was highly racialised. Black students had for decades experienced higher education as alienating and hostile environments in which they felt they did not belong (Clowes, Shefer, and Ngabaza 2017; Davids 2018; Jogee, Callaghan, and Callaghan 2018; Munyuki 2015; Swartz et al. 2017). The reasons for the perpetuation of a racialised hostile institutional culture at South African universities are complex, but for many students, one aspect of it is the centralised decision-making structured within an elite group of older, usually white male, academics on key bodies like University Senate (Canham 2017; Chikane 2015; Naidoo 2016b; Satgar 2016).⁵⁸²

While students at South African universities understood the problematic nature of undemocratic institutions, they were less clear about how they ought to replace these systems. In this respect, students’ imaginaries of a democratic university remained abstract. An important attempt to grapple with how a new university would be envisioned came from UCT, where students like Annika highlighted that it would entail “a public African, decolonised, decommodified education where people would go to the university for free”, although she acknowledged that she did not know “how would that look like materially, in the way in which the university is structured – I don’t think that we’ve thought about that enough”.⁵⁸³

6.2.2 Spaces of Oppression, Spaces of Liberation

The way in which the university is built and structured - from its bureaucracy to the physical buildings and infrastructure, to the number of students that can come in. It’s all streamlined for a neoliberal, free-market, profit-based commodified education.

Interview, Annika, 7 April 2017

Struggles for liberation, democracy, and new imaginaries of education take place within physical spaces and the confines of built environments. In both South Africa and Brazil, students and workers challenged the material infrastructure of their educational institutions as physical embodiments of alienating environments. During the mobilisations, however, students and workers broke with this sense of alienation and asserted their ownership of institutional spaces by undertaking occupations, which positioned student-worker alliances as the primary decision-makers in their institutions (Naidoo 2016b).

In Brazil, physical infrastructural conditions were central to the mobilisations in several ways. While in São Paulo, the focus was on an unaccountable state, students also highlighted the importance of decision-making around the construction and use of school

⁵⁸¹Interview, Aisha, 15 September 2017

⁵⁸²Interviews, Isaac, 23 March 2017; Thandolwethu, 27 March 2017

⁵⁸³Interview, Annika, 7 April 2017

infrastructure. A significant concern was that schools were prison-like environments.⁵⁸⁴ Maria, a student in São Paulo's poorer South Zone, explicitly argued that "it is more than necessary to change the school environment, primarily the architecture. Because it looks like a prison, like a jail".⁵⁸⁵ This architecture is partially a historical legacy of the Military Dictatorship, discussed in Chapter 3, and its drive to control the Brazilian population, particularly the poor and working class. Students recognised that the physical construction of the school space was not natural, necessary, or desirable, but reflected the priorities of control and discipline. This resonates with Foucault ([1975] 1977)'s analysis of European schooling systems, intended even in their very physical construction to create "docile bodies", people whose individuality and creativity is suppressed to fit more smoothly and obediently into capitalist modernity. At Mendes, the first school occupied in Rio, Luiz similarly argued that his school was a prison with "classrooms that are totally enclosed with only one small window, with guard houses, bars on the windows, and police within the school".⁵⁸⁶ As discussed in Chapter 3, the catalyst for this very first occupation was partially motivated by infrastructural failure in the form of a broken air-conditioning unit in a cramped, overcrowded, prison-like classroom.

Over the course of the mobilisations, however, students were able to reshape both institutional decision-making and, to an extent, their physical environment. For students to effectively voice their concerns and be taken seriously, they realised the need for an organising space. At Mendes in Rio, for instance, one of my interviews took place in a room maintained for the High School Student Council (*Grêmio*), which students called a "victory" as it was secured from the administration.⁵⁸⁷ The room was decorated with students' contributions, from information on how to organise and notes for one another, to radical, black consciousness, feminist artwork and a poster wall of memories from their occupation. Even after the mobilisations had subsided, students kept the room to maintain forms of *autogestão* by using it as a hub for self-organisation. In another move to reclaim space, students at Mendes challenged the school directorate's decision to lock the library for fear of students damaging it. In its place, occupying students created an "open library" in a main hall, with books ranging from politics to philosophy to photography.⁵⁸⁸

Infrastructural concerns were also important in South Africa, particularly on Historically Black University (HBU) campuses. These were largely constructed by the Apartheid state to maintain control over students' movement, fearing their resistance.⁵⁸⁹ Mobilising

⁵⁸⁴Indeed, from the earliest occupations in São Paulo, students generally contested the state prioritising building more prisons than schools for working-class, poor, and black Brazilians (Capai 2019)

⁵⁸⁵Interview, Maria, 5 June 2017

⁵⁸⁶Interview, Luiz, Mendes de Moraes, 22 August 2017

⁵⁸⁷Group Interview, Mendes, Rio, 22 August 2017

⁵⁸⁸Group Interview, Mendes de Moraes, 22 August 2017. Photography became important for students in both countries to document and represent their own experiences and challenge state narratives (Clowes, Shefer, and Ngabaza 2017; Hayes 2017)

⁵⁸⁹Interview, Beverley, the University of the Western Cape (UWC), 6 April 2017

against physically oppressive spaces was thus a way of reimagining education. The most prominent example of this was the removal of the symbolic statue of Cecil John Rhodes at UCT (Kamanzi 2015b; Mbembe 2015), as well as renaming buildings, such as Bremner Administration building at UCT which was occupied and renamed Azania House,⁵⁹⁰ and Senate House at Wits as Solomon Mahlangu House.⁵⁹¹ The occupations became focal points for Africa-centric cultural activities, as students remade an institutional culture that spoke to them (Chikane 2018a; Mogorosi 2017).

However, students' concerns extended to other aspects of physical infrastructure, and how it was designed as an exclusive space which undermined the potential for inclusive and democratic education. For example, campuses were often designed in ways that reflected a bias towards able-bodied individuals, disadvantaging students with physical impairments (Chiwandire and Vincent 2017; Kiru and Cooc 2017; Mutanga and Walker 2017; Sen 2004; Wolff and de-Shalit 2007). While not as centrally addressed within the mobilisations, students did draw attention to campus accessibility, particularly for disabled students (gameEdze and gameZe 2019, pp. 221–2). At UCT until 2019, for instance, the Disability Unit was on the 4th floor of a building with an unreliable elevator.⁵⁹² Informed by the intersectionality of the student mobilisations, however, the Students' Representative Council (SRC) pushed for the Unit to be relocated to a ground-level entrance while moving itself to temporary offices in shipping containers elsewhere on campus.

Student housing was another rallying point for students challenging the physical implications of their marginalisation and how this made education alienating. At numerous universities, students continued long-running housing protests under the banner of #FMM. They argued that university management had not prioritised student accommodation,⁵⁹³ disregarding their basic needs and human rights, undermining their dignity by leaving accommodation overcrowded and students homeless, and turning to disciplinary procedures when students sought alternatives (Jaza 2017; Langa 2017). Shezi (2016, p. 9), for instance, recalls that in his first year at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (UKZN), he had to squat with a friend because of a lack of affordable accommodation. However,

according to university rules and regulations squatting is illegal. In the eyes of the neoliberal university which could not offer me funding and a place to stay, I broke one of its rules... if I was caught I would have deserved to be disciplined. By simply asking a fellow African brother to help me out in a desperate time of need.

⁵⁹⁰A Pan-Africanist alternative to "South Africa"

⁵⁹¹Solomon Mahlangu was a young anti-apartheid activist and militant with umKhonto we Sizwe (MK), the ANC's armed wing, after being radicalised by the 1976 Soweto Uprising. He was executed by the apartheid state in 1979 at the age of 22. Mahlangu became an iconic figure for many Fallists, with the song "Iyho Solomon" a rallying cry at numerous protests. See <https://witsvuvuzela.com/2016/10/02/struggle-songs/>

⁵⁹²See UCT SRC Newsletter 15, 20 May 2019

⁵⁹³In 2010, for instance, UWC provided housing for just 20% of its students (Mugume and Luescher 2015, p. 3), a figure roughly in line with national statistics (DHET 2011, p. xiii)

In both South Africa and Brazil, students reclaimed institutional space and made it their own during the mobilisations. These autonomous spaces became cultural hubs, home to poetry, music, and other forms of creative expression which students imagined a liberating, democratic education to include.

6.2.3 Spaces of Violence, Spaces of Safety

Many students in South Africa and Brazil, especially women, had never experienced their educational institutions as safe spaces where they could feel welcomed and able to learn in healthy, violence-free environments. In many cases, students and workers articulated their experience of school or university as places where they were kept under surveillance by an oppressive authority while attempting to go about their daily lives. The level of violence that students experienced, particularly over the course of the mobilisations, became a central ground of power contestation at multiple levels, from the state and private security companies, to school and university authorities and, in some cases, other students and community groups. By contrast, students imagined educational spaces which were safe and welcoming. At Wits, for instance, White (2017) emphasised the multifaceted and intersectional nature of this space, arguing,

The work towards the post-revolutionary world should not only imagine all of us in it, but want us in it. And wanting us in it means a communal investment in ensuring that that world will be safe for all of us, and not just some of us.

In Brazil, safety and security were both physical and psychological concerns. In Rio, for example, students were critical of state cuts to education partially because schools could no longer hire security guards to protect schools, while funding was somehow available for the Military Police to repress students' protests. In a significant development in São Paulo, students challenged the use of state violence against their mobilisations by taking the São Paulo state government to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights over police violence (Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos 2016).

To address the trauma of state violence directed against their peaceful occupations, students and teachers created healing forums. At *Escola Estadual* - State School (E.E.) Diadema in São Paulo, for example, they created a 'Mental Health Week', with a programme specifically tailored towards addressing the trauma and psychological harms incurred during students' mobilisations.⁵⁹⁴ In Rio, students occupied *Secretaria de Estado de Educação* - State Education Secretariat (SEEDUC), challenging the state's use of violence by interrupting their daily lives and drawing attention to repression with posters like,

⁵⁹⁴Pamphlet in personal collection

Gritamos Paz
Ganhamos Gás
Como é que faz
#OcupaSEEDUC

We shout peace
We get gassed
How is this what you do
#OccupySEEDUC

In South Africa, students also fought against both physical and psychological violence, centring questions of epistemic and symbolic violence. Demands for decolonisation and Africanisation, discussed in detail in the following chapter, brought into view the need for educational environments that did not perpetuate psychological harms against the majority of students (Metz 2015, pp. 258–9). Instead, students imagined spaces of safety that would draw on culturally-sensitive responses to pain and trauma, such as support from traditional healers (See e.g. Kamanzi 2015b, 22m40s). At UCT, students contributed to a Mental Health Charter that addressed such concerns, including provisions for traditional health practitioners (University of Cape Town 2018). Similarly, students argued that questions raised by #RMF, #FMF, and the Shackville protests about colonial legacies, policing and violence on campus, were unresolvable under existing institutional frameworks. They thus pressured the university to negotiate through a new forum, the independent, neutrally-mediated “Institutional Truth and Reconciliation Committee”. This was a contested space, with “rules of engagement that [students] themselves had had a large part in determining” (Mpendukana and Stroud 2018, p. 185).

Through the mobilisations, students both explicitly demanded different institutional environments, as well as put into practice and experimented with new ways of ordering their surroundings. Taking student, and worker, power seriously would provide a way of ensuring that their demands, such as learning in healthy environments, would be maintained rather than acceded to only after intensive mobilisation and later forgotten or undermined (Hamilton 2015; Piper 2017).⁵⁹⁵

6.3 Institutional Social Relations and Community

[Decolonisation] means a re-imagining of the ways in which we interact with one another in this space of learning. A reconfiguring of power relations.

Anele Nzimande (2015), Wits law student⁵⁹⁶

The desire for democratic, liberating forms of education taking place in safe, inclusive environments, was often motivated by a desire to overcome alienating forms of education.

⁵⁹⁵There are, of course, various complications to this, notably that students’ interests are not always as obvious, coherent, or consensual as they were with some of the infrastructural concerns. Group Interview, Mendes de Moraes, 22 August 2017

⁵⁹⁶Also member of Decolonizing Wits and EFF during #FMF

Central to these alienating experiences was what students and education workers experienced as the alienation of “people from other people” Marx ([1844] 1988, pp. 78–9),⁵⁹⁷ which created malformed relationships between individuals within “campus communities” (Connell 2019). In this section, I discuss three forms of this interpersonal alienation which inhibited students and workers’ freedom: students’ alienation from one another, alienation between students and education workers, and between students and broader society. Through the mobilisations, however, a new set of relationships emerged within educational institutions, and students and workers imagined alternative interpersonal relations structuring their educational futures.

In South Africa, campus relations have historically been highly structured by societal racism, sexism, and class stratification. The “institutional whiteness” of universities, for instance, inhibited students from feeling “at home” (Tabensky and Matthews 2015; Vice 2015), and thus inhibited students’ capacities to act and relate with one another authentically. These limitations were often more acute between students and educational workers, which were further structured by academic hierarchies as well as exploitative labour conditions in the form of outsourcing.⁵⁹⁸ As students such as gamEdze and gamedZe (2019, p. 222) recognised, these institutionalised conditions fettered the growth of deep interpersonal relations, as well as ethical, harmonious and caring social relations more broadly (Dladla 2017; Praeg 2017a; Tabensky 2010).⁵⁹⁹

Similarly, Brazilian schools were marked by a distance between students and workers, with each atomised and individualised. In Rio, for instance, Fernanda recalled that before her school’s occupation, students and teachers had been “caught within the bubble we live in”, barely interacting with those outside of their immediate group of friends.⁶⁰⁰ For Carlos in São Paulo, the school “doesn’t let you come to know each other”.⁶⁰¹ This social distance was partially underpinned by the physical and working conditions within the school, alongside institutional hierarchies and reproduced societal inequalities. As a student in Rio argued, when teachers were barely able to live on their salaries, it was more difficult for them to teach.⁶⁰² As a result, they were discouraged from what Freire (2018, p. 5) describes as the “joyful and rigorous” work of an educationalist, requiring “seriousness and scientific, physical, emotional, and affective preparation” - what Patrícia called “teachers that really *want* to work” and who participated wholeheartedly at school.

Despite their limitations, these communities and the sociability within them were important for and valued by students and workers. Indeed, one of the central claims that

⁵⁹⁷Translating the original German *menschen* as “people” or “human being” rather than “man”

⁵⁹⁸Thanks to A. Polat for discussion on this theme

⁵⁹⁹Similarly, see Marx ([1843] 2000b, [1875] 2010)

⁶⁰⁰Interview, Fernanda, 24 August 2017

⁶⁰¹Interview, Carlos, 29 May 2017

⁶⁰²Interview, Patrícia, 28 August 2017. Deliwe Mzobe made similar arguments for her ‘dream university’; see Luckett and Mzobe (2016, p. 98)

São Paulo students made during their occupations was that the state was trying to *break apart* the schools as communities and families (Campos, Medeiros, and Ribeiro 2016).

6.3.1 Relations between Students

In both contexts of mobilisation, many students experienced and learnt from healthy, caring and supportive interpersonal relations. They actively sought to create such bonds with one another, trying to overcome the general trend towards isolation that their societies and institutions pressured them towards. In general, students were more able to accomplish this when mobilisations faced less repression and lasted longer in shared spaces. New relations emerged in part because students had to find common ground and unite to overcome the difficulties that they faced collectively.⁶⁰³ Underpinned by a strategic concern, their relations developed through affective connections. Students

cried together, we laughed together, we went through unimaginable things together. . . in certain moments we received news of death together. Everything was one for the other. We needed to become intimate with these people that we were living with.

Interview, Fernanda, 24 August 2017

Students became friends through the occupations, and the warmth of their relationship lasted after the mobilisations ended.⁶⁰⁴ In Brazil, Fernanda recalled how “people started to love each other after the occupation, and people turned into best friends, they started to have relations with people that they never would have”.⁶⁰⁵ She argued that as a result, Brazilian students came to,

know the other that you thought was so different from you, and you become capable of understanding their reality and recognising them. You recognise yourself in a totally different person

Interview, Fernanda, 24 August 2017

This also enabled students to build empathy, generating emotional and cognitive understandings of others’ “internal frames of reference”, while retaining a sense of oneself in relation to them (Rogers 1975). Students could thus see where each other were coming from, conscientising them as to how they had been shaped by social conditions, and were accountable to one another, hence reducing critical judgements based on superficial assessments or first impressions (Harman 1999; Tetlock 1985).⁶⁰⁶

⁶⁰³Interview, Fernanda, 24 August 2017

⁶⁰⁴Group Interview, ISERJ, 19 September 2016

⁶⁰⁵Interview, Fernanda, 24 August 2017

⁶⁰⁶In psychological terms, students overcame the cognitive bias of Fundamental Attribution Error. Thanks to P. Velasco Herrejón for discussion on this theme

In South Africa, students aimed to create new relationships grounded in their commonalities, as they attempted to make sense of their shared experiences. Solidarity and affinity groups thrived during the mobilisations, bringing together students on the basis of shared identity, for instance in groups like “Black Girl Magic” and “For Black Girls Only” (Mahali 2017), and the Trans* Collective (Ghost Writer 2016; Heerden 2016). Similarly, at Wits, Thandolwethu recalled that the mobilisations “taught me black radical love” which entailed “taking care of people, taking into consideration their feelings”.⁶⁰⁷ Students thus realised their commonalities with one another through struggle, achieving a stronger sense of self through intersubjective mutual recognition (Fanon [1952] 2008; Hegel [1807] 1979; Nyamnjoh 2017). This entailed coming to better understand yourself through the awareness of those around you and how you were regarded by those others.

It is important to acknowledge that emotional and affective relations in movements are not always positive, loving, caring, or supportive (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001b; Jasper 1998; Zembylas 2018). Many factors underpin the emotional dynamics of mobilisations, and these can be reshaped, both intentionally and in ways unintended by participants. This was particularly salient in South Africa, where students’ social relations were dramatically shaped by deeply rooted patterns of racism, and where anger, frustration, and pain were central themes for Fallists (Chikane 2018a; Mpatlanyane 2018; Nyamnjoh 2017; Publication Collective 2017; Tabensky 2016). During the 2010s, several debates took place in South African society as to what “inter-racial” friendships could be like (Hook 2014; Soske and Walsh 2016; Zuma 2013), and whether they were even possible in the context of pervasive, fundamentally oppressive racial hierarchies (Mngxitama 2013; Mngxitama and Kaganof 2013). These were re-examined in the context of the student mobilisations. The Ruth First Lecture at Wits (17 August 2015) was a crucial intervention, linked to the early-2015 Fallist mobilisations, where author Sisonke Msimang and poet Lebo Mashile spoke to the politics of “being friends across ‘racial’ boundaries”. The lecture developed into texts that argued genuine friendships are only possible where preconditioned by egalitarianism and commitment to justice (Msimang 2016a,b).

In parallel, the tumult of the mobilisations both dissolved existing bonds between some students, “[disintegrating] affective ties” (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2000, p. 76), while forming new relationships. Black students in particular became wary of white friends who would not support student struggles, coming to see these friendships as paternalistic, ignorant, or oppressive (Pather 2016).⁶⁰⁸ Grappling with intimate and painful questions, students sometimes adopted corrosive discourses that undermined relationships of trust, including between friends and even comrades in struggle (Chikane 2018a). As violence escalated during the mobilisations, students and workers often retreated into a “laager

⁶⁰⁷Interview, Thandolwethu, 27 March 2017

⁶⁰⁸See also Ortega (2006)’s discussion of being “lovingly, knowingly ignorant”

mentality”, where separate groups turned inwards, becoming hostile or fearful of one another and taking refuge in what they understood as their own certainties. These ranged from racist views that dismissed decolonisation out of hand, deferring to the supposed supremacy of ‘western civilisation’, or to its inverted twin of a total denigration of ‘the west’ and ‘whites’.⁶⁰⁹ The latter often also entailed an absolutist celebration of a reified, primordial form of ‘African culture’ (Fanon [1952] 2008; Tabensky 2010).⁶¹⁰ In the process of this polarisation, the “campus community” fractured and sub-groups closed themselves off from each other.⁶¹¹

The social relations and emotional valence of the mobilisations nevertheless shifted over time. In some cases, students recognised the limitations of “callout culture”, which led to students being ostracised from the movement if others disagreed with them.⁶¹² Thandolwethu argued that over time, this shifted to students “calling in” each other, meaning that, “when we reprimand you, whether it is harsh or nice, we are doing it to call you in to this village”, where a community would self-regulate in caring rather than alienating ways.⁶¹³ Giving the example of male students’ “patriarchal ways”, she argued that,

This fighting was coming from a place of love. Afterwards, we need to return to each other and be one. . . We will fight each other, okay, but we cannot forget that we fight together as a collective. But! Just because we fight as a collective, doesn’t mean that you can ignore what you as a man put me through

Interview, Thandolwethu, 27 March 2017

6.3.2 Relations between Students and Workers

During the mobilisations, and particularly within occupations, students had to live and work together daily. Through these encounters, they had to assume responsibilities which had traditionally been carried out by operations workers. Having to perform the social reproductive work required during the mobilisations, such as cooking and cleaning, meant that students learnt to acknowledge and value the work of outsourced workers like cleaners and cooks in their institutions. For Fernanda, students during the occupation realised that although “our school unit was very small, it’s a whole world – we had to clean everything daily, make lots of food for everyone”, and thereby realised how labour-intensive these tasks were and how important operations workers were, developing new respect for them.⁶¹⁴ Through their interactions with outsourced workers over the course of the mobilisations,

⁶⁰⁹Sometimes referred to as ‘wypipo’/‘1652s’; cf. Chikane (2018a, pp. 23–4) for a more complex portrayal

⁶¹⁰Interviews, Isaac, Wits, 23 March 2017; Aisha, UJ, 7 April 2017

⁶¹¹Interviews, Mark, Wits, 17 March 2017; Paballo, UCT, 20 March 2019; Beverley, UWC, 6 April 2017

⁶¹²Interview, Thandolwethu, 27 March 2017

⁶¹³Interview, Thandolwethu, 27 March 2017

⁶¹⁴Interview, Fernanda, 24 August 2017

Fallists in South Africa became aware of how operations workers in their institutions were often young people their own age, who had simply been “denied access to education and ended up doing no-skill or low-skill labour” because of how class, race and gender had shaped their lives.⁶¹⁵ Students in the mobilisations thus came to reflect on how racialised and gendered capitalist relations shaped the realities of their and workers’ lives. They came to see workers as having been denied “what is due to them” by an “anti-black system”.⁶¹⁶

Alongside working together in student-worker coalitions, these realisations helped bring students and workers closer together, humanising one another and enabling them to recognise their mutual joys and challenges.⁶¹⁷ Through exchanges during the São Paulo occupations, for instance, one teacher described how,

There’s more affinity, it’s not that cold. You start to humanise teacher-student relationship. You end up being more human.

Interview, Matheus, 8 June 2017

In both Brazil and South Africa, many students expressed how they had rarely seen or spoken to these education workers before the mobilisations. In place of this hierarchical, divided microcosm of society, students discussed their commitment to creating “communities” in schools and universities, which would enable both students and workers to feel “at home”.⁶¹⁸ In South Africa, for example, campuses were envisioned as welcoming communities by bringing students and workers closer together. Deliwe Mzobe, a formerly outsourced cleaner at Wits, argued that her reimagined university “is a place where. . . all the workers and the students are free”. She recalled that,

I like what is happening now with all the struggles that have brought us together. It is not like before, when we just used to walk past each other. Now wherever I go, the students say “Mam Deliwe, our parent, how are you?” They are greeting us. It is whereby we know each other as the university community. We communicate. We get together, not only when we are protesting. We should be able to get together in a friendly and free way.

Luckett and Mzobe (2016, p. 98)

In both South Africa and Brazil, imagined forms of sociality and solidarity within educational communities were often framed by both students and workers along in terms of ‘family’ and ‘kin’. In South Africa, Fallists referred to workers as *abalazi bethu* (“Our Parents”), and particularly to black women working as cleaners as “our mothers” (Coetzee 2019; Mabasa 2017). The choice of a familial framing to express solidarity in South

⁶¹⁵Interview, Thandolwethu, 27 March 2017

⁶¹⁶Interview, Thandolwethu, 27 March 2017

⁶¹⁷For a more theorised discussion, see the concepts of *Mudita* and *Karuna* in, e.g. Gokhale (2015)

⁶¹⁸Interview, Gabriel, Rio, 28 August 2017

Africa is complex. It is partially grounded in a political reading of cultural difference that challenged the normative power of institutional relations modelled along European institutions where, as Coetzee (2019, p. 105) argues,

social and intellectual (or disciplinary) codes rely precisely on an explicit lack of kinship between students and their teachers. . . . But there is a further and heightened version of this for those students who understand how these codes also reinforce a sense of exclusion (of themselves, their homes and their ancestors) from the symbols and heritage of university life.

Drawing on feminist slogans like “the personal is political” (Manzini 2017; Matandela 2017), students argued that such relations of intense familiarity and solidarity were not only a matter of group support, but acts of challenging existing power relations. In Brazil, new relationships were thus developed amongst *uma família de luta* (a “family of struggle”).⁶¹⁹ Imagining ‘familial’ relations in educational institutions became a marker for students of overcoming students and workers’ senses of alienation, domination, and mistrust.

However, the discursive shift towards framing relations in terms of ‘family’ carries significant normative implications, including negative repercussions. Beverley, a lecturer at UWC, explicitly spoke about these tensions, recalling, for instance, Vice-Chancellors being framed as “the father who is disappointing students”, and more generally,

it was about losing trust in adults in a parental role. Um. . . . I feel ambivalent that, because students are adults. They were angry, and they confronted all of us. But at the same time they wanted to be. . . . forgiven, and loved, all their wishes granted. There’s a kind of volatility that I found quite striking

Interview, Beverley, UWC, 6 April 2017

This sentiment resonates with Freire (2018, p. 8)’s warning of reducing educational workers to a parental role, which can undercut their political agency. Workers framed as parents can be inhibited from taking action, such as striking, to resist and “remedy the unjust conditions under which they work”.

Not all relations between students and workers improved over the mobilisations, however. In some cases, relationships that had previously been tense but stable were fractured, particularly as vice-chancellors and school directors worked with police and private security to undermine students’ mobilisations and students saw them as opponents.⁶²⁰ Students shutting down the academic project frustrated and angered many teaching workers, who saw their formal educational role as paramount (Praeg 2017a, p. 303; Ntsebeza 2019,

⁶¹⁹Patrícia, the student who used the phrase, had participated in three occupations, at C.E. Amaro Cavalcanti in central Rio, C.E. Euclides da Cunha in Teresópolis, and had spent about a month occupying SEEDUC. Interview, 28 August 2017

⁶²⁰See, for instance, *Lute Como Uma Menina* (Colombini and Alonso 2016, 11m30s), which captures a rare moment where students, staff, and police are in proximity with one another and when such interpersonal tension is obvious and unmediated

pp. xiv–xv).⁶²¹ In the most painful moments, these campus tensions and escalating violence intermingled with pre-existing faultlines, both social and personal, causing significant distress and psychological harm amongst students and education workers - in some cases, becoming a factor in long-standing or even irreparable damage (Ntsekhe et al. 2018; Watkins and Ntusi 2018). In imagining an education wherein hierarchies between workers and students would be broken down and replaced with a sense of community, students had to face the difficult reality of power relations which underpinned how relationships could be created and constrained, as well as the harmful repercussions of violence and hostility (Fanon [1963] 2004, Chapter V).

6.3.3 Relations between Campuses and Communities

The disciplinary physical construction and prison-like spatial conditions of schools and university campuses served to segregate ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’, with walls and gates preventing interaction. During the mobilisations, students critiqued the distance between the “ivory tower” and the lives of people beyond campus walls. In the process, they reimagined their institutions becoming more embedded in community life. In Johannesburg, for example, student-worker debates within Wits had grappled with, as Thandolwethu put it, “the disconnect between our institutions and society itself”.⁶²² For Kabelo, this entailed the question, “how can we have a system of education that talks to us, that is tied to us, that does not alienate our community?”.⁶²³

A key issue that students raised about this distance and disconnection was how campuses were inaccessible to people outside of their walls. Members of local communities were largely unable to make use of campus spaces or learn from educational processes inside, and could not access the physical, epistemic, and cultural resources within the institutions.⁶²⁴ During the occupations, however, students often formed stronger relationships with local communities. At times in Brazil, students opened their schools during the day to community members who wanted to take part in events and learn alongside students and workers. In South Africa, one student argued that such moments were “really about the dialogue and the re-imagination that takes place *in dialogue* with people in a very real and concrete way”.⁶²⁵ These were efforts to “change the school itself, and the relationship between schools and society as a whole”.⁶²⁶ One of the main proposals which students articulated was the need to open the physical space of schools to wider communities, providing access to leisure, sports, and cultural facilities missing in these communities.⁶²⁷ For many students,

⁶²¹Interview, Patricia, 22 March 2017

⁶²²Interview, Thandolwethu, 27 March 2017

⁶²³Interview, Kabelo, Wits, 23 March 2017

⁶²⁴Interview, Marcia and Juliana, 10 August 2017

⁶²⁵Interview, Aisha, 15 September 2017

⁶²⁶Interview, Marcia and Juliana, 10 August 2017

⁶²⁷Interviews, Marcia and Juliana, Rio, 10 August 2017; Thandolwethu, Wits, 27 March 2017. Experi-

institutional resources could be shared more widely, particularly at wealthier institutions where students challenged the hoarding of privilege behind campus walls. At Wits, for instance, Thandolwethu argued that, “the infrastructure, the resources in universities are not currently used for the greater good of the society. The only people it benefits are those that can pay for it”.⁶²⁸

During the mobilisations, many students who were already working with community organisations drew on these affiliations to build relationships between those inside and outside educational institutions. In Cape Town, for example, the organisers of the *Know Your Africa* project attempted to bridge spatial segregation and build educational links between the elite UCT and disenfranchised townships (Benson, Gamedze, and Koranteng 2018).⁶²⁹ They drew on institutional resources from the Department of Historical Studies and the Institute for Humanities in Africa (HUMA) to run a decolonial African history workshop, both at UCT and at local NGO Equal Education’s offices in Khayelitsha township. The organisers thus argued that education was a process that included “relationship building and community learning” (ibid., p. 108).

Similarly, students attempted to form relationships with off-campus communities and organisations, including trade unionists such as Joseph Mathunjwa from the mining sector.⁶³⁰ For Aisha, who was involved in community organisations such as housing justice movements and trade unions prior to the student mobilisations, students had to orient themselves both while at university and afterwards towards “doing things that are relevant to people”, or risk losing their support.⁶³¹ In some cases, since the end of the mobilisations, graduating students have remained active in off-campus community struggles, for instance developing LGBT+ networks in some townships (Dhlamini, Charlie, and Dougan 2018).

Campus-community relations were influenced by the structure of education institutions themselves. In South Africa, for instance, universities were argued to be channels for individualised self-advancement,⁶³² wherein students are “not taught to give back to our communities” upon graduation.⁶³³ Historical experiments that draw universities closer to

ments with opening schools and making them community centres has been a feature of several political educationalists, particularly across Latin America (Jadue and Denvir 2019; Torres 1994). Even in Brazil, Freire (1993) attempted to build relationships between schools and communities in his time as São Paulo’s Minister of Education, but these efforts were undone through neoliberalisation over the 1990s (Pilar O’Cadiz, Wong, and Torres 1998)

⁶²⁸Interview, Thandolwethu, 27 March 2017

⁶²⁹I attended one of these, on “Popular Education: Reflections on the work of Neville Alexander”, hosted at UCT on 29 Aug 2015. This special memorial session was dedicated to the renaming of the Humanities Building as the Neville Alexander Building

⁶³⁰Mathunjwa was the head of the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union, AMCU, which was central in the Lonmin dispute, in which dozens of mineworkers were killed by South African police in the 2012 Marikana Massacre. He came to speak at UCT on 20 August 2015, on the invitation of #RMF. See <https://www.facebook.com/RhodesMustFall/posts/1618356105106548/>

⁶³¹Interview, Aisha, UJ, 15 September 2017

⁶³²An argument that also underpinned the argument for tuition fees as a “private investment” (Hull 2015, 2016b)

⁶³³Interview, Thandolwethu, 27 March 2017. This point is a complex one, given that universities tend

local communities have met with mixed success. In Tanzania in the 1960s, for instance, programmes designed for ‘relevance’ at the University of Dar es Salaam became both unpopular and ineffective, even at their stated purpose, producing “technocrats rather than reasoning graduates” (Kibambo, cited in Mamdani 2016, p. 74).⁶³⁴

In practice, the links that mobilisations tried to create with communities were fraught, often because of the class position and social distance between students and local communities. In South Africa particularly, many university students were middle class or training to enter the ranks of the middle class through their tertiary education. Those students experienced a sense of alienation within their institutions, but also from external communities by virtue of their relative privilege.⁶³⁵ At UWC, for instance, one lecturer argued that creating links with communities was not an easy process, as such links could provoke tensions and rivalries, calling into question students’ priorities and sense of urgency. Nevertheless, he contrasted student struggles in the 1980s to the Fallist moment, arguing that in the 1980s,

the space of UWC was a site of learning, which was then taken to communities and communities were then invited onto campus to teach. In contrast, UWC Fees Must Fall had good intentions but failed to learn from this history

Discussion, Leonard, UWC, 29 June 2018

While prioritising their education, students were torn by different sets of demands and had to assess their importance against their own life goals. Many students, for instance, were indebted to pay for their education and had to find well-paying jobs that could also contribute to family income.⁶³⁶ This made it difficult for students, in their liminal position, to commit to one or another political trajectory and hence develop relationships with communities on the basis of shared objectives.

6.4 Conclusion

The period of rupture in late 2015 opened the possibility for these issues to be reimagined, and the shifting configuration of the mobilisations over the course of 2015-16 influenced the way in which Brazilian and South African students and workers formed these imaginaries.

to at least claim to support national development and call on their graduates to be socially responsible. Whether their ‘hidden curriculum’ encourages students to do this is another matter

⁶³⁴Similarly, Mazrui (1975)’s concerns that the quest for relevance may subordinate knowledge production to prevailing social pressures and thus risk undermining theoretical, critical, or ‘basic’ research have manifested across Africa. This has, however, primarily been because of the marketisation of education, where scholars come to rely on the whims of funders, whether international organisations or domestic nation-states, rather than on attempts at ‘relevance’ as responding to communities’ needs (Mkandawire 2005)

⁶³⁵Interview, Thandolwethu, Wits, 27 March 2017; Discussion, Leonard, UWC, 29 June 2018

⁶³⁶The so-called “black tax” (Magubane 2017)

This chapter engaged with questions of how students imagined education during the mobilisations, focusing on three aspects.

Students and workers developed a sense of their personal and collective agency through their mobilisations. Through this process, they came to imagine an education system that was liberatory and decolonised, enhancing rather than suppressing their agency. In this regard, they overcame a sense of alienation in which they were inhibited from seeing themselves as agents whose actions could reshape their institutions and society.

Student-worker alliances also developed a critique of existing institutional democracy, particularly through their practices of *autogestão*, or democratic self-management. This underpinned a wide-ranging rethinking of how decision-making took place within their institutions, enabling students and workers to have power over the decisions which affected their lives. Both in practice during the mobilisations, and in their imaginaries of how education could be constructed differently, students and workers thus challenged a form of alienation in which their lives were shaped by structures which they had no control over.

Finally, the mobilisations enabled new relationships to form amongst students, between students and workers, and between campuses and broader society. Students and workers thus imagined and built relations of trust, empathy, solidarity, and familial closeness in caring campus communities. However, they could also be pervaded and broken by structural differences of race, class and gender, as well as underlying institutional power relations, leading to bitterness, anger and resentment. Nevertheless, these relationships could at times point towards ways of overcoming interpersonal alienation, humanising and bringing together people divided and isolated by their structural conditions.

These student-worker struggles were relevant not only to their own lives, but opened broader questions of how their societies were constructed and reproduced. In each context, students were thus “negotiating over issues that strike at the heart of the very existence of the country”.⁶³⁷ While this chapter focused on questions of agency, democracy, and social relations, the student-worker alliances raised fundamental questions about knowledge, which I turn to in the next chapter.

⁶³⁷Discussion, Faisal, 27 November 2017

Chapter 7

Education Reimagined: Towards Epistemic Justice

The best model of education was literally the occupation, that is the student being able to live within it... Choosing that which they want to learn

Carlos, Student, São Paulo, 29 May 2017

Students in both South Africa and Brazil not only called for education that enhanced their sense of agency, facilitated by healthy interpersonal relations and taking place in democratic, reliable, and safe conditions. They also addressed questions of learning, in the form of pedagogical practices, and knowledge, as embedded in the curriculum.⁶³⁸

In both mobilisations, students prioritised making education *relevant* for their lives, having it speak to the socio-political conditions in which they lived while drawing on important lessons from their teachers and realising these through practical, collective activity. Questions of relevance are not new or unique to these waves of mobilisation. Nevertheless, students and workers in both countries became “epistemological agents of change” by practicing and imagining alternative forms of curriculum and pedagogy (SOTLUJ 2016b). These practices and imaginaries facilitated an overcoming of epistemic injustice which, as discussed in Chapter 2, inhibited students from comprehending their reality and their place therein, their ability to critique existing social practices and hence change them, and their ability to contribute to shared knowledge (See e.g. Dotson 2014; Fricker 2007; Medina 2013).⁶³⁹

⁶³⁸Students and education workers were quick to emphasise that their struggles had never been narrowly over curricula alone. Interviews, Annika, the University of Cape Town (UCT), 7 April 2017; Kabelo, the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), 23 March 2017

⁶³⁹Epistemic Justice can thus be understood as an overcoming of epistemic injustice (Fricker 2013), both as restitution for past epistemic harm, such as the erasure of indigenous knowledge under colonialism, or as forward-looking justice requiring the “avoidance of wrongful harm in prospect” (Hull 2019, pp. 9–10)

This chapter draws on three approaches to explain how students and workers reimaged education. Firstly, it draws directly on the ideas, proposals, and concepts that students and workers developed. This recognises students and workers and knowledge producers, and their movements as sites of knowledge production. Secondly, it looks at what they implicitly endorsed by inverting their critiques of existing systems. This approach recognises that critique serves an important function for the imagination, in negating reality such that alternatives might be imagined (Sartre [1940] 2004b). Finally, it draws on what students and workers did *in practice*, particularly when they were freely able to organise themselves, such as in occupations. How people choose to self-organise, along with what and how they focus on learning, suggests what mattered to them, even if they did not explicitly indicate it would form part of an envisioned education system.

Outline In this chapter, I examine the *pedagogical* alternatives embedded in and raised by the mobilisations. Students did this by going ‘beyond the classroom’ and looking more broadly to the spaces in which learning takes place; by adopting dialogical learning; and by drawing on cultural practices that are often informal, as well as non-dominant languages, as pedagogical mechanisms. The chapter also shows how the *content* that students and workers prioritised within their own spaces, when they had control over what they learnt about, differed from their ordinary institutional experience. Students prioritised three themes, addressing questions of decolonisation and indigenous knowledge; history, power relations, and social struggle; and feminism and gender.

7.1 Pedagogy

Students’ mobilisations frequently held space for explicitly pedagogical activities, often in non-traditional locations. In so doing, they also drew in two further distinctive pedagogical processes: dialogical learning, and learning grounded in cultural and linguistic relevance.

While protesting and occupying to bring about change, students first and foremost wanted to continue learning. In South Africa, for example, students at numerous universities organised “Protest and Pass” study groups to continue working towards their degrees while participating in #FeesMustFall (#FMF). One commerce student at the University Currently Known As Rhodes (UCKAR) described how,

we tried to make the space suitable for both political objectives and academic objectives. . . . The mantra of “protest and pass” put paid to the notion that protesting and studying were somehow mutually exclusive

Siviwe, quoted in O’Halloran (2016, p. 193)

In Brazil, occupying students continued working on their regular schoolwork alongside the vastly expanded set of topics introduced by the ruptured space. As a student at

ISERJ put it, students sought a more holistic education, rejecting the idea that “if you do physics, you can’t do politics”.⁶⁴⁰ At ISERJ, for example, students called in sympathetic teachers who offered ‘solidarity classes’, while also using digital tools like the *Descomplica* (Uncomplicated) YouTube channel to prepare for the *Vestibular* university entrance exams.⁶⁴¹ At Mendes, students hosted “community pre-vestibular” preparation sessions within the occupation,⁶⁴² while at *Colégio Pedro II* - Pedro II College (CPII), students detailed how,

We organised preparatory classes for UERJ and ENEM, for all subjects... We organised everything: schedules, the classrooms, who would teach, etc.

Interview, Fernanda, 24 August 2017

7.1.1 Alternative Pedagogical Spaces

In such spaces, students aimed to shift education to a more dialogical process. For dialogical pedagogical practices to work, however, students had to attend to even micro-scale issues, such as the spatial organisation of the room in which discussions took place. In Brazil particularly, photographs of students sitting in circles became characteristic of the mobilisations as a whole: students would include one another, face each other, each participating equally in co-constructing the space and their collective actions. Maria explained that ordinary schooling is “horrible, sitting one behind the other”, and that when they choose how to self-organise, students sit in circles because they want “to stop seeing our colleagues’ necks”, and instead want “to see their faces, their eyes”, to connect with them.⁶⁴³ These practices served to create a “more inclusive hermeneutical microclimate” which enabled students to learn better, understand one another, and contribute their experiences, thereby functioning as a corrective to some epistemic injustices (Fricker 2007, pp. 171–2).

Outside of standard classrooms, students taught and learnt from one another, disseminated information about practical and political issues, translated texts, generated and developed new ideas, and discovered new ways of thinking about the world. At UCT, for example, Chikane (2018a, p. 109) argues that the occupied Mafeje Room,

became our ideological incubator. It was where many of us either unearthed or polished the raw arguments we had about race and identity... Azania House was always alive... bursting with ideas and new opportunities

⁶⁴⁰Group Interview, *Instituto Superior de Educação do Rio de Janeiro* - Higher Education Institute of Rio de Janeiro (ISERJ), 16 September 2016

⁶⁴¹See <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCT0JugAtGmqiYkwxFZ0wAtg>. *Descomplica* even produced a video about the student occupations: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xyNnijQWMBk>

⁶⁴²Group Interview, Mendes de Moraes, RJ, 22 Aug 17, 28’17”

⁶⁴³Interview, Maria, 5 June 2017

In Brazil, every occupation had some combination of classes, talks and lectures, debates and discussions, workshops, cultural and sporting activities (Alvim and Rodrigues 2017). Across campuses, *secundaristas* held online discussions, and convened regional meetings and discussion groups. They took part in academic conferences alongside university students and academics, such as *Reformas de Ensino e Movimentos de Resistência* (Goulart, Cássio, and Ximenes 2017)⁶⁴⁴ and book launches, such as for *Escolas de Luta* in São Paulo (Campos, Medeiros, and Ribeiro 2016).⁶⁴⁵ Students invited teachers and university affiliates into occupied schools to run classes, on topics ranging from physics to feminism, as well as legal aid clinics for protesting and occupying students to know their rights under the Brazilian Constitution and the Statute of Children and Adolescents (Januário et al. 2016, p. 19).⁶⁴⁶ The topics during the occupations were broad, encompassing “everything we couldn’t talk about in our normal school days we were able to discuss extensively”.⁶⁴⁷ In Rio, students at ISERJ produced a dossier on the infrastructural degradation of their school, with an affidavit and photographic evidence of crumbling buildings and mouldy food.⁶⁴⁸

During their occupation, students at ISERJ also ran several practical training sessions, including public speaking and presentation classes.⁶⁴⁹ At Mendes, students hosted a discussion with visiting Zapatistas and held a ‘cine-debate’ about the São Paulo occupations, learning about contemporary political movements, their tactics, and their imaginaries of the future.⁶⁵⁰ They also ran practical training in, for example, first aid. At C.E. Euclides da Cunha, students similarly learnt through action, running a volunteer vegetable garden, planting their own food in the school, gaining an appreciation for taking care of nature.⁶⁵¹

In South Africa, students in writing subcommittees drafted manifestoes (Wits #FeesMustFall 2015; Xaba 2017b; Zidepa 2015), informational materials, reading lists, and academic publications (See e.g. #RhodesMustFall 2015c; Ndelu, Dlakavu, and Boswell 2017). Out of these efforts, students also realised the importance of creating more durable documentation of their narratives, ideas and struggles, culminating in autonomously self-published documents like *Publica[c]tion* (Publica[c]tion Collective 2017) and the *Pathways to Free Education* booklets (Pathways to Free Education Collective 2016, 2017a,b). In Johannesburg, the #October6 (#Oct6) student-worker alliance built an “intellectual programme” for teaching and learning collectively. Students and workers thus hosted panel discussions, film screenings, lectures, and conversations that spoke to the practical components of what

⁶⁴⁴School Reforms and Resistance Movements, conference 16-17 May 2017

⁶⁴⁵Schools of Struggle, book launch 24 September 2016

⁶⁴⁶Lei No. 8.069, 13 Julho 1990, *Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente*

⁶⁴⁷Interview, Juliana, 10 August 2017

⁶⁴⁸Copy in author’s possession

⁶⁴⁹Group Interview, ISERJ, 20 September 2016

⁶⁵⁰Group Interview, *Colégio Estadual* - State School (C.E.) Mendes de Moraes, Rio, 22 August 2017

⁶⁵¹Interview, Patrícia, 28 August 2017. See also https://twitter.com/job_polak/status/1061176598890795008

decolonisation meant and the role of the university in society.⁶⁵² Students and academics also hosted seminars and conferences, such as the Psychology and Decolonisation conference (University of Johannesburg 2017a) and Scholarship of Teaching and Learning programme at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) (Masweneng 2017a; SOTLUJ 2016a,b), Decolonising Feminism at Wits (University of the Witwatersrand 2016), and the Decolonial Winter School (2018) at UCT. Students contributed to refashioning curricula, for instance through the contested, controversial Curriculum Change Working Group (2018) at UCT (Reddy and Smith 2019).

Like in Brazil, ideas condensed within student-occupied buildings, such as Azania House at UCT and Solomon House at Wits (Gamedze 2015; Liphosa and Dennis 2017; Sebambo 2015) and in community spaces, such as Black House in Soweto (Sipuye 2016). Here, students held dialogues and debates, and formed groups where “students would sit and study after supper” (Kgoroba 2017, p. 126). These spaces provided the environment to valorise and acknowledge knowledge not ordinarily deemed important in educational institutions. Occupations, such as at Azania House at UCT, for instance, drew experiences from students and workers who had had, in ordinary university life, not been able to fully express themselves, or who were alienated from the kind of knowledge valued there. On this basis, students argued, the occupation gave space for alternative knowledge to develop and hence the emergence of a “black imagination” (Gamedze 2015; Sebambo 2015). Mbembe (2015, p. 6) thus argued that,

In order to set our institutions firmly on the path of future knowledges, we need to reinvent a classroom without walls in which we are all co-learners; a university that is capable of convening various publics in new forms of assemblies that become points of convergence of and platforms for the redistribution of different kinds of knowledges.

Occupations were not the only space for this kind of activity, however. One common practice that students in both South Africa and Brazil adopted was a critical walking tour, or “transect walk”.⁶⁵³ In South Africa, students at UCT developed a Fallist walking tour which revealed the university’s historical complicity in the slave trade, discussed the “colonial compound” student residences, and the legacy of Rhodes at the location of the statue that #RhodesMustFall (#RMF) had removed. Crucially, the tour made clear how these were not accidental or inevitable, demonstrating “how purposeful that construction was when the university was being built”.⁶⁵⁴ In Brazil, students at ISERJ took me on such a walking tour during my visit, showing me where and how they had occupied buildings, slept, cooked, cleaned, and hosted open meetings, as well as features of

⁶⁵²Interview, Patricia, 22 March 2017

⁶⁵³An important technique in anthropological and Participatory Action Research (Adams and Moore 2007; Ingold and Vergunst 2008)

⁶⁵⁴Interview, Annika, UCT, 7 April 2017

the school in disrepair that they were trying to fix themselves or had called on authorities to address.⁶⁵⁵ When we sat down in a classroom to discuss the occupation, students and teachers sat alongside each other in a circle, each contributing equally.

These experiments were important because they pointed the way towards an education that is not constrained by the physical classroom space and the often hierarchical learning relations that that instantiates. Moreover, recognising a diversity of spaces in which students could teach and learn is connected to recognising and valuing knowledge that emerges beyond textbooks and teachers, paving the way to an ecology of knowledges and hence epistemic justice (Boidin, Cohen, and Grosfoguel 2012; Sousa Santos 2007, 2014).⁶⁵⁶

7.1.2 Dialogical Learning

The ideal education system is a diverse, public, quality education that would be an exchange: an education of giving and receiving.

Interview, Carlos, 29 May 2017

Pedagogical practices are crucially shaped by the form of interactions between those in the roles of ‘teacher’ and student’. Before the mobilisations, however, numerous students argued that their education had resembled a hierarchical, banking model, as discussed in Chapter 2. Maria, a student in São Paulo, argued for instance that, “we look like robots. . . if you think against something, people attack you”.⁶⁵⁷

However, the 2015-16 mobilisations could shift these pedagogical relationships. Student-worker mobilisations, drawing particularly on Freire ([1970] 2006), experimented with *dialogical pedagogy*, creating possibilities for thinking together in more egalitarian ways (Granato 2015; Publica[c]tion Collective 2017).⁶⁵⁸ As discussed in Chapter 2, dialogical pedagogy recognises that each participant can have something to contribute to a discussion, not only because of their own formal education, but also because of their life experiences and own experiments (Freire [1970] 2006; hooks 1994).

In South Africa, for example, during the emblematic #RMF occupation at UCT, students created the “University of Azania House”, where they became their own teachers. Annika, a student who had been actively involved, described how they “would have talks

⁶⁵⁵Group Interview and Campus Transect Walk, ISERJ, 16 September 2016

⁶⁵⁶Although, in some instances, these were limited by more populist rhetoric rather than genuine pedagogical practice (Chikane 2018a, p. 109). In South Africa, this could entail learning towards what Lester, Osborne, and Smith (2017), Mbolo and Mabasa (2019), and Reddy and Smith (2019) argue is a “nativist” turn in some Fallists’ political discourse which essentialised racial identity

⁶⁵⁷Interview, Maria, 5 June 2017. In other cases, students did have spaces for discussion but these still “happen in a very bureaucratic way and is still totally structured by vertical power relations”. Interview, Juliana, CPII, 10 August 2017

⁶⁵⁸Interviews, *inter alia*: Isaac, Wits, 23 March 2017; Annika, UCT, 7 April 2017; Group Interview, ISERJ, Rio, 19 September 2016; Carlos, São Paulo, 29 May 2017

and education sit-ins everyday around various aspects of political ideology. . . We had a really important discussions about our politics and we would debate and chat and speak and have meetings until 6 o'clock in the morning".⁶⁵⁹ In the Brazilian occupations, students undertook similar dialogues, drawing in students from nearby non-occupied schools.⁶⁶⁰ These discussions were intentionally dialogical, with Maria arguing, for example, "let it be more than classroom learning, more than the teacher talks and the student copies. Let it be one where everyone says 'ok, what do you think?'"⁶⁶¹ Some students described the importance of this not only in each school, but also "at a national level", such that both school and state policy should be collectively discussed with students, education workers, and officials.⁶⁶²

Learning and power relations are deeply linked. For dialogue to be effective, it must occur horizontally, rather than as an authoritarian imposition. As Freire ([1970] 2006, p. 88) argues, dialogue "cannot exist without humility" and "cannot occur between. . . those who deny others the right to speak. . . and those whose right to speak has been denied". During the mobilisations, students' alternative dialogical pedagogies thus attempted to shift the power relations that underlay the educational process. At times, this manifested in confrontation, such as when South African students challenged the symbolic authority invested in the figure of the 'professor'. Such challenges to authority entailed challenging academic hierarchies, and hence pedagogy. As one student at Wits argued,

it's both taking on the centrality of the professorial figure, which some read as taking on white people. . . and understanding decolonising the curriculum is also decolonising *pedagogy*

Interview, Patricia, 22 March 2017

Similarly, in Brazil, occupying students saw constructing "libertarian education" and challenging authority as intertwined. Marcia and Juliana in Rio, for example, argued that schools should be "as horizontal as possible", which meant "doing away with this verticality of someone ordering someone, who orders someone, and after all of that there's the student".⁶⁶³ Changing interpersonal relations, discussed in Chapter 6, also contributed to new pedagogical relations. Students and education workers caring for one another, or seeing each other as part of a "family", facilitated mutual learning (Freire 2018; McKernan 2008).⁶⁶⁴ These reshaped relations also shifted pedagogical practice from being purely

⁶⁵⁹Interview, Annika, 7 April 2017

⁶⁶⁰Interview, Juliana, 10 August 2017

⁶⁶¹Interview, Maria, 5 June 2017

⁶⁶²Giving the examples of the National Education Plan (PNE), the High School Reforms, PEC241, PEC155. Interview, Juliana, 10 August 2017

⁶⁶³Interview, Marcia e Juliana, 10 August 2017

⁶⁶⁴This was particularly as teachers came to learn more about their students' lives. Interview, Gabriel, Teacher, Rio, 28 August 2017

factual towards the kind of *sentipensante* ('thinking-feeling') learning that numerous authors advocate for in decolonising authoritarian knowledge relationships (Fals Borda 2008; Rappaport 2016; Rendón 2009; Vargas 2017).

Although students teaching one another and learning amongst themselves was a distinguishing feature of their mobilisations, there was a qualified acknowledgement of the role of teachers and academics (Shay 2016). From the perspective of many teachers, students' mobilisations were both an opportunity to connect in new ways with their students, and important pedagogically. As one teacher in Rio argued, they took on a "much wider pedagogical role than usual" during the mobilisations.⁶⁶⁵ In concert with students, they helped organise cooking, activities, debates, and relations with other occupied schools, sharing their own experiences and knowledge. Moreover, students recognised that they did not hold answers to all questions and that others had knowledge and expertise. In South Africa, for example, academic Pumla Gqola came to speak to students in the "University of Azania House" at UCT about feminism and intersectionality. Gqola (1999)'s PhD thesis was about the role of black women in the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in the 1970s and 80s, a topic she later published on more widely (Gqola 2001), which students were particularly interested in. Similarly, as Annika described,

We had various academics coming to speak about how they would view decolonising their department or subject, interest or faculty. We had workers coming to share their experiences at the university.

Interview, Annika, 7 April 2017

In Brazil too, students were not opposed to input from those with specialist knowledge. In Rio, Fernanda recalled that philosopher Marcia Tiburi came to speak at her school.⁶⁶⁶ Tiburi (2015) is known particularly for her book entitled *How to Talk to Fascists*, about creeping authoritarianism in Brazil.⁶⁶⁷ Similarly, Juliana mentioned a debate her occupation had hosted about the legalisation of drugs and the carceral state with Luciana Boiteux, an academic who writes about state repression, drugs, and prisons, often with a focus on racialisation of policing and imprisoned women (Figueiredo Rodrigues 2011).⁶⁶⁸ School administrators had blocked attempts to host such a debate before the occupations, but under their own authority, students decided it was important to discuss issues relating to drugs, trafficking and incarceration, which affected many students' lives.⁶⁶⁹

⁶⁶⁵Interview, Gabriel, 28 August 2017

⁶⁶⁶Interview, Fernanda, 24 August 2017

⁶⁶⁷Tiburi is a philosophy lecturer at the Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (UNIRIO), and has been affiliated to *Partido Socialismo e Liberdade* - Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL) and *Partido dos Trabalhadores* - Workers' Party (PT)

⁶⁶⁸Boiteux lectures at the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), and is affiliated to PSOL

⁶⁶⁹Interview, Juliana, 10 August 2017

This recognition of expertise revealed a subtle but important difference between standard formal education and dialogical relations. Within dialogical processes, students and educational workers recognised one another as knowers and thinkers, rather than imposing their own views on each other. In South Africa, for example, many Fallists rejected Achille Mbembe's positions, sometimes with acrimonious exchanges between them (Laing 2016).⁶⁷⁰ Patricia, a student at Wits, argued that this was because Mbembe did not engage with the substantive arguments taking place within the student movement, effaced their thinking, and attempted to impose his own perspective.⁶⁷¹ By contrast, some workers were acknowledged as allies within the institution, such as Isaac, a lecturer at Wits. He attributed this to how he engaged with student activists, trying

to listen carefully, to immerse myself but always removed from centre of that movement. To be supportive, but also critical, trying to make sense of what students articulated. . . People like me, coming from a previous generation of activism, needed to position myself to facilitate dialogue. . . and most importantly, listening

Interview, Isaac, 23 March 2017

While many teaching workers were perceived as a part of the problematic structure that students were fighting, they could be present in student-run spaces to listen, discuss, and question. Doing so, however, required that teachers divested themselves of the institutional power to dictate how students' educational or political practice would take place. Thus, rather than teachers as the ultimate repositories of knowledge,

The relationship between teacher and pupil is active and reciprocal so that every teacher is always a pupil and every pupil a teacher.

Gramsci (1971, p. 350)

7.1.3 Education, Culture and Language

In creating alternative pedagogical practices during the mobilisations, students in both South Africa and Brazil prioritised forms of cultural expression relevant to them. In Brazil, students organised cultural activities which had never previously taken place in their schools, from book fairs to poetry workshops to creating and screening documentaries about issues in daily life, such as Black Consciousness.⁶⁷² One of the most widespread and popular activities was the *sarau*, a cultural mini-festival with a variety of activities, usually involving poetry and music. In South Africa, students hosted similar events, with musical

⁶⁷⁰Mbembe is a noted postcolonial scholar based at Wits, who wrote several pieces about the student mobilisations

⁶⁷¹Interview, Patricia, Wits, 22 March 2017

⁶⁷²Group Discussion, Luis and Carol, *Escola Estadual - State School (E.E.) Diadema*, 8 June 2017; Interview, Maria, 5 June 2017

jam sessions, poetry readings, and theatrical performances.⁶⁷³ As Chikane (2018a, p. 109) recalls, “art became our blood, with music sending it pumping through our veins. I don’t remember a day of the occupation without song or dance”. Unlike in Brazil, however,⁶⁷⁴ culture and language were interwoven issues in South Africa. Fallists across the country contested the hegemony of English and Afrikaans at their institutions. In campaigns like the prominent documentary, *Luister* (Listen), at Stellenbosch University, students argued that universities’ language policies entrenched an exclusive and white-supremacist institutional culture while academically excluding black students whose first languages were not acknowledged (#OpenStellenbosch 2015; Cupido 2017). These cultural practices highlighted the failings of hegemonic pedagogies, for instance in ignoring the importance of oral histories, or the sense of connection with learning that came from a felt connection with bodies of knowledge (d’Abdon 2016; Doyle and Bezerra 2016; Jacobs 2017; Matandela 2017).⁶⁷⁵ Similarly, language and culture are crucial channels through which learning takes place (Bam, Zinn, and Ntebeza 2018; Hamza 2004; Thiong’o [1981] 1994).⁶⁷⁶ As one student at Diadema recalled, through his exposure to poetry, “I managed to perceive things that I wouldn’t have understood otherwise. . . it increased our thirst for knowledge”.⁶⁷⁷ Cultural practices during the mobilisations facilitated students’ own creative expression and introduced new conceptual resources, crucial components of facilitating their imagination and ensuring epistemic justice (Dotson 2012; Fletcher 2016; Fricker 2007). Ultimately, cultural activities also mattered because of the sheer act of creation and joy that they embodied. As two South African students reflected,

Black students shut the university down, and then we didn’t have to just be *students*. In that time-space we could be artists, intellectuals, African people, friends, comedians, musicians, writers, dancers, actresses, and we could be together. People were able to collectively create, learn, tell stories, teach, rap, laugh, cry, and sing in occupation in ways that I had never seen or even imagined in my almost ten years at and on the fringes of the university. It’s as if that arrested space allowed us to return to our true (following Marx to our social)⁶⁷⁸ nature; it allowed us to return to ourselves, to be with our internal world, and that means singing (being) together as a people.

gamEdze and gamedZe (2019, p. 224)

⁶⁷³Notably, students at UCT created *The Fall*, a play about the #RMF campaign and occupation, which went on to tour around the world (Conrad et al. 2017).

⁶⁷⁴As a legacy of colonialism and nation-building in Brazil, over 99% of the population speaks Portuguese as a first language, and it rare for this to be contested (Chacoff 1989; Fleuri and Fleuri 2017; Miki 2018; Scarato 2016)

⁶⁷⁵Interview, Isaac, 23 March 2017

⁶⁷⁶Interview, Paballo, 20 March 2019

⁶⁷⁷Group Interview, Luis, 8 June 2017

⁶⁷⁸Marx ([1844] 1988) is cited in the original text here: “Communism as the positive transcendence of private property as human self-estrangement, and therefore as the real appropriation of the human essence by and for humans; communism therefore as the complete return of people to themselves as a social (i.e., human) being”

7.1.4 Challenges with Alternative Pedagogies

Students' mobilisations generally enacted and discussed alternative pedagogical practices, in terms of new learning environments, dialogical interactions, or cultural exchanges. However, these experiments were not always successful. In some cases, this was because students could not live up to the open-spirited ideal of anti-hierarchical egalitarian learning, for instance by rejecting knowledge exchanges with those they disagreed with or viewed as politically invalid (Jacobs 2017; Lester, Osborne, and Smith 2017). In most cases, however, students were unable to reshape pedagogical practice by focusing exclusively on single institutions. For example, what counts as valid or scholarly knowledge is a process influenced by global educational structures, which place pressure on all institutions to compete for sought-after research funding (Tabensky and Matthews 2015, p. 13; Connell 2019, Ch. 4). In Brazil, a young teacher in Rio highlighted how global educational standards, particularly those set by International Financial Institutions, influence what was considered "good teaching" in Brazil. World Bank (WB) assessors, for instance, were tasked with determining whether a teacher was effective, and their criteria used to assess schools' funding allocations.⁶⁷⁹ Similarly, pedagogical patterns at one level of education may influence other levels. Numerous interviewees discussed how schooling in South Africa shaped students' expectations of university pedagogy, and Brazilian schools' pedagogical priorities were shaped by the demands of universities and entrance exams like the *Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio* - National High School Exam (ENEM) and *Vestibular*.

7.2 Curriculum

In addition to the way in which students learned, they developed demands around how the content of their education could and should change. Curricula are the product of struggles over how education is to be conducted (Apple [1979] 2004; Arthur 2011; Naidoo, Adriansen, and Madsen 2015). As Jansen (2017, p. 154) argues,

Curriculum transformation strikes at the very identity of a higher education institution by asking troubling questions about how a university sees itself in relation to the nation and the world.

Changing curricula is thus a contentious process, but one which often "recedes from view", as Ahmed (2012, p. 12) argues in a study of institutional change in British universities. The work to ensure these changes take place is "hard because it can involve doing *within* institutions what would not otherwise be done *by* them" (ibid., p. 25). As discussed in Chapter 4, during the periods of rupture in Brazilian and South African institutions, students made these behind-the-scenes processes visible, demonstrating that the work

⁶⁷⁹Interview, Gabriel, 28 August 2017

required to adequately change curricula had not been done (Alegria 2018; Canham 2017). Students addressed several key themes, including in South Africa specifically, decoloniality and indigenous knowledge, as well as feminism and gender; and history, politics and economics.

Students' demands for a different kind of education were similar in both South Africa and Brazil, although channelled through differing frameworks. In Brazil, demands for curriculum change were not made through a singular framework, although students often used the discourse of 'diversity' and 'relevance' to frame their disenchantment with their existing education. They emphasised the need to connect their education to their social world and reflect their experiences. As two students put it, in an ideal education system, "school subjects are more than facts and squares, beginning, middle and end. It brings a bit more of reality in, more social topics".⁶⁸⁰ Education should thus "bring you back to reality".⁶⁸¹ To do this, education has to become inclusive of different perspectives, and continually adapt to changing social conditions (Freire 2018). Carlos in São Paulo argued, for instance, that without such an education, individuals would succumb to filter bubbles and echo chambers, where "I can choose my truth and follow my life according to what I believe, and only interact with those people who I agree with and follow".⁶⁸² However, because education "is not the world for you, it's the world for everyone", it "will bring opposing views". As a result,

Education has that essential role, of bringing the complexity of others. Not to bring full truths, but to bring diversity. To bring the beauty of diversity, because the world is only the world because people are black, white, yellow, gay, straight, cis, trans.

Interview, Carlos, 29 May 2017

At the same time, education has to enable students to draw on their own diversity of experiences and what they learn to critically reflect on the world around them (Freire [1970] 2006). Conscientisation, in the Freirean sense, is a form of epistemic justice because it enables people to engage critically with the world around them, identifying problems and working towards possible resolutions. While Brazilian students rarely used the term 'decolonisation', their discussions and demands identified continued problems with colonialism and racism and how these were reflected in school curricula.

In South Africa, by contrast, Fallists predominantly framed their mobilisations around a struggle for *decolonisation*, developing a critique of 'Western' knowledge and Eurocentrism in their universities. Many South African students perceived Western and European ideals as the sole lens they were offered to study their own society (Taghavi 2017, p. 59). Their activism was therefore "motivated by the desire to dismantle racial inequalities and

⁶⁸⁰Interview, Maria, 5 June 2017

⁶⁸¹Interview, Juliana, 10 August 2017

⁶⁸²Interview, Carlos, 29 May 2017

the hegemony of western knowledge in tertiary institutions” (Maringira and Gukurume 2017, p. 39). As discussed in Chapter 2, students drew in particular on the work of Biko and the BCM, as well as anti-colonial and anti-apartheid traditions beyond the African National Congress (ANC), such as Sobukwe and the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC)’s Pan-Africanism. Intermingled with this were the influences from the Latin American decolonial school, particularly the work of Walter Mignolo, and US-centric Afro-pessimism (Sitas 2017). Much of this was discussed in occupied spaces and throughout Fallist organising, where “quotations and abstractions from authors such as Frantz Fanon, Steve Biko, Pumla Gqola, Robert Sobukwe, W.E.B. Du Bois, Albert Memmi, Malcolm X, Achille Mbembe, Marcus Garvey, Maya Angelou and Kendrick Lamar became common currency” for students (Chikane 2018a, p. 109).

The following discussion focuses on how South African students engaged with the question of decolonisation as a focal point for imagining a new kind of knowledge formation. This is a rare opportunity to document how ‘decolonisation’ is interpreted and mobilised as an organising frame in practice.

7.2.1 Decolonisation and Indigenous Knowledge

Recognising the limits of the post-1994 “rainbow nation” consensus, students in South Africa attempted to grapple with the depth and breadth of changes that their institutions and society would require (Chigumadzi 2015; Chikane 2018a,b; Kamanzi 2015b; Lester, Osborne, and Smith 2017). Students’ convergence on calls for decolonisation entailed critiquing the programme of “transformation”, hegemonic in universities since the 1990s, which students rejected for seeking “accommodation” in an existing racist system (Naidoo 2015a; Kamanzi 2015b, 13m53s).⁶⁸³

This was most clearly described in students’ manifestos, which highlighted recurring themes of what decolonisation meant for students.⁶⁸⁴ The #RMF Mission Statement at UCT (#RhodesMustFall 2015c, p. 8), for example, made demands of university research and curricula,⁶⁸⁵ including:

- Implement a curriculum which critically centres Africa and the subaltern... treating African discourses as the point of departure - through addressing not only content, but languages and methodologies of education and learning - and only examining western traditions in so far as they are relevant to our own experience.

⁶⁸³Although students’ demands in early 2015 were often still framed in terms of transformation, demanding that promises of transformation be realised in practice (Pilane 2015)

⁶⁸⁴Other manifestos were less clear and highly technically framed, such as Wits #FeesMustFall (2015), or were preliminary, such as at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (UKZN), where students argued decolonisation entailed the removal of colonial statues, diverse teaching staff, increased access for Black students, free quality education, and a decolonised curriculum (Shezi 2016)

⁶⁸⁵Alongside addressing campus symbolism, admissions, fees, faculty composition, financial issues, student support, and workers’ rights (#RhodesMustFall 2015c, p. 8)

- Introduce a curriculum and research scholarship linked to social justice and the experiences of black people.
- Re-evaluate the standards by which research areas are decided - from areas that are lucrative and centre whiteness, to areas that are relevant to the lives of black people locally and on the continent.

Central to the decolonial project, students turned to knowledge that had been marginalised and erased through colonial knowledge production, attempting to reconstitute indigenous and subaltern knowledge formations and ensure their education was “reflective of our local society and worldviews” (Shezi 2016, p. 27). At the University of the Western Cape (UWC), for instance, Beverley suggested that the Fallist moment was an opportunity,

to build an absolutely fabulous, brilliant, new curriculum around pre-colonial Africa. It’s so rich, you need so many skills, it’s so poetic, that it would be really exciting. It’s also neglected, hardly anywhere touches that - nineteenth century is the earliest for most departments. It’s such a pity.

Interview, Beverley, 6 April 2017

To build alternative curricula like this, students turned to existing literature. Significantly, the early 2015 #RMF campaign collated numerous digital resources, widely publicising a freely accessible Dropbox folder with ‘conscientisation literature’.⁶⁸⁶ Graduate students developed reading lists for undergraduates that were shared online or in occupied spaces. Fallists shared their ideas and research in forums, both on campus and off-campus, such as through organisations like the Institute for African Alternatives (IFAA) in Cape Town, which hosted several discussions including *Black Consciousness and Feminism*⁶⁸⁷ and *Economics and Consciousness*.⁶⁸⁸ Students also discussed ideas with a series of prominent speakers invited to South African universities, including Angela Davis at the University of South Africa (UNISA);⁶⁸⁹ Ramon Grosfoguel at UNISA; Nelson Maldonado-Torres at UNISA and UCT;⁶⁹⁰ Gayatri Spivak, Lewis Gordon, and Mahmood Mamdani at UCT;⁶⁹¹ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o at UCT and Wits; and Raewyn Connell at UJ.⁶⁹² A number of these scholars also spoke to students and activists in contexts outside of the university, including Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, Maldonado-Torres, and others at Black House in

⁶⁸⁶See <https://bit.ly/2YIGLOU>. The Dropbox folder was inaccessible at the time of writing, although there are offline mirrors of it. The folder included works by, *inter alia*, Biko, Césaire, Cabral, Angela Davis, Gramsci, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, C.L.R. James, Charles W. Mills, Cheikh Anta Diop, Crenshaw, Said, Wilderson, Fanon, Spivak, Marcuse, Bhabha, Baldwin, Sartre, Nyerere, Nkrumah, Lewis Gordon, Mabogo More, Mamdani, Malcolm X, Mao, Marx and Engels, Hardt and Negri, Neville Alexander, Ngugi, Patricia Hill Collins, Sobukwe, Saidiya Hartman, Saul Alinsky, Walter Rodney, W.E.B. du Bois, and Zizek

⁶⁸⁷9 Aug 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/events/704106836378973/>

⁶⁸⁸4 Feb 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/events/1814279922123183/>

⁶⁸⁹See Davis (2016) and Dougan (2016)

⁶⁹⁰See Kessi (2016) and Makhubu (2016)

⁶⁹¹See Mamdani (2017). See also Davis (2017) and Rafudeen (2017)

⁶⁹²See Connell (2016a,b)

Soweto, Johannesburg;⁶⁹³ and Lewis Gordon who held a “men’s meeting” between UCT Fallists and community members in Khayelitsha, a township in Cape Town.⁶⁹⁴

As students investigated these alternatives, they encountered new questions and challenges.⁶⁹⁵ In some cases, these were ‘internal’ to the project itself, such as addressing regional variances in knowledge formations outside of colonial influence. Historical and linguistic differences across Southern Africa meant that ‘local’ knowledge in the contemporary Western Cape may differ significantly from, say, Gauteng, which would again be different from “Africanisation” that encompassed the continent as a whole. Annika, a student at UCT, argued for instance that “we would have a national re-conception of what the curriculum would be. . . but it would also be provincial-based” to account for these variations.⁶⁹⁶ Students, however, rarely had the research skills to develop such curricula themselves, although they could draw on pre-existing material such as the Precolonial Catalytic Project at the UCT Centre for African Studies (Bam 2014; Ntsebeza and Saunders 2014; Peires 2014). Projects such as these were enhanced, legitimated, and deepened by the questions students had raised during the Fallist period, and complemented the work that students had done in placing such questions centrally on institutional research agendas (Bam, Zinn, and Ntsebeza 2018; Centre for African Studies 2017a,c; Sitas 2017).⁶⁹⁷ However, university structures also proved controversial in students’ pushes for decolonisation. Attempting to contain dissent, they often tried to ‘co-opt’ the decolonisation discourse by making minimalist changes,⁶⁹⁸ ranging from symbolically introducing figures like Mandela, Biko and Gandhi into curricula, to temporarily inviting a few individuals who could add legitimacy to the institution, such as Nigerian poet Wole Soyinka at UJ.⁶⁹⁹ In other cases, the challenges to (re)building alternative knowledge formations were ‘external’. Reshaping knowledge production is constrained by the norms, standards, and pressures of the international academic political economy, exemplified by the difficulty in publishing such knowledge in academic journals (Connell 2019; Ssentongo 2019; Trahar et al. 2019).⁷⁰⁰ Similarly, at a broader scale, Mbembe (2015, p. 20) argues that without the “recapitalisation” of universities, and direct engagement with the global political economy

⁶⁹³See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NoIX5xTytgw>

⁶⁹⁴Interview, Aisha, UJ, 15 September 2017. See <https://tinyurl.com/LewisGordonRMF>

⁶⁹⁵Interview, Annika, 7 April 2017

⁶⁹⁶Interview, Annika, 7 April 2017

⁶⁹⁷Personal Communication, Lungisile Ntsebeza, 14 October 2019

⁶⁹⁸Interviews, Mark, UJ lecturer, 17 March 2017; Aisha, UJ student, 15 September 2017. These institutional practices have since spread to other locations where the decolonisation discourse has emerged, including the UK. See e.g. <https://twitter.com/saramsale/status/1052463776191193088> Such a dynamic is common amongst powerful actors unable to fully contain dissent and resistance; Cf. Gramsci (1971, p. 80)’s definition of ‘corruption’

⁶⁹⁹Soyinka, a Nobel Prize-winner in Literature was appointed as a Distinguished *Visiting* Professor in the Faculty of Humanities at UJ in 2017. See <https://www.uj.ac.za/newandevents/Pages/Nobel-Laureate-prize-winner-Prof-Wole-Soyinka-joins-UJ.aspx>

⁷⁰⁰Global university rankings are similarly problematic (Connell 2019; Hazekorn 2016; Shahjahan, Ramirez, and Oliveira Andreotti 2016)

of knowledge production, curriculum changes of any kind are likely to be subordinated to the imperatives of accumulation under financial capitalism.

There was, however, little consensus on what a decolonised curriculum ought to look like, or how it would relate to existing knowledge formations in universities.⁷⁰¹ For some, particularly amongst Fallists in the earlier periods of the mobilisations, the way forward entailed *disconnection*: scrapping the existing curriculum and beginning afresh with a new academic project grounded in African realities. One student at UCT argued that this meant that,

you want nothing to do with the system as it is... it's not about you want to change things there and there... we are disconnecting ourselves from the so-called 'society' that was there

Kamanzi (2015b)

While this position could overlap with theories such as Amin ([1989] 2009)'s argument for geopolitical 'delinking', discussed in Chapter 2, students who adopted this position generally wanted to distance themselves from any knowledge associated with the 'West' or 'Whiteness'.⁷⁰² As one lecturer at Wits summarised,

Some feel we cannot transform the current system, we need to get rid of it outright. This university is Eurocentric, it's structured in a way that you can remove all the professors and the culture is still embedded. It can never change. We need to come up with our own education that is very different

Interview, Kabelo, 23 March 2017

A second position among students, however, was *addition*: largely retaining existing curricula, while introducing and elaborating 'decolonised' content. Students like Shezi (2016, p. 27) argued that Indigenous knowledge ought to be placed alongside the existing curriculum, while critiquing the latter. While critical of such an approach, Garuba (2015) argued that additive-inclusive changes, as part of a broader process, may be useful in changing the basis of shared knowledge on which further changes could be made. As such, this position proved attractive to many, and was the easiest for institutions to adopt. Responding to the context of the Fallist mobilisations, the UCT philosophy department, for example, has since 2015 reshaped its undergraduate courses to include Ancient Chinese,

⁷⁰¹Interview, Kabelo, 23 March 2017. Indeed, some students rejected the idea of replacing one canonical curriculum with another, challenging the process of canonisation itself for entrenching hierarchical power dynamics (Connell 2016a; Publica[c]tion Collective 2017; Lewis and Hendricks 2016, p. 13)

⁷⁰²As discussed in the methodology section in Chapter 1, I do not have fieldwork interviews of students who held this position, likely because many of the students who advocated for total disconnection would not likely have responded to a researcher they read as being white, and hence would not have responded or been willing to participate in the research

Egyptian, Tibetan, and Islamic philosophy alongside typically “Western” authors.⁷⁰³ Nevertheless, most Fallists were critical of an ‘additive’ approach. Patricia, a student at Wits, for instance, argued that decolonisation was not “simply putting Fanon on the syllabus”.⁷⁰⁴ This was in part because curriculum changes, without broader pedagogical changes, were inadequate. She argued that “Eurocentrically trained, unreformed white professors” could not simply teach Fanon as if it was merely another text while still being “deeply invested in the Eurocentric form of higher education”. Similarly, Mark, a lecturer at UJ, argued that merely adding African texts to readings lists was inadequate because “it’s possible to read African texts from a European perspective”.⁷⁰⁵

Modifying this position, many students emphasised the need for *recentering* the curriculum to prioritise local perspectives and experiences. For Kabelo at Wits, this meant a curriculum that talks to and puts “our own African experience at the centre of the university”. He argued that,

We are not saying that we should not have or draw on the experiences of other societies, but the problem *here* is that *our* experiences are not important.

Interview, Kabelo, 23 March 2017

This too was intertwined with pedagogical questions, particularly in the relationship between teaching staff and knowledge embedded in the curriculum. For Kabelo, for instance, Africanising the curriculum had to entail having “more professors who relate to the students’ experiences”, which in this context effectively meant Black, working class, and female professors.⁷⁰⁶ The relationship between a teacher’s identity and curriculum content, however, was delicate and controversial. Isaac, for instance, warned that reducing the complexities of decolonisation to the identity of teaching staff was a mistake. He argued that while decolonisation required black people at the centre of the project, leading and defining it,

We need to go beyond the narrow idea that all it takes is to have a majority African staff, then you will have decolonised education. It’s not true that only black and African people can decolonise the curriculum. In fact, many remain invested in a conservative politics at the university.

Interview, Isaac, 23 March 2017

⁷⁰³See, for instance, the course PHI2041S: Great Philosophers (2017), which includes Confucius and Ibn Al-Hatham, the Egyptian and Tibetan Books of the Dead, alongside Plato, Augustine, Hume, Locke, J. S. Mill, and Kant. Course Reader in personal possession

⁷⁰⁴Interview, Patricia, 22 March 2017

⁷⁰⁵Interview, Mark, UJ, 17 March 2017. Mark gave the example of UJ philosopher Metz (2007), whose philosophical work, he argued, was effectively a Europeanisation of African thinking. See similarly Dladla (2017) and Praeg (2017a)

⁷⁰⁶Interview, Kabelo, 23 March 2017

Finally, some students advocated for *pluralising* and *entangling* knowledge. Summarising various debates at Wits, Kabelo argued that

we are not saying ‘we should do away with our Western theories’, but they must be *in conversation with* our own knowledge system and African experience.

Interview, Kabelo, 23 March 2017

How this could be accomplished in the academy varied from field to field. At Wits, for example, these discussions in the field of International Relations highlighted creating a “plural curriculum” that taught several historical perspectives alongside one another (Matos-Ala 2018).⁷⁰⁷

Although relatively unusual, several students and academics argued against these pushes for a “mosaic” epistemology (Connell 2016a), critiquing the idea that knowledge formations were *either* Western *or* African. Instead, they pointed to the historical *entanglement* and interactions between knowledge formations, arguing that a decolonised syllabus would be explicit about this historical complexity (Jansen 2017, p. 162). At UJ, for instance, sophisticated critiques of both hegemonic, Eurocentric knowledge formations and alternative ‘essentialised’ models emerged amongst students and workers. One student summarised these critiques by arguing that the purpose of decolonisation “is not to revert to the precolonial period and idolize that situation” and that,

Instead of essentializing African knowledge systems, we should be engaging critically and thinking more of synergies. Instead of seeing the ‘Western’ as something pure and external to us, understanding that we’re also part of that. We have to understand that we are part of the world, part of ‘us’ is out ‘there’

Interview, Aisha, 15 September 2017

Mark, a lecturer at UJ, drew on Biko (1978, p. 95) to argue against introducing a decolonised history that pretended that African knowledge formations were unaffected by colonialism, or advocated for a simplistic “return to the precolonial” with a romanticised resuscitation of what was ostensibly “indigenous”.⁷⁰⁸ Instead, he argued that historical knowledge should be integrated with and speak to the “here and now”, while drawing on sources from precolonial periods through to knowledge emerging from conflict, exchange, and interaction over the last five centuries. Similarly, at Wits, Isaac drew on Said (1983, [1993] 1994, 2000a) to argue against inward-looking critiques of ‘Western’ or ‘Northern’ knowledge, dismissing the idea that “knowledge is produced in discrete geographical spaces”, and rejecting some

⁷⁰⁷Calls for ‘pluralist’ curricula have a long history. Mazrui (1975, pp. 206–7), for instance, argues for decolonised African universities teaching African Political Thought alongside Confucius and Mao, as well as John Locke

⁷⁰⁸Interview, Mark, 17 March 2017

students' insistence that knowledge was only valid if "produced by oppressed people".⁷⁰⁹ Instead, he argued that,

The best knowledge is produced through interaction, engagement. You've got to prioritise knowledge produced in the South... But you can't say that all knowledge produced in the North should be dismissed outright - as if other parts of the world did not contribute to that knowledge that exists in the North, as if it's some kind of exclusive product of Western society.

Interview, Isaac, 23 March 2017

7.2.2 History, Politics, and Economics

The mobilisations enabled students to question crucial gaps in their knowledge, and hence how their existing curricula obscured issues like how history and power relations shape their daily lives, and how social movements had previously challenged these relations. Students thus felt that their existing curricula frustrated their ability to understand the world around them and, even when the formal curriculum supposedly spoke to these issues, the *actual* curriculum was inadequate (McKernan 2008, p. 35).⁷¹⁰ These omissions and suppressions were forms of epistemic injustice insofar as they inhibit collective self-understanding (Fricker 2007), undermining one's sense of historical continuity and dislocating one's own experience from those of one's ancestors. Such lacunae also serve to produce ignorance about the reality of subaltern histories, which in turn suppresses public knowledge of alternative ways of living and alternative social configurations. This artificially limits a collective imagination in terms of how people might change themselves and their societies (Anderson 2016; Fricker 2016; McIntyre 2000). Portraying the world in a one-sided, apolitical way, students argued, training them to fulfil certain social functions, without enabling them to understand how the social conditions that necessitated those functions arose or could change (Barreto 2016, p. 91). They argued that this was not accidental, but was rather a "project" to undermine students' political capacities (Capai 2019).⁷¹¹

For Brazilian students, for example, African and Indigenous history had formally been on the curriculum since the 2000s.⁷¹² However, students felt that inadequate attention was paid to these histories, and that they were taught in a way that disconnected them from the contemporary realities of Brazil.⁷¹³ Almeida and Centeno (2014, p. 72) argue that São Paulo history textbooks offered one-sided explanations where critical perspectives were marginalised, or were incoherent in ways that undermined sustained and consistent

⁷⁰⁹Interview, Isaac, 23 March 2017

⁷¹⁰See Chapter 2 discussion on Conceptual Resources for further elaboration of these terms

⁷¹¹Interview, Carlos, 3 December 2019

⁷¹²The PT had mandated that schools taught the history of Africa and Afro-descendants (Law No. 10.639/2003) and Indigenous Brazilians (Law No. 11.645/2008) in all high schools

⁷¹³Interview, Maria, 5 June 2017

understandings of historical phenomena.⁷¹⁴ Similarly, in Rio, Juliana complained that she was still taught with a racist curriculum claiming that “someone came and ‘discovered’ Brazil”.⁷¹⁵

This was central in Brazilian schools, but resonated in South African universities, particularly for students in programmes outside of the humanities and social sciences.⁷¹⁶ Fallists argued that their curricula were Eurocentric, marginalising or ignoring significant parts of world history, while subjects like economics were taught one-sidedly and ignored local realities (Bam, Zinn, and Ntebeza 2018; Bassier 2016; Chelwa 2015, 2016; Chikte et al. 2016). Students called for the “Africanisation” of the curriculum, centring the experiences of Africans and its diaspora in what knowledge is taught and valued (Masaka 2017; Xaba 2015). During the mobilisations, students hosted lectures, discussions, reading groups, and theatre performances on topics like African history. One of the most notable projects was the Know Your Continent (KYC) series, run by students affiliated to #RMF at UCT. This revitalised a longer-running project with a “Pan-Africanist orientation” which aimed to “highlight the multiple and complex histories of pre-colonial African societies” (Benson, Gamedze, and Koranteng 2018, p. 106). The project drew on radical historiography to develop a curriculum that could link the past to the present and thereby enable participants to make sense of both (ibid., p. 108). In addition, throughout the mobilisations, students sought authors and thinkers who they felt could explain their conjuncture, and whose insights they could draw on to develop their own understanding of their conditions, centring Biko and Fanon. Students in universities had immediate access to a wide pool of relevant resources, and were more easily able to find digital resources in English, such as the ‘conscientisation literature’ Dropbox. Interestingly, prior to 2015, some academics had already attempted to address such concerns. The results were uneven, and whatever forms of knowledge were taught varied significantly across and within institutions. At UWC, for instance, Beverley argued that historians had for decades tried to “Africanise” the history curriculum. In 2015, the history department underwent a review with outside reviewers, one of whom from UCT,

wrote a critique of our curriculum and said it was *too* African, and that we needed more global history, Asian, Indian, European history. We found it ironic that at UCT, their own students were demanding those very things a few months later

Interview, Beverley, 6 April 2017

For many high school students (*secundaristas*) in Brazil, the 2013 *Jornadas* had been the first time they realised people could organise social movements to affect change (Capai

⁷¹⁴Carlos, a student in São Paulo, offered a similar critique of his school’s textbooks. Interview, 29 May 2017

⁷¹⁵Interview, Juliana, 10 August 2017

⁷¹⁶One frustrated lecturer at UCT dryly suggested that most Fallists were “commerce students who had never actually taken humanities courses”. Interview, Gregory, 6 August 2016

2019). During the mobilisations, students thus sought to learn about the histories of grassroots and left movements in Brazil and elsewhere, which had been neglected in their formal curricula. They often did so in conversation with university students and academics, activists in social movements and progressive NGOs. In Rio, for example, Marcia recalled that students hosted “spaces for the reconstruction of history, for example, of feminist movements, black movements”,⁷¹⁷ as well as movements of the traditional left, including anarchists and communists. In these conversations, students learnt about figures such as Carlos Marighella, a leading left-wing opponent of the Military Dictatorship, and oppressive historical figures, such as Brazilian presidents following the 1964 military coup.⁷¹⁸ Students, for instance, invited speakers who had suffered under the Brazilian military dictatorship to share their experiences (Colombini and Alonso 2016, 42m14s). At times, students were interested in longer-term histories, notably colonialism and slavery, and their effects on the present, inviting indigenous activists to speak about struggles against colonisation and continued efforts to reclaim their land.⁷¹⁹ They also focused on more recent history that could shape their political consciousness and horizons of imaginative possibility, such as by watching the ‘Penguin Rebellion’ documentary about Chilean student struggles against neoliberal education since the 2000s (Martins et al. 2016, p. 239). In many of these cases, students wanted to learn about topics that challenged hegemonic understandings of history and social organisation, arguing that school authorities would have prohibited these subjects from being discussed in their ordinary curriculum because they were too radical.

Unlike in South Africa, however, Brazilian students often struggled to access relevant resources. This was partially a language issue, particularly with the relative paucity of digitally accessible work in Portuguese, but also spoke to the lack of resources in Brazilian schools more generally. As Maria explained, in São Paulo, “reading isn’t very encouraged and there aren’t many books because they are super expensive”.⁷²⁰ However, several students nevertheless managed to find, read, share, and discuss a wide body of literature, from Russian revolutionary anarchist Mikhail Bakunin, to Karl Marx, Paulo Freire, and Angela Davis.⁷²¹

During the 2015-16 mobilisations, students attempted to better comprehend reality by trying to understand history, power relations, and previous waves of social movement activity. Students envisioned an education that would enable them to situate their understanding of contemporary society in the context of a complex and contested history, bringing into view the construction of the present and making sense of their own trajectories

⁷¹⁷Interview, Marcia, 10 August 2017

⁷¹⁸Interview, Maria, 5 June 2017

⁷¹⁹Interviews, Francisca, 18 August 2017; Gabriel, 28 August 2017

⁷²⁰Interview, Maria, 5 June 2017

⁷²¹Interviews, Patrícia and Beatriz 28 August 2017; Maria, 5 June 2017

therein. In the process, students tried to make sense of how the past impacted the present, capturing students' interest and connecting their immediate knowledge to a broader picture, enabling them to both see their own experiences in a new light as well as linking new content to what was familiar (Ramogale 2019).⁷²² In this light, students in São Paulo argued that while “it is important to know chemistry and mathematics”,⁷²³

It's also important that we discuss our reality... To discuss criminality and organised crime here. To talk about the favelas – what is a favela? Where does it come from?

Interview, Maria, 5 June 2017

Understanding history helped students make sense of the world around them, including contemporary political and economic conditions and their position therein. This enabled them to ground themselves in their realities, critically reflecting and acting to change those realities (Freire [1970] 2006). In South Africa, for example, Aisha, a student at UJ argued that learning about history and political economy was not “just about *education per se*”, but related to the conditions of the post-2008 global financial crisis, its “extreme nature and impact”, and its long-term effects on social organisation.⁷²⁴

Learning about histories and polities that have been erased or denigrated is important because it opens an epistemic space for those marginalised to contribute to knowledge within that space, and from there to shared human knowledge (Koela 2015; Squires 2002). Particularly at a time when hegemonic forms of social organisation are in crisis, as Aisha highlighted above, it is crucial to learn about alternative ways of living together and structuring society. Whether historical or contemporaneous, these alternatives presented students and workers with the conceptual resources to imagine outside of and beyond the existing, hegemonic configuration, thereby offering them potential pathways to organise towards (Fleuri and Fleuri 2017). With reference to Brazil, for example, Aisha argued that “Indigenous communities have something to teach about spirituality and meaning and space and life”.⁷²⁵ Creating spaces that welcomed and took seriously the contributions of such suppressed knowledge, the mobilisations were thus sites of epistemic justice. Learning about historical struggles also enabled students to form a “historical consciousness” and “consciousness of the future” (Tabensky and Matthews 2015, p. 10).⁷²⁶ This entailed a sense of their own role as agents within historical processes, as discussed in Chapter 6, contributing not only to knowledge production but also the construction and shaping of social reality (Castoriadis 1988; Martins et al. 2012). Students thus revived and referenced historical struggles as part of their own, intertwining the present with past

⁷²²Interview, Carlos, 29 May 2017

⁷²³Interview, Maria, 5 June 2017

⁷²⁴Interview, Aisha, 15 September 2017

⁷²⁵Interview, Aisha, 15 September 2017

⁷²⁶Interview, Carlos, 29 May 2017

(Heffernan and Nieftagodien 2016; Martins 2016; Ray 2016). As a result, unlike many of their experiences in formal educational processes, history became something living and important for students.

According to Júlia, a teacher in Rio, while students tried to learn about the world, they were dismissed by authorities saying things like “oh, these adolescents just want drugs, sex, and rock ‘n roll”.⁷²⁷ During the occupations, however, she “arrived in the library to find two students quietly reading Marx”.⁷²⁸ As one student in Rio argued,

We have to study the past to understand the present and change the future

a gente tinha que estudar o passado para entender o presente e mudar o futuro

Interview, Fernanda, 24 August 2017

7.2.3 Gender, Sexuality, and Feminism

Without necessarily articulating a clear vision of how to structure a new curriculum, students in both the South African and Brazilian mobilisations emphasised that their education needed to centre questions of gender, sexuality, and feminism. Students argued that patriarchal social relations shaped their institutions and, by extension, their curricula, undergirded by a heteronormative masculinity and largely omitting the voices and experiences of women and LGBT+ people (Alegria 2017b, 2018; Bell 2015; Matandela 2017).

To address this, students ran numerous events relating to these themes.⁷²⁹ In Rio, for example, students’ occupations held many debates about gender.⁷³⁰ The content of these debates ranged from “how to make the rest of the occupation listen to what the girls were saying”, to knowledge of one’s own body and health, gendered biases and students’ own self-perceptions, and the ways in which interpersonal relationships were and should be constructed. Importantly, these discussions were often held amongst both men and women, with many students realising how aspects of their own gender, sexuality, or relationships were shaped by patriarchal social norms.⁷³¹ The mobilisations thus served as epistemic communities in which students contributed to one another’s shared knowledge and understanding of the world (Fricker 2016; Okech 2020).

Such discussions enabled students to open new channels towards epistemic justice. In the first instance, ensuring that women’s voices were heard, for instance, facilitated the creation of a “more inclusive hermeneutical micro-climate” designed to overcome the testimonial

⁷²⁷In the memorable words of one student in Capai (2019), “. . . I don’t even like rock ‘n roll”

⁷²⁸Interview, Júlia, 26 August 2017

⁷²⁹It is unclear why, but these were more prevalent and successful in Brazil than in South Africa

⁷³⁰Interview, Marcia, 10 August 2017

⁷³¹Interview, Carol, 8 June 2017

injustice that women tended to experience in having their ideas and perspectives devalued (Fricker 2007, p. 171). Additionally, because students were learning about gendered issues, they were better able to make sense of their own gendered experiences. In São Paulo, for example, one student described how,

The first day we occupied, we had a meeting with a feminist. The boys were shocked because they didn't even know what feminism was, and they were amazed: "wow, I'm totally *machista* (patriarchal)!" I thought that was great.

Quoted in Martins et al. (2016, p. 245)

Additionally, by making explicit and central questions of gender and sexuality, these discussions also made visible much of the unseen labour that ensured the reproduction of institutional spaces (Ahmed 2012; Clark 2018).⁷³² In South Africa, for example, Ayesha Krige illustrated how "unseen labour" involves the work required to arrange transport and prepare food, as well as emotional labour and invisible conditions like time spent in jail (Publica[c]tion Collective 2017, p. 25). In these practices, there was however often a gendered division of labour. White (2017), for example, conveys how the South African mobilisations relied on the labour of black women to sustain itself, and yet how organising could nevertheless exclude black women such that the supposedly-intersectional collectives "cannot imagine you into its existence". Discussing, illustrating, and writing about these issues, as these students did, enabled others to better understand how gendered roles function to shape individuals' experiences, even within ostensibly counter-hegemonic spaces.

At the same time, learning about critiques of hegemonic gendered practices demonstrated the contingency and mutability of gendered norms and enabled students to imagine beyond their past experiences towards alternative possibilities. In numerous instances, students' understandings of gender and sexuality changed as a result of what they had learnt, in theory and practice. By centring and valorising their own experiences and thereby speaking to questions of overcoming oppression, they imagined an alternative education system which prioritised those ordinarily marginalised and disadvantaged in South African and Brazilian society, expanding their "opportunity to live the lives we want and value" (Sen 2000; White 2017). Through the mobilisations, students thus argued for an alternative education system that embedded in its curriculum ways of addressing questions of social difference and oppression, particularly in terms of gender and sexuality. This was, as Carlos argued, "what the school should have provided for our collective life".⁷³³

⁷³²These arguments were developed through the 2018 UCU Pension Strikes at the University of Cambridge and across the UK. See <https://www.facebook.com/events/235840450494950/>

⁷³³Interview, Carlos, 29 May 2017

7.3 Conclusion

This chapter addressed how students reimagined the epistemic components of education, particularly in terms of pedagogy and curriculum, over the course of their mobilisations.

Students' activities enabled them to overcome forms of epistemic injustice and move towards epistemic justice. This is because the kind of educational practices they adopted, demanded and imagined would enable them to comprehend themselves and the world, making sense of their own experiences and the way they were situated in broader social structures. It would also enable them to critique the world around them, challenging injustices and changing how social reproduction functions, while conversely transmitting important and valued intergenerational lessons that would be lost or erased without a just education. Finally, it would enable them to contribute to shared knowledge and thereby guarantee a crucial epistemic component of political agency.

Pedagogically, this was manifested in students' adoption of alternative spaces and forms of learning. In both South Africa and Brazil, students went beyond the typical lecturer-teacher presentation, enhancing one another's comprehension of their institutions and world around them through learning-by-doing activities and educational walking tours, or sharing knowledge through digital platforms and distributed pamphlets and dossiers. In other cases, they expressed themselves and taught one another through cultural activities. These creative forms of pedagogy were ordinarily marginalised from dominant educational practice, but became crucial for spurring students' imaginations. Most importantly, they held regular discussion circles within the mobilisations, encouraging the participation and contribution of all in the learning process. This was a prominent form of dialogical learning that moved away from a hierarchical, technical, expert-oriented model, towards respecting the exchange of knowledge and ideas from across the mobilisations, thereby making space for a more democratic practice of education.

In both contexts, students adopted alternative, collective pedagogical approaches to learning their existing curricula. However, the mobilisations were important sites for raising critiques of the content that students were learning, thereby emphasising the importance of reshaping curricula. In South Africa specifically, this was taken up in the question of decolonising curricula, such that educational institutions resuscitated histories and indigenous knowledge that had been erased through colonialism, critiqued colonial impositions, and, given complex historical interrelations, developed new knowledge formations. Similarly, students argued that their curricula ought to engage with further questions of history and political economy, such that they would be able to understand the power relations that underpinned why and how societies had become structured as they were, and what possible ways these could be changed. Finally, gendered social relations were a significant theme in which students argued that school curricula obscured or reinforced patriarchal relations. Through their own practices and in what students

demanded, they imagined a curriculum that spoke adequately to questions of gender and sexuality, enabling them to make sense of their experiences and have the knowledge to critically reflect on these issues in society.

In many cases, students and workers did this pedagogical and curriculum-based work themselves during the mobilisations. However, the student-worker alliances did this not only *for* themselves and their own experiences of education, but also as part of a broader process of challenging and reshaping educational and social relations. As Beatriz, a student in Rio, argued, “I want my son to have a good education in a public school, with decent quality of teaching”.⁷³⁴ As students thus recognised, educational institutions are key sites of intergenerational social reproduction, as I will return to in the final concluding chapter.

⁷³⁴Interview, Beatriz, 28 August 2017

Chapter 8

Conclusion

In South Africa and Brazil, the wave of student-worker mobilisations over 2015-16 were dramatic in their scale, forms of organisation, and demands. They were the largest student movements in South Africa and Brazil since democratisation in the 1990s, winning several key victories. They generally rejected the commodification of education, its use as a tool of domination, and the alienation that they experienced in educational institutions. The specific issues they critiqued varied depending on institutional circumstances, from continued coloniality and racism to gendered oppression, to prohibitive tuition fees and inadequate accommodation, to school closures, infrastructural underinvestment, and education workers' rights. In place of this, students and workers sought to create new, caring communities, learning from each other and from marginalised histories and narratives. The mobilisations, and particularly occupied spaces, thus became epistemic hubs, where students experimented with new pedagogical strategies and focused on content not ordinarily accessible to them through their formal education. Through their participation in the mobilisations, students and workers developed their understanding of the world around them, reshaping social relations on campuses and more widely. Individually and collectively, students and workers also came to see themselves more as agents of their own histories and authors of their own futures, and shapers of educational institutions that would be well funded, freely accessible, decolonised and democratic. They also operated in a different political space from traditional political cleavages, opening up new debates and becoming successful in part *because* they rejected the existing patterns of political polarisation and expanded the political and educational horizons that had dominated Brazil and South Africa (Grigera et al. 2019, p. 40).

Students and workers secured victories, whether complete or partial, in numerous areas that they had campaigned on. In South Africa, for example, student-worker alliances were able to extract a guarantee of fee freezes for 2016 and a partial concession from the government towards fee-free education in 2017.⁷³⁵ They also secured other victories,

⁷³⁵As several activists noted, the supposedly “fee-free” education promised by then-President Zuma was,

including insourcing workers at numerous universities, as well as having academics across the country committing to and experimenting with decolonising education. In Brazil, São Paulo students had, by 2016, forced the state to back down on school closures and secured its promise that high schools across the state would continue to operate.⁷³⁶ They had also brought significantly more visibility to the ‘Rouba Merenda’ (Stolen Snacks) scandal, demanding accountability and forcing the legislative assembly to create a Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry (CPI) (Agência Estado 2017). In Rio, students’ occupations brought the state to negotiate with student and teachers’ unions, and introduced changes at some institutions in line with their demands, such as elections for school directors. However, over the course of the 2016, they were largely unable to successfully challenge state austerity (Sens 2017).

The mobilisations had their own limitations and issues. The turn towards intimidation and violence, both by the state and institutions and by activists, was a core issue that undermined the capacity of the mobilisations to maintain themselves and to grow. Internal differences along gendered lines and attempts to subordinate women, specifically, undermined much of the trust and cooperation within the mobilisations, also inhibiting their longevity and effectiveness. Finally, broader political changes and party-political partisanship had an important influence on students’ capacities to organise collectively.

Since 2016, the socio-political context in both regions has shifted and diverged.⁷³⁷ In South Africa, the re-election of the ANC has returned Cyril Ramaphosa to the presidency in a victory for the anti-corruption, but still neoliberal, faction of the party (Smith 2018). The country’s macroeconomic and political trajectory has therefore not shifted significantly since before the student mobilisations, continuing an export-oriented, neoliberal growth strategy. Similarly, there have been few major changes in the education sector. As a result, university campuses are still simmering, and ad-hoc protests continue to flare up as universities grapple with the complex set of issues that the student-worker alliances raised. Thus, although students’ demands on issues like decolonisation may not have been fully worked out at the peak of the mobilisations, they have since become enmeshed in university life and are likely to shape institutional agendas in the years ahead. By late 2019, the Fallist mobilisations had receded, riven by infighting and competing personalities, institutional and state co-optation, lingering animosity over unresolved issues around, for instance, gender and patriarchy, and deep divisions over strategic and tactical questions. Moreover, the underlying political-economic conditions, like state neoliberalisation, that gave rise to the mobilisations in the first place remain largely unaltered.

In Brazil, by contrast, the far right has gained significant power since 2016, attempting

however, limited and inadequate to meet the demands of the #FMM movement (Masweneng 2017b)

⁷³⁶Although by 2017, several students described how the state had found individualised, less-visible mechanisms by which to close several high schools in line with their initial intentions

⁷³⁷Discussion, L. Trajber-Waisbich, 15 October 2019

to ideologically control schools through *Escola Sem Partido* - School Without Party (ESP) legislation and criminalise, under terrorism legislation, left-wing mass movements and popular protest.⁷³⁸ Despite the significance of the 2015-16 student mobilisations, their struggles have been overshadowed by a series of subsequent crises and dramatic political convulsions, most notably the 2018 election of Jair Bolsonaro. This marked a significant right-wing shift in Brazilian national politics, albeit challenged by numerous mass counter-protests as the heavily fragmented left attempts to reconstitute itself (Grigera et al. 2019; Mussi and Bianchi 2018). In many cases, activist students such as those in this study have coalesced around these struggles, including those against ESP, as well as joining university-based movements against extensive funding cuts to Higher Education and further mass privatisation of public education.⁷³⁹ In other cases, those *opposed* to the 2015-16 student mobilisations are likely to have affiliated themselves with Bolsonaro. While planning a discussion at a school in Rio, for example, I was warned by student activists of other students who had been part of the *desocupa* counter-movement and now supported Bolsonaro, who had made threats on Facebook to prevent our event from taking place and to shut the discussion down. This suggests that research across social cleavages, and particularly into right-wing organising, is necessary to understand ongoing political dynamics.

8.1 Thesis Summary

In this dissertation, the primary research question was *how is education reimagined and practiced in student-led mobilisations in times of rupture?* This spoke both to the process by which students and workers encountered, experimented with, and envisioned new pedagogical practices, as well as the ways in which students and workers developed or popularised new imaginaries of how education ought to take place, and its position in relation to broader social organisation.

To answer this question, the thesis investigated student-worker mobilisations at universities in two South African cities, Johannesburg and Cape Town, and at high schools in two Brazilian cities, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. These cities were selected primarily because each saw massive student organising during the 2015-16 period, with similar tactics and underlying issues resonating throughout. Because the mobilisations were ongoing, conflictual processes that unfolded over the course of researching and writing the thesis, and themselves called into question the politics of knowledge production, I employed several methodological approaches. Drawing on Participatory Action Research and Freirean pedagogy, I endeavoured to thread students' practices together with relevant

⁷³⁸Under Bill PLS No. 272/2016. See RQJ 41/2018

⁷³⁹See, for instance, Scholars at Risk Network (2019), Scholars for Academic Freedom in Brazil (2019), and Tollefson (2019)

theoretical tools, grounding my arguments in the experiences of students themselves, particularly those ordinarily marginalised. At the same time, the research situates their experiences and discussions in broader historical and global contexts, connecting their experiences to underlying social processes (Gunderson 2013, p. 570; Rutzou 2016, p. 334; Burawoy 1998; Hart 2018, p. 390).⁷⁴⁰

A combination of educational and political-economic history helped situate the context in which students and workers acted from 2015. In both South Africa and Brazil, this demonstrated the intentionally exploitative and hierarchical ways in which education had been historically constructed, the effects of which persist. To understand the mobilisations themselves, I drew on social movement studies, particularly student movement studies, which helped characterise various phases of the mobilisations, from recruitment and rupture to their dynamics over time. This I combined with activist literature, whether Marxist, Anarchist, Feminist, or Anti-racist and Anticolonial, all crucial for making sense of the mobilisations' political priorities, strategies and tactics, and situated decision-making. Engaging with the epistemic life of the mobilisations, several bodies of literature proved helpful. Social movement learning and embodied, social epistemologies emphasise how people collectively produce knowledge that is conditioned by their situated social position. Combining this with existentialist theories of the situated imagination, I argued that mobilisations are spaces conducive for challenging old ideas, sharing new ones, and developing new imaginaries. As such, they can interrupt the production of forms of ignorance while promoting epistemic justice.

8.2 Findings, Contribution and Significance

Informed by this theoretical literature, and based on my field research grounded in a comparative approach between South Africa and Brazil, the dissertation offers crucial insights into researching student mobilisations in the Global South, especially with regards to questions of social reproduction and political change, democratic agency and social relations, and epistemic justice and decolonisation.

8.2.1 Social Reproduction and Change

Historically, students' struggles are both contentious and important because education is a key site of *social reproduction*. As discussed in Chapter 2, societies are continually produced and shaped through collective human activity in ways that may favour particular groups or interests over others (Bhattacharya 2017; Gimenez 2018; Vogel 2013). Early theorists of educational social reproduction, such as Althusser ([1969] 1971) and Gintis

⁷⁴⁰This is not to say that this work is unique in making these connections; many of my interlocutors themselves did this

and Bowles (1981), argued that educational institutions are set up to replenish the workforce and reproduce class divisions, specialisations, and privileges. Particularly in South Africa and Brazil, these processes have been deeply racialised and gendered, as I demonstrated in Chapter 3. Select institutions produce powerful ruling elites, and low-quality mass education produce workers in the service of capitalist accumulation. Schools and universities have therefore contributed towards social stratification and contributed towards intergenerational wealth and privilege hoarding. Significant shifts in the educational landscape, as have happened in both regions since the 1990s, have meant new struggles over the nature, quality, and accessibility of education. As students recognised, institutions themselves have often been torn between the legacies of inegalitarian education and the impetus towards democratisation. While the mobilisations in 2015-16 were not the first student challenges since democratisation, they were a scale shift that raised a significant challenge to both institutional and social organisation. Students' and workers' concerns were grounded in the conditions of their institutions. Nevertheless, by disrupting the ordinary functioning of their educational institutions, the mobilisations shook the core of intergenerational training, socialisation, and transmission of dominant knowledge, thereby challenging the reproduction and maintenance of the socio-political order.

At the same time, the mobilisations were relatively short-lived, and their two-year peak over 2015-16 has not been able to fundamentally shift these broader social dynamics. The student-worker mobilisations have been crucial for revealing the critical role of education as a mechanism of social reproduction in highly unequal and stratified countries, particularly in the Global South. Student movements are therefore specifically important. They reveal and challenge reproductive aspects of how societies are constructed and maintained over time, both by sorting individuals and by producing, normalising, and disseminating particular kinds of knowledge about the world. What students learn, whether through their formal education or through their counter-hegemonic struggles, feeds into how societies more broadly understand themselves and their knowledge of natural and social processes. This is particularly notable in the cases explored in this dissertation, where my research focus was primarily on institutions that are mid- to high-tier in educational hierarchies, such as elite South African universities of Wits and UCT or the elite Brazilian public schools of Fernão Dias or CPII. Over their lifetimes, the students in these institutions are highly likely to have disproportionate influence over social life in both countries. Moreover, as the Global South reshapes and reconfigures geopolitical relations, "emerging powers" like South Africa and Brazil, and subaltern movements therein, may have a significant impact across the planet. If so, then the interests and struggles of grassroots movements from below in these contexts are crucial for understanding the possible directions that may lie ahead globally.

8.2.2 Democracy and Collective Agency

Understanding forms of *self-organisation* within counter-hegemonic mobilisations is crucial for making sense of the ways that movements are evolving in a global context. In South Africa and Brazil, students faced a complex set of historically-produced challenges, from infrastructural underinvestment and authoritarian state school closures, to poorly-paid or outsourced workers, prohibitive tuition fees, alienating institutional cultures and continued institutional coloniality, as I argued in Chapter 3. Recognising the weaknesses of existing organisations, while drawing on historical examples of counter-hegemonic organising, students organised in new ways against the challenges they faced. In doing so, they were able to overcome impasses with existing organisations and connect across multiple ideological and social positions. As I argued in Chapter 4, this resulted in a wide, cross-class and intersectional base of participants in the mobilisations. They were also, crucially, able to forge alliances with workers, predominantly outsourced operations workers in South African universities and underpaid, striking teachers in Brazilian schools. In South Africa, and particularly in Brazil, the mobilisations were primarily oriented from their earliest moments towards autonomous and horizontal forms of self-organisation, as discussed in Chapter 5. Over the course of the mobilisations, this sometimes changed, notably in South Africa where party-political affiliations began to override other affinities over 2016. Nevertheless, in this time, the mobilisations were generally self-organised, with decision-making largely taking place in public assemblies and students taking responsibility for the reproduction of their own spaces. As a result, students learnt crucial lessons about their own agency and capacities. As discussed in Chapter 6, they realised what was required of them to act in the world rather than waiting for a third party to act on their behalf. It also intertwined with students' calls for greater institutional democracy, as a way for them to institutionalise their power and ensure they had decision-making capacities within and over their institutions. Moreover, these forms of self-organisation also reconstituted relationships amongst students, between students and workers, and in some cases between those on educational campuses and wider communities. As I argue in Chapter 6, students and workers tended to work towards developing caring campus communities to overturn hierarchical relations of dominance and replace them with egalitarian and horizontal relations of mutual recognition.

These mobilisations were the most significant student movements since the end of the authoritarian rule in South Africa and Brazil. Taking place under relatively democratic conditions, however, and in the context of nominally left-wing parties in power nationally, their relationship to authority was not merely oppositional but spoke to alternative forms of social and political organisation that went beyond patterns that had become normalised since the 1990s. Indeed, one striking feature of these mobilisations is that they adopted

a complex amalgamation of forms of claim-making.⁷⁴¹ The first kind of claim was for students to demand that authorities fulfil their promises, such as students and workers calling for teachers' salaries to be paid in Rio de Janeiro. This approach did not itself challenge existing political configurations, but was an important for mobilising widely and as a moral claim against existing actors. The second kind of claim was to argue that existing promises were inadequate, and that authorities had to go further than they had already. In South Africa, for example, students demanded their universities hire significantly more black academics. This approach also operated within existing forms of political organisation, but called on institutions to go beyond what they had been willing to do. The third kind of claim was that an authority had gone in the wrong direction, and student-worker alliances demanded a shift towards a different future. São Paulo students' opposition to the state's decision to close schools was the most prominent example of this. This approach was more often directly confrontational and brought countervailing interests into conflict with one another. The fourth kind of claim was that the authority itself had become illegitimate, and modified or new forms of political organisation ought to take its place. Across contexts, student assemblies and occupations exemplified this approach, whether they demanded more representation in existing decision-making structures or whether students wanted to fully replace existing management with their own forms of self-organisation.

This was one of the most radical and significant approaches developed through the 2015-16 student mobilisations. It distinguished them from other student movements under democratic political orders, demonstrating an orientation more akin to anti-colonial, anti-apartheid, and anti-dictatorship movements that saw authorities as inherently illegitimate. In so doing, the student-led mobilisations presented new imaginaries of socio-political organisation and participatory decision-making which could influence future political change in these societies.

8.2.3 Epistemic Justice and Decolonisation

Student movements are focal points of *learning and imaginative activity*. As argued in Chapter 4, mobilisations can rapidly destabilise taken-for-granted assumptions, as well as bring together a range of views that are ordinarily marginalised and generate intensive internal debate. As a result, they not only challenge existing forms of educational organisation, curricula, and pedagogies, but also experiment with and envision new ones. In Brazil and South Africa, students and workers practices and imaginaries of education tended to facilitate three facets of epistemic justice. As discussed in Chapter 7, they enhanced their comprehension of their own circumstances, coming to understand their position and the world around them better. Secondly, it better enabled them to

⁷⁴¹Thanks to L. Trajber-Waisbich and T. Adam for discussions on this

reflect on and critique hegemonic knowledge and forms of social organisation. Finally, particularly by creating alternative pedagogical spaces and adopting dialogical pedagogies, the mobilisations offered a wide range of participants new opportunities to contribute to shared knowledge.

Over and above organising collective learning and critiquing of their existing curricula, students prioritised learning content that was ordinarily absent or marginal. They highlighted themes of gender, sexuality and feminism, black consciousness and decoloniality, indigenous knowledge, history and culture, political economy and power. Embedded in this was a rejection of technical knowledge for purely instrumental ends. Instead, students prioritised these themes because they were relevant to their daily lives and spoke to their experiences of reality. Crucially, since political decolonisation in the mid-20th century, discussions on decolonisation have often remained theoretical in nature. Few have attempted to engage with campaigns demanding decolonisation in the academy. This research is an attempt to understand what epistemic justice and educational decolonisation means in practice from the perspective of those struggling towards it.

These educational practices and imaginaries, however, were only made possible because students and workers were able to rupture the patterns of hegemonic education in their institutions, and create alternative possibilities through their mobilisations and occupations. Practical movement organising and alternative forms of counter-hegemonic knowledge production and exchange are deeply intertwined. Imagining alternative futures is grounded in having the epistemic resources beyond a narrow canon, learning in dialogue with others, and experimenting with different forms of social organisation and self-expression. By removing oneself from ordinary life experience and experimenting with alternatives, students and workers became conscious of possibilities beyond what was given, challenging the standard patterns of knowledge production, recognition, validation, and use. While these have not generated any definitive answers, calls to decolonise education or make it more relevant shift the social basis of knowledge production and transmission, revealing new pathways for human self-knowledge and epistemic justice. Struggles over educational institutions thus speak to fundamental questions about knowledge itself (Sousa Santos 2017). Moreover, the student mobilisations in South Africa and Brazil demonstrate the importance of social movements for enabling space for thinking that “seeks out the hidden cracks in prevailing ideas and conjunctures, anticipates the unexpected, imagines a future vastly different from the present, and examines the potentialities of the present to seek a basis for its realisation” (Nash 2009, p. 210).

8.2.4 Space, Imagination, and Emotion

These mobilisations raise a host of other issues. Prominently, students recurrently identified the role of space in producing a sense of alienation. In South Africa, for instance, Colonial

and Apartheid-era institutions often embodied white supremacist institutional cultures in their architecture, monuments, and artworks, and Historically Black Universities (HBUs) were constructed to facilitate the policing of students. Brazilian schools often resembled prisons, constraining students' movement and regulating their behaviour. Conversely, in liberated spaces during the mobilisations, students could collectively gather and develop new educational practices, forging new identities for themselves and relationships with others. Because the imagination relies on one's existing experiences and knowledge, and because knowledge is grounded in social practices, controlling campus spaces in these ways was able to free students' imaginations.

Another of the most apparent aspects of the mobilisations was their emotionally charged nature. Black pain and the validity of anger became central ways of framing South African students' experiences in their institutions and broader society, and students celebrated the loving relations they developed towards one another while embittered tensions coursed through factional conflicts. In Brazil, students recurrently emphasised how afraid, angry, and frustrated they were, particularly with their school directors, the state, and police - but also how hopeful, excited, overwhelmed and passionate they were about their mobilisations and the relationships they developed with fellow students and teachers. In both contexts, the emotional and relational content of the mobilisations became central channels for students to make sense of and engage with the world around them. Alongside a broader 'Affective turn' in academia, emotions have since the 2000s become a prominent part of discussions of social movements (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001b). The importance of such "passionate politics" in the student mobilisations in South Africa and Brazil suggest that these are indeed central issues for social movements and mass politics more widely.

8.3 Limitations and Further Research

There are four noteworthy limitations of this research which could be addressed through subsequent studies. The first two limitations relate to questions of who is excluded from the study, and the second two are methodological challenges.

While this research adopted methodologies which specifically aimed at inclusion and giving voice to those often silenced in research spaces, I nevertheless privileged certain voices at the expense of others. Trying to represent the views of those who struggled to change the status quo meant that I could not centre the views of students and workers, as well as state and institutional authorities, who *opposed* or actively organised to inhibit the movements (Gillan and Pickerill 2012). Movements are shaped through dialectical interactions with their opponents, because they affect their capacities to mobilise and organise as well as their priorities in doing so, thereby also shaping broader societal configurations and social cleavages (Bernasconi 2010; Sartre [1960] 2004a). Further research into oppositional efforts

to these mobilisations, such as why fellow students, for instance, might oppose a student movement, would make clearer conflictual processes of personal, institutional, and social change.

The second limitation of this research is its epistemic privileging of student mobilisations that took place in urban centres of power. The picture of education in South Africa and Brazil in this research is partial because of the narrow lens which examines only mid to high-tier institutions in urban centres like Cape Town, Rio, São Paulo and Johannesburg, omitting mobilisations in smaller cities, rural areas, and even more marginal institutions (Heffernan and Nieftagodien 2016). The differences between these peripheral cases and more visible mobilisations, such as those discussed in this study, are likely to be significant. Moreover, there are also likely to be numerous important interconnections between core and peripheral mobilisations, only some of which would be visible from the perspective of researching grassroots movements in relatively privileged spaces. The discussions, for example, of cross-campus solidarity in Chapters 4 and 5 would therefore be enhanced with more detailed study from the perspective of relatively more disempowered students and workers.

The third challenge, and perhaps the most serious limitation in this dissertation, is its attempt to understand processes of social change as they unfolded. Because this research and writing took place shortly after the peak of the mobilisations themselves, the analysis has been constrained by the ever-changing political context in which they took place. Moreover, questions of the availability of research materials, availability of students who participated in the mobilisations, and my capacity as a researcher to step back and analyse the complexity of the movements have influenced how the research was shaped. This in turn shapes the conclusions that can be drawn at this stage. One of the main consequences of this is that the longer-term repercussions of these mobilisations cannot be inferred from the immediate experiences during the mobilisations themselves. Further research is therefore important, for example, to better understand the biographical consequences of the student-worker mobilisations on both participants and opponents (Bosi, Giugni, and Uba 2015; Vestergren, Drury, and Chiriac 2017). A range of factors beyond the scope of this thesis shape the likelihood of student activists becoming disenchanted with organising and with revolutionary politics (Barker 2008, p. 80; Zlobina and Vazquez 2017), or whether student mobilisations “pave the way for other movements” (Barker 2008, p. 86). If students and workers continue to organise, whether on campuses or elsewhere, it is likely that the lesson they have learnt from their experiences of 2015-16 will stay with them, and their actions will be shaped by the imaginaries developed over the course of these struggles.

Drawing on the previous point, a fourth limitation which has affected a study of this sort has been the fluidity of some of the key central concepts. Decolonisation in South

Africa, for example, was a central organising principle for the student mobilisations since 2015. However, the concept and its implications for education remain contested and ambiguous. While decolonisation continues to feature prominently on university agendas after several years, debates are no closer to reaching a single definition or programme of change. Ongoing and future work can therefore track the evolution and application of these concepts.

8.4 “Seizing the means of one’s own education”

“Seizing the means of one’s own education” is a critical act in its own right, as students and workers learnt from their own self-organised educational praxis. Doing so also lays the groundwork for subsequent endeavours, where pursuing these paths means learning and teaching together in more egalitarian ways. Crucially, this entails critical reflection on existing reality, including existing forms of social organisation and mobilisation. Such critique and cooperative dialogue would enable collective imagination beyond the present, towards a future free from existing injustices. To bridge from contemporary reality to such future imaginaries requires collective, creative attempts to reshape the modes, forms, content, and purposes of our own education, who it serves and why it serves them. Ultimately, this draws out the central question of how education, and by extension society, could be built differently. As the student-worker mobilisations in South Africa and Brazil over 2015-16 demonstrate, developing and realising visions of how we learn, teach, and live freely requires collective reflection and practice.

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Appendix A

Educational Institutions in this Study

Table A.1: Institutions in South Africa

City	Institution Name	Short Name
Cape Town	University of Cape Town	UCT
	University of the Western Cape	UWC
Johannesburg	University of the Witwatersrand	Wits
	University of Johannesburg	UJ

Table A.2: Institutions in Brazil

City	Institution Name	Short Name	Location
Rio de Janeiro	Instituto Superior de Educação do RJ	ISERJ	Maracanã
	CE Amaro Cavalcanti	Amaro	Catete
	CE Prefeito Mendes de Moraes	Mendes	Ilha do Governador
	ETE Adolpho Bloch (FAETEC)	Adolpho	São Cristóvão
	Colégio Pedro II	CPII	Multiple Campuses
	CE Euclides da Cunha	Euclides	Teresópolis
São Paulo	EE Diadema	Diadema	Diadema
	EE Fernão Dias Paes	Fernão	Pinheiros
	EE João Amós Comenius	Comenius	Vila Santa Catarina
	EE Maria Elena Colonia	Maria Elena	Mauá
	EE José Lins Do Rego	José	Jardim das Flores
	Escola Nacional Florestan Fernandes	ENFF	Guararema

Appendix B

Interviewees

Table B.1: Interviewees

Pseudonym	Institution	City	Role	Pseudonym	Institution	City	Role
Júlia	Amaro	RJ	Teacher	Annika	UCT	CT	Student
Fernanda	CPII	RJ	Student	Lubanzi	UCT	CT	Student
Juliana	CPII	RJ	Student	Paballo	UCT	CT	Student
Marcia	CPII	RJ	Student	Jacob	UWC	CT	Student
Gabriel	Euclides	RJ	Teacher	Beverley	UWC	CT	Academic
João	Euclides	RJ	Teacher	Leonard	UWC	CT	Academic
Beatriz	Euclides	RJ	Student	Lynette	UWC	CT	Academic
Patrícia	Euclides	RJ	Student	Aisha	UJ	JB	Student
Antonia	ISERJ	RJ	Teacher	Mark	UJ	JB	Academic
Larissa	ISERJ	RJ	Teacher	Lesedi	Wits	JB	Student
Antonio	ISERJ	RJ	Student	Mary	Wits	JB	Student
Fransisco	ISERJ	RJ	Student	Patricia	Wits	JB	Student
Paulo	ISERJ	RJ	Student	Tasneem	Wits	JB	Student
Francisca	Mendes	RJ	Teacher	Thandolwethu	Wits	JB	Student
Gabriela	Mendes	RJ	Student	Bandile	Wits	JB	Academic
Lucas	Mendes	RJ	Student	Grace	Wits	JB	Academic
Luiz	Mendes	RJ	Student	Isaac	Wits	JB	Academic
Marcos	Mendes	RJ	Student	Lindiwe	Wits	JB	Academic
Pedro	Mendes	RJ	Student	William	Wits	JB	Academic
Adriana	USP	RJ	Student				
José	Various	RJ	Teacher				
Matheus	Diadema	SP	Teacher				
Carol	Diadema	SP	Student				
Luis	Diadema	SP	Student				
Aline	Fernão	SP	Student				
Ana	Fernão	SP	Student				
Maria	Comenius	SP	Student				
Carlos	Maria Elena	SP	Student				
Felipe	Various	SP	Teacher				

Appendix C

Public Social Media Accounts

Table C.1: Social Media Accounts in Brazil

Zone	Name	URL
BR	O Mal Educado	https://fb.com/mal.educado.sp
	Não fechem minha escola	https://fb.com/naofecheminhaescola
	Grupo Autônomo Secundarista	https://is.gd/exltzi
	Frente Libertária Estudantil	https://fb.com/frentelibertariaestudantil/
	Movimento Autônomo Pela Edu.	https://is.gd/2GMQD0
	Escolas ocupadas BR	https://fb.com/0cupaTudoBrEo/
	Educadores em Luta	https://fb.com/educadoresemluta.pco/
	Escola Sem Mordação	https://fb.com/frenteescolasemmordaca/
	Escola Sem Empresa	https://fb.com/escolasemempresa/
	Canal Secundarista	https://fb.com/canalsecundarista/
	Comitê de Mães e Pais em Luta	https://is.gd/tH2UG1
Corrente Estud. Classista	https://is.gd/OYwRY7/	
SP	Secundaristas em Luta de São Paulo	https://fb.com/luta.secundas/
	Eu apoio as escolas ocupadas em SP	https://is.gd/1nmPpY
	Ocupa E. E. Diadema	https://is.gd/LxhH00/
	Escola de Luta Fernão Dias Paes	https://fb.com/0cupaFerna0/
RJ	Escolas do RJ em Luta	https://fb.com/EscolasRJemLuta/
	Edu. Munic. e Estad. em GREVE	https://fb.com/educacaoopublicadoRJ/
	Ocupa ISERJ	https://fb.com/ocupaiserj/
	Mendes em Luta	https://fb.com/0cupaMendes/
	CP2 Revolucionário	https://fb.com/revolucaocp2/
	Ocupa MinC RJ	https://fb.com/0cupaMincRJ/
	OCUPA CP2 CENTRO	https://fb.com/ocupacp2centro/
	OCUPA CPII REAL	https://fb.com/ocupacp2real/
	OCUPA CPII Tijuca	https://fb.com/ocupacp2tijuca/
Ocupa CPII Nit: A luta continua	https://fb.com/0cupaCpIINit/	

Table C.2: Social Media Accounts in South Africa

Zone	Name	URL
SA	Pathways to Free Education	https://fb.com/pathways2freeeducation/
	OutsourcingMustFall	https://is.gd/UN1P7H
	Trans University Forum	https://fb.com/transuniversityforum/
JHB	Wits Fees Must Fall	https://fb.com/FeesMustFallJoburg/ https://twitter.com/WitsFMF
	Wits Workers Solidarity Committee	https://fb.com/WITSWSC/
	UJ FeesMustFall (UJFMF)	https://fb.com/ujfms/ https://twitter.com/ujfmf
	FeesMustFall UJ	https://fb.com/FWFUJ/
	Fees Must Fall Western Cape	https://fb.com/FeesMustFallWC https://twitter.com/FeesMustFallWC
	WC Students & Parents #FeesMustFall	https://is.gd/Y6ATPS
	UCT Rhodes Must Fall	https://fb.com/RhodesMustFall/ https://twitter.com/rhodesmustfall
	UCT FeesMustFall	https://twitter.com/UCTFeesMustFall
CPT	UCT Disrupting Whiteness	https://fb.com/DisruptingWhitenessUCT/
	UCT: #PatriarchyMustFall	https://is.gd/HZDMJj
	UCT Left Students' Forum	https://fb.com/UCTLSF/
	UWC Fees WILL Fall	https://is.gd/p9tSzB
	CPUT FeesMustFall	https://is.gd/5mcygc