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Article

Teaching Gender and Sexuality in the Wake of the Must Fall Movements: Mutual Disruption through the Lens of Critical Pedagogy

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Abstract

The recent Must Fall movements shone a light on how South African universities are exclusionary spaces in many respects. In addition to the focus on racial, financial, and epistemological exclusions, the movements also highlighted how gender and sexual minorities are marginalised in university curricula and spaces. In the wake of these movements, I taught a range of courses dealing with gender and sexuality to pre-service teachers at a South African university. Using an autoethnographic approach, I recount some of the challenges I faced in teaching subject matter that many South Africans consider controversial. Students often relied on simplistic discourses of culture and religion to voice resistance to my courses and to "disrupt" my classes, while the subject matter simultaneously disrupted their deeply held concepts of identity. These moments of disruption from students, while largely intended as resistance, offered considerable pedagogical value, especially when viewed through the lens of critical pedagogy that informs my teaching approach. In this article, I use autoethnographic reflections to describe some of these moments of mutual disruption. I examine how the discussions with students have shifted after the Must Fall movements, linking the philosophy and some of the events of the movements to the ways that students are engaging differently. I argue that these pre-service teachers also hold the potential to disrupt discourses of queerphobia, gender-based violence and HIV in the South African school system. Additionally, I contend that gender and sexuality diversity deserve greater focus in teacher education in order to create critical thinking spaces that can foster reflective capacities in teachers around how they relate to learners who are gender and sexual minorities.

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Keywords: gender and sexuality education; queer studies; pre-service teacher training; critical pedagogy; pedagogy of discomfort; disruption in education

Introduction

Many South African scholars have highlighted the importance of teacher training in gender and sexuality (Bhana et al. 2010; Francis 2010; Morrell 2003), and have argued that this could impact homophobia, transphobia, HIV/ AIDS, gender-based violence and related societal issues in the school context (Bhana 2012; Francis 2010; Francis and Msibi 2011). However, social, religious and cultural factors in South Africa make discussions of gender and sexuality particularly challenging, and many teachers resist grappling with gender and sexuality diversity as they frequently cite "tradition" or "culture" (DePalma and Francis 2014) as being inherently opposed to these topics. In this article, I use an autoethnographic approach to discuss my experiences while delivering a range of courses and presentations, each discussing aspects of gender and sexuality, to pre-service teachers at a major South African university. Students frequently resisted lessons in these courses through various methods of "disruption". These disruptions included trying to derail class discussions, questioning the reasons for discussing gender and sexuality, appeals to culture and religion, and expressions of anger, laughter, or leaving the lecture halls mid-discussion. In turn, I understood these courses as "disrupting" students, challenging them to reconsider expressions of gender and sexuality that they saw as taboo or offensive. I argue that the nature of these disruptions has changed after the recent Must Fall movements in South Africa, which brought gender and sexual diversity into national conversations of decolonisation, equality and social progressivism.

This article first provides a brief history and clarifies certain philosophical underpinnings of the Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall movements, particularly outlining the ways that gender and sexuality were significant factors in these movements. I discuss the theoretical framework used to analyse the autoethnographic data in this article, including critical pedagogy, a pedagogy of discomfort and the importance of disruption in educational settings. I then present autoethnographic reflections of moments of disruption while teaching these courses. I argue that these moments of disruption adopted a new character in the wake of the Must Fall movements, becoming productive elements for pedagogy around sensitive topics.

I locate these changes as influenced by two factors: first, due to social changes, students who are gender and sexual minorities or allies now openly contest those who attempt to obstruct or resist lessons on gender and sexuality; and second, gender and sexuality have become part of the social justice agenda in South Africa in a tangible way, and this status creates different dynamics in educational settings including heightened self-consciousness and tentativeness among students who voice queerphobic or misogynistic views. While the frequency of student resistance has not changed, the changing nature of these resistances allows for more thoughtful, nuanced and personal debates to

emerge, including changes to the style of student engagement in both the lecture setting and in one-on-one consultations.

The Must Fall Movements and Changing University Spaces

University spaces in South Africa have become arenas for heated social and political debates over the past few years, especially concerning decolonisation. Many of the largest and most prestigious universities in the country have distinctly colonial and racist histories that cause tensions in a country still grappling with the many social and economic injustices that linger decades after the end of formal apartheid. The symbolic and real violence committed on university campuses in South Africa against marginalised people is an enduring legacy, even as university managers publicly commit to the project of institutional transformation.

The symbolic violence is a large part of what students were protesting in the recent #MustFall movements, seeking to decolonise universities in many different ways. The first of these movements was the #RhodesMustFall (RMF) movement, which started at the University of Cape Town (UCT). Students began a series of protests against relics from colonial, Eurocentric ideologies that were foundational to many universities in the country. This was physically represented by the statue of Cecil John Rhodes, which stood at the foot of the Jameson stairs at UCT, and students were calling for this statue to fall as a symbolic and impactful step towards decolonising the university space. Additionally, many campuses had seen pressures to lower student fees, as capable students were being financially excluded due to the high cost of higher education and fee increases, at times in excess of 10% per year.[1]

These various tensions allowed for the #RhodesMustFall movement to ignite a spirit of protest across all major South African universities. When the statue of Rhodes finally fell in April 2015, it signalled the power that students had to change university spaces; it demonstrated their critical approach to education and their resistance to the coloniality and inequality inherent in the institutions of higher learning in South Africa, and it brought a clarity of purpose among students to hold government and institutions accountable for the continued exclusion, violence and marginalisation in university spaces.

The resultant movements collectively became known as Fallism, popularly centred around the #FeesMustFall (FMF) philosophy that, as outlined in the country's Constitution (RSA 1996, Section 29), education should be a right and not a privilege, and no person should be excluded.[2] Students called for an immediate end to tuition

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1 For a detailed look at some of the early RMF philosophies, see *The Johannesburg Salon, Volume Nine* (Rhodes Must Fall, Writing and Education Subcommittees 2015).

2 It is important to note that the philosophy of Fallism is contested, and that many students who were involved in the protests that started in 2015 would not identify with this term. See Naidoo (2016) for more about the complexities of the student movements and the philosophy of Fallism.

hikes, and held that public education should be tuition-free for all students. Additionally, students refocused the discussions around decolonising education by calling for the Africanisation of curricula, for Eurocentrism to be expelled and for more black academics, particularly professors, to be employed at universities.

The Must Fall Movements' Focus on Gender and Sexuality

The Must Fall movements opened the door for many other concerns around higher education to be addressed. There was a particular focus on gender, sexuality and issues of sexual violence such as the End Rape Culture protests and dialogues. The mission statement of RMF emphasised the role of intersectionality in the movement, powerfully showing how the role of "race" could not be divorced from other identity markers that are marginalised or oppressed. The mission statement reads:

> An intersectional approach to our blackness takes into account that we are not only defined by our blackness, but that some of us are also defined by our gender, our sexuality, our ablebodiedness, our mental health, and our class, among other things. We all have certain oppressions and certain privileges and this must inform our organising so that we do not silence groups among us, and so that no one should have to choose between their struggles. (UCT: Rhodes Must Fall 2015)

Khadija Khan stresses that "Black queer womxn and nonbinary people constituted leadership within both [the RMF and FMF] movements, contrary to many existing articles and narratives, and were actively addressing and resisting the country's historically androcentric and heteronormative social activism environment" (2017, 112). Prominent activist and academic Zethu Matebeni speaks about how queer issues were central and intertwined with the origins of the student movements (Davids and Matebeni 2017). Matebeni was present at the early conversations that students had about the Rhodes Must Fall movement at UCT, when students occupied the Bremner administration building and renamed it Azania House, and she notes how questions of identity were crucial to defining the purpose of the movements. She says in an interview with Nadia Davids:

> Many of [the students] were talking about how to see themselves as gay students, as queer students on campus […W]hen students got together it was very clear that they had a lot of things that they were dealing with: coming out issues, reconciling their sexuality, their gender identities with being African, with being at UCT. (Davids and Matebeni 2017, 166)

However, discussions around and within the Must Fall movements have been accused of erasing and sidelining queer voices. Davids explains that there is a "long history of sacrificing [conversations of gender and sexuality] on the altar of what the greater struggle objectives are" (Davids and Matebeni 2017, 166). The sense of hope around how gender and sexuality were prominently considered at the start of the Must Fall movements was arguably misplaced, as queer students began to realise that they were being excluded from conversations and efforts to historicise the movements. At UCT in

2016, the Trans Collective, a group of students representing trans, non-binary, nonconforming and intersex communities, a large contingent of early Rhodes Must Fall activism, disrupted an exhibition by RMF activists titled "Echoing Voices from Within". The Trans Collective protesters claimed that their voices were being erased from the RMF retrospectives, and that the broader movement should be "accountable to its commitment to intersectionality" instead of erasing or misrepresenting trans participation and leadership in RMF. A placard at the protest read: "The Trans people who built RMF are not a part of this exhibition" (Petersen 2016).



Figure 1: A sign at a Rhodes Must Fall protest, which was made by activist Kumkani Sivu Siwisa and popularised at the removal of the Rhodes statue (Mupotsa 2016, 54). Reproduced with kind permission, ⓒ Sydelle Willow Smith

Ndelu, Dlakavu, and Boswell (2017) note how "sexism, heterosexism, homophobia and transphobia have emerged as characteristics that marred these movements, albeit unevenly, across various institutions. Cleavages emerged between students who identified as Black, queer and transgender feminists and sections of the movement who identified more explicitly with patriarchy" (2017, 2). This also led to queer members of the RMF movement declaring in early 2016 that the new Azania House at UCT (previously Avenue Hall) would be "declared a black trans womxn, cis womxn and non binary people's space" (UCT: Rhodes Must Fall 2016).

The tensions around queer issues within student movements are highlighted in a post on the social media site Facebook by RMF protesters. These students express that their

"voices were stifled by overbearing misogynistic cis men who have repeatedly been called to check and reflect on the patriarchy they exhibit in the space. Attempts at challenging the patriarchy of RMF are reduced to [a] 'derailing tactic' or a matter to be 'dealt with later', to a time that will never arrive" (UCT: Rhodes Must Fall 2016). The silencing of queer voices, especially when these had been central to the formation of the movements, exposed a sense of unease around queer issues that persists within university spaces in South Africa. The idea that queer activists were "disrupting" the Must Fall movements, even when they were central to the formation of these movements, demonstrates the ambivalent nature of queer issues in the decolonial and Fallist movements, and these conflicts are still apparent in terms of pedagogy at universities.

Pedagogy at a School of Education

In the wake of the student movements, after free higher education had been promised by the country's ex-president, Jacob Zuma, and adopted as policy by the ruling African National Congress party, university campuses have become spaces of lingering trauma and anxious renegotiation of a new normal. I began working at the start of 2018 as a lecturer at a school of education that had seen a great deal of violence, hostility and anger. Students were clearly still reeling from the events of the past few years. Many seemed uncertain of how to continue with their studies when they were disrupted to such a great degree by ongoing protests, either through their own involvement, which often led to their studies suffering, or through the involvement of others with whom they shared lecture halls, dormitories and computer labs, and who had occupied spaces, torn up exam papers or blocked access ways to university campuses. To many students, these were necessary steps towards their goals. To others, resentment still lingered, and tensions persisted.

Staff, too, bore the weight of what they had been through, confiding in me about times they had to lock themselves in their offices fearing violence, telling me how to find alternative exit routes from campus in case of protests, letting me know that WhatsApp groups would be our means of communication if we noticed any major disruptions. There was still a sense that students should be mobilised, and indeed there were still chants heard in the hallways from groups, but there seemed to be much less drive and purpose, and neither staff nor students seemed to really know how they should exist in the university space after the Must Fall movements began slowing down[3] and arguably reached their end.

[3] It must be acknowledged that these changes in the student movements might have also been a result of the large-scale securitisation of university campuses, and the violent tactics of these security forces against students, including reports of gendered violence against female and queer activists during the protests. Kylie Thomas notes that "[w]omen and LGBTQI people were particularly vulnerable to the violence of the police and private security guards and several students recounted being groped and assaulted during the protests" (2018, 108).

The impact of the movements was also felt in terms of pedagogy. I was teaching as part of a language, literacy and literature team, so postcolonial theory, gender theory and ideas of power, intersectionality and access were already central to our work as with many working in these fields at South African higher education institutions. However, we began to think differently about how these topics are taught. One of my colleagues, who had taught a course on Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* for many years, faced a moment of "disruption" in one of her lectures—a student stood up, visibly shaken, and argued that even reading a text like Conrad's was a form of colonial violence and was representing blackness in ways that retraumatised students. My colleague was given pause and had to reassess the pedagogical value and the forms of violence inherent in teaching the novel in South Africa today.

I noticed that many of my colleagues had come to expect a greater deal of engagement from students, particularly around issues of "race". Campuses had become more politicised, and pedagogical methods and curricula were becoming points of meta-discussions with students, even during lectures as course content was being delivered. This context is creating powerful new terrain for transforming curricula and for greater input by students towards reshaping higher education. Within a school of education like the one where I teach, it also created the potential for major social impacts as many of our students would go on to teach in schools and be able to, potentially, look differently at school curricula and consider reshaping basic education to be more inclusive. These students could be agents of decolonisation within schools when they qualify as teachers.

However, as with the FMF movements, there was resistance to intersectionality in these conversations. While many of the students I worked with seemed to have a much greater understanding of gender identity and sexuality diversity, and while a progressive mood dominated in these conversations, discussions of sexuality often led to students disrupting my lectures and voicing their opposition to exploring issues affecting gender and sexual minorities. There was a broad focus on the decolonial project in the way that students engaged within lectures, but they often resisted any links between decolonisation and discussions of gender and sexuality diversity.

In the following section, I outline my theoretical perspective in understanding the moments of disruption that I experienced while teaching courses on gender and sexuality. I frame these moments of disruption through the theoretical lens of Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy (2005) and through a pedagogy of discomfort. I also briefly examine some of the work done on gender and sexuality education in South Africa in order to demonstrate why I see these disruptions as productive in the current South African setting and as offering the space for social change, particularly in the context of working with pre-service teachers. Some uses of the concept "disruption" in gender and sexuality education are also explored to frame disruptions as assets in pedagogy.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework: Autoethnography, Critical Pedagogy and a Pedagogy of Discomfort

This article uses the method of autoethnography (Schmid 2019), and analyses the autoethnographic reflections using two theories of education, namely critical pedagogy (Freire 2005) and a pedagogy of discomfort (Boler 1999; Zembylas and McGlynn 2012). Autoethnography is a method of qualitative social science research that "allows [the researcher] to translate … (self)discoveries into an academic framework, and permits [the researcher] to unashamedly connect the personal and professional" (Schmid 2019, 265). Jeanette Schmid (2019) adds that autoethnography is a method that allows for often marginalised or unheard voices to be heard in academic discourse, explaining that it "is a potential gateway for those with subordinated, subjugated identities to have voice and to express unheard, silenced, perhaps taboo-ised stories" (265). For this reason, it is important for the researcher using autoethnographic research to be reflexive about how their own identity might impact on their research, and how the narratives that they present in autoethnographic reflection could be shaped by whom they are (266). Schmid explains that autoethnography "uses the individual reflexive narrative to creatively highlight undisclosed, untold and potentially subversive texts. It is a deeply personal research approach, linking identity and culture, as well as the individual and social" (266).

I am an early career researcher and lecturer at a school of education in South Africa. I am a gay, Coloured[4] man who was raised in a working-class community in the Western Cape, who has often experienced homophobia and racism in the various personal, educational and professional settings that I move in. I am committed to social justice, and I have worked for years with LGBTQ+ organisations. Thus, issues of gender and sexuality are deeply personal to me, and have been central to my research focus as well. I acknowledge that my identity and my past experiences might impact the way that I present and interpret the autoethnographic narratives in this article, and simultaneously I see this as a strength of my research in this article, as it is a part of how autoethnography "facilitates inclusion and allows for multiple voice(s) and knowledge(s) and thus adds to our collective, multifaceted understanding of South Africa" (Schmid 2019, 266). My hope is that these reflections offer useful insights for other educators[5] who discuss gender and sexuality in their classrooms, and that it can add to the knowledge around current perspectives on teacher training on these topics.

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4 The term Coloured is a broad and contested racial category codified during apartheid, and mostly used to describe those who are "mixed race" or who have indigenous South African (Khoisan) or Cape Malay heritage. The term still has wide currency in South Africa today (Andrews 2018, 37).

5 I use the term "educator" in this article to collectively refer to those providing instruction in educational settings, namely lecturers, school teachers and other teaching staff at basic and higher education institutions.

In reflecting on the autoethnographic data that I present in this article, I use Paulo Freire's theory of critical pedagogy (2005), which is the approach I take in order to challenge students to consider social structures of marginalisation and exclusion in terms of gender and sexuality. Donaldo Macedo, in his introduction to the revised edition of Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2005), explains that he negotiated "a colonial existence that is almost culturally schizophrenic: being present and yet not visible, being visible and yet not present" (2005, 11). In addressing social transformation, Freire highlights that both those who oppress and those who are oppressed in societies need to transform, and that education is a central site of this transformation. He insists that the "banking model" (2005, 71) of education, where the educator is merely depositing information into students as receptacles of knowledge, is incompatible with this social transformation; rather, "[the educator's] efforts must coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization. His efforts must be imbued with a profound trust in people and their creative power. To achieve this, they must be partners of the students in their relations with them" (2005, 75). This type of pedagogy decentres the role of the educator, placing them as equal agents in the collaborative educational process where students hold power to dialogically negotiate learning in the educational environment.

This type of pedagogy disrupts traditional models of teaching and calls for deep levels of engagement from students and educators. Freire emphasises that critical pedagogy invites students to engage creatively and humanistically with structures of power and oppression; this would not be an easy process as "the very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped" (2005, 45). In other words, those who have relative power in certain contexts would be resistant to critically analysing that power as this would threaten their positions, and those who are oppressed "adopt an attitude of 'adhesion' to the oppressor" (45) as they are subsumed within ideologies that reproduce their oppression.

While Freire originally conceived of these dynamics in relation to class and racial oppression, the framework can be applied to dominant ideologies of heterosexism, misogyny and queerphobia that stifle critical engagement around gender and sexuality. Members of gender and sexual minority communities encounter a multitude of social oppressions, including violence and stigma in South African educational settings as well as pervasive heteronormativity in school settings (Francis 2017). These factors make gender and sexuality suitable topics for critical pedagogy where these normative ideologies can be challenged and the oppressions they reproduce can be dismantled.

In challenging dominant and oppressive systems, strong emotions often arise that must be recognised in the practice of critical pedagogy (Zembylas 2013). Michalinos Zembylas specifically refers to post-traumatic cultural moments, like South Africa after apartheid, as spaces where "troubled knowledge" (Jansen 2009), or knowledge that reproduces oppressive systems, is not easily engaged in educational spaces. Zembylas argues that traditional views of critical pedagogy must be nuanced by a focus on emotion

and require "new ideas on how affect and emotion might be harnessed by teachers to deal with troubled knowledge" (2013, 177). Megan Boler (1999) argues for a pedagogy of discomfort, where emotions are constructively engaged within educational spaces, and where "educators and students ... engage in critical inquiry regarding values and cherished beliefs, and ... examine constructed self-images in relation to how one has learned to perceive others" (1999, 176–77). A pedagogy of discomfort

> emphasises the need for educators and students alike to move outside their "comfort zones". Pedagogically, this approach assumes that discomforting emotions play a constitutive role in challenging dominant beliefs, social habits and normative practices that sustain social inequities and in creating possibilities for individual and social transformation. (Zembylas and McGlynn 2012, 41)

A pedagogy of discomfort could be useful in teaching about gender and sexuality diversity, especially in the South African context where these topics often elicit strong emotional reactions (Reygan and Francis 2015). Zembylas (2008) conceptualises emotions as "performances that produce action within the context of particular social and political arrangements" (2008, 3); this understanding of emotions is particularly relevant for this study, as the way that students expressed themselves in relation to gender and sexuality education could be seen as linked to dominant ideologies that oppress queer and gender-nonconforming people. Finn Reygan and Dennis Francis found in their study on South African teachers that "teachers deny their own emotional responses to issues about sexual and gender diversity" (2015, 106), and noted that the participants in their study "struggled with their own biases, emotions, discomfort and disapproval of LGBTI identities in an unreflexive and ultimately pedagogically ineffective manner" (106), leading to poorer engagement with these issues in their own classrooms at schools. In bringing these topics to the fore for pre-service teachers, I aimed to disrupt these dynamics and to potentially transform oppressive ideas of gender and sexuality that teachers perpetuate in classrooms. In my experiences with students' "disruptions" described in the next section of this article, I found that many students expressed these strong emotions and sought to stifle discussions of gender and sexuality diversity when heterosexist, cisnormative and patriarchal ideologies were critically interrogated in classes.

Zembylas notes that pedagogies of discomfort involve the disruption of "received (taken-for-granted) knowledge that perpetuates reductive binaries between perpetrators and victims and black-and-white solutions" (Zembylas 2013, 187). The educator disrupts dominant ideologies that stifle critical thinking concerning oppression and marginalisation. Disruption, thus, is a part of the process of critical pedagogy and a pedagogy of discomfort, specifically on the part of the educator, and the strength of emotional reactions also entails that students or learners might be likely to "disrupt" or resist ideas within teaching environments.

In addition to the definition of disruption from critical pedagogy, namely of challenging deeply held beliefs of students, the concept of disruption also takes on significance in

the South African setting. Shepherd Mpofu offers a definition of disruption with a "positive twist" (2017, 358) in the South African setting that is useful for this discussion. Mpofu argues that disruption, through challenging power structures or the status quo, is a valid form of communication in a country marked by continued oppression in multiple ways (2017, 359). Disruption, Mpofu notes, "guarantees the poor of an audience with the powerful elite running important institutions in society" (354). Disruption becomes a way for those with relatively less power to assert their voices and views, a type of "resistance and defensiveness" (Sonn 2008, 164), which is often argued to be deeply tied to the work of a pedagogy of discomfort. Additionally, disruption has been viewed by gender and sexuality scholars like Deevia Bhana (2015) as a way of calling into question cultural and social norms that are stifling to oppressed groups or that silence their realities.

In this article, the term disruption will be used to describe actions and processes involving both educator and students. First, disruption refers to the ways that I was able to challenge the deeply held ideologies of students through teaching about gender and sexuality diversity. Second, the term is used for the ways in which students were able to challenge my classes, sometimes in how they aimed to derail discussions through acts of resistance or disagreement, but also how they were able to voice their discomfort with the ideas discussed in ways that were ultimately productive in the current South African climate.

These mutual disruptions were important in my teaching about gender and sexuality. In the autoethnographic reflections outlined below, I show how students' attempts to disrupt discussions of gender and sexuality became moments of deep critical engagement by these students and their peers, and opened the space for shifts in classroom dynamics that allowed students to become more personally invested in these discussions of gender and sexuality. I show how these disruptions and the reactions to them are markedly different from even a few years ago; disruptions that had once been coloured by unflinching homophobia and assertions of restrictive gender norms now became much more tentative, and other students were less apprehensive about engaging in conversations after these disruptions took place, even challenging the students who sought to silence critical conversations of gender and sexual identities and norms.

Moments of Disruption

I taught courses on gender and sexuality diversity at two other universities while the RMF and FMF movements were ongoing. I noticed certain patterns with these courses: male students would often stop attending, or would generally be disengaged during classes. At times, students would visibly be annoyed or antagonistic during lectures. In one lecture, a student rolled her eyes at me, shook her head animatedly and spoke loudly to her classmate sitting next to her, clearly trying to rally support from the uncomfortable looking peer who avoided her gaze and pretended not to hear her. I became flustered when she continued showing her anger through fidgeting and speaking even more loudly to her classmate. I asked her if there was a problem, and she laughed

out loud, clearly excited that she elicited a reaction. In another class, I showed a short film to students about men who challenged gender stereotypes, and at the image of a male in the video wearing a dress, one of the students began to laugh loudly and incessantly, seemingly unfazed that her laughter was louder than the video being screened. I asked her why she was having such a strong reaction, and she refused to answer me, still barely suppressing her laughter.

Another time, during a lecture on sexuality diversity and gay marriage laws in South Africa, a male student stood up during my lecture, and loudly announced from his seat at the back that his religion did not agree with what I was teaching. There were times when I would engage with this line of discussion and give students the space to voice their discomfort respectfully; since religion and culture were such common points raised by students, I sometimes felt that they should be put on the table and considered openly. But the way that this student had stood up to deliver his message, his visible outrage, let me know that this was not one of those times. I told him that my class was about the realities of South Africa, that we took an approach of respecting human rights and academic inquiry, and that we could not allow personal religious convictions to prevent open discussion during class time. The student stopped attending my class.

I had similar disruptions in other classes, and conversations with my colleagues revealed that they had had similar experiences in almost every class they had taught where they had discussed gender roles or sexuality: female students would show their discomfort through their nonverbal expressions of resistance, and male students would feel the need to speak up and challenge the educator, often in front of the rest of the class but also at times in private discussion after class. There would be common arguments about why gender and sexuality should not be discussed: strict patriarchal gender roles and compulsory heterosexuality are part of "African culture", as many students told me, or religious beliefs prohibited same-sex sexualities or gender nonconformity. Students of all racial and cultural backgrounds would voice opposition in class, much more than for any other controversial topics. One colleague told me about a time he asked a group of students if they knew what cisgender meant, and a male student shouted out, "Normal!"

What marked these disruptions in the past was the fact that the conversation would often grind to a halt. Other students would seem too embarrassed to speak up, or perhaps some were pleased that someone was voicing what they felt. When I tried to continue conversations, there would be a feeling of disengagement, like I had "lost" the class and the conversation could not be productive pedagogically. I wondered if I had challenged the deeply held norms and beliefs of some students, and if this disruption was met with a need to silence me. Unfortunately, it was often effective as I could hardly ever reignite a productive conversation in these lectures, despite my impression that some students were critically engaged and grappling with these topics.

However, in the wake of the Must Fall movements, while the disruptions have not stopped, the nature of these interactions has changed in ways that I read as influenced

by aspects of the movements. Now, disruptions become productive moments, reflecting changing social attitudes and allowing for critical engagement.

I recently taught a class with a group of fourth-year education students. They had begun their university careers as the RMF movement was catching fire, and they had been witness to (and many participated in) the heated protests. I taught a class on marginalised stories, looking at short stories, a film and videos about intersectional oppression, the often-silenced voices that rarely become part of school or even university curricula in South Africa. We spoke about the realities of transphobic violence, gender expectations, queerphobia and racism, using the texts to reflect these ideas and discussing the potential of these conversations in South African classrooms. In one class, one of the male students raised his hand and accused me of racism for pointing out the rampant queerphobic violence in South Africa and other African countries. I was taken aback. While many of my students had circled the issue of how my classes on sexuality were somehow against African cultural values, this was much more direct than I had experienced before.

However, an immediate wave of outrage spread across the rest of the class; perhaps the bluntness of the words had shocked them all as it did me, and they seemed to rally to defend me. I responded to the student by pointing out how I had shown examples of discrimination in many different racial and cultural groups in that very class, and how he was cherry-picking examples. He would not back down, but other students began to interject. I allowed them time to speak, and what followed was a very productive and nuanced conversation dealing with the lack of critical capacity around cultural practices and norms. Many other students spoke about their personal experiences with gender norms, and students were able to openly discuss their discomfort around or support for queer people. Even though I initially felt that my planned lecture had been "disrupted", as it had been many times in the past when topics of gender and sexuality were the focus, this disruption opened the space for deep critical engagement that made the rest of our classes together even richer.

I now see these disruptions as very different in nature, and the Must Fall movements seem to have offered many opportunities in teacher education in South Africa. In a country with so much gender-based violence, where HIV continues to be widespread and affect millions of families, and where gender and sexual minorities are still subject to "corrective rape", beatings and murder, it is essential that teachers are trained to discuss gender and sexuality in classrooms in South Africa. There are many opportunities to address this in pre-service teacher training at South African universities. The fact that students were given a voice through the movements, how intersectionality became a central focus, and the current limbo of discovering a new normal at universities all allow for these pedagogical disruptions to be productive and offer rewarding discussions. I argue that educators should be purposeful in including these topics in pre-service teacher training. First, because it honours the voices of the students who worked so hard to ensure a greater respect for the dignity of all in South Africa and

who fought for LGBTQ+ voices to be heard, and second, because it is a part of the decolonial project at universities that is so necessary in the current climate. Educators should recognise that disruptions have become a greater part of higher education and embrace the potential of these disruptions.

In addition to class time disruptions, students were also much more willing to raise their issues about gender and sexuality education outside class time than they had been before. Whereas I had experienced class time disruptions as a performance or a way to rally support from classmates, students seemed to recognise that they would not receive as much support for their ideas in public spaces as they would have in the past. Instead, students were coming to see me after class, still demonstrating that they felt disrupted by the ideas I raised, and wanting to push back or voice resistance, but no longer feeling free to do this publicly.

A student came to speak with me after a lecture about Dennis Francis's article on homophobia in South African schools (2017), asking: "Why do we have to learn about this stuff?" My defences went up. My quick response, which I was quite proud of in the moment, was, "Why not? Don't you think it is important for us to think about our learners who are gender and sexual minorities, especially when they are exposed to all of the things that Francis highlights in his article?" The conversation lasted about 25 minutes in the empty lecture hall, as we went back and forth, both of us feeling somewhat wounded by the exchange. We discussed decolonisation, how the student thought that I should not bring up decolonisation in discussions about sexuality because the two have nothing to do with each other; he quickly silenced me when I tried to counter this argument. It was a moment where I realised the potential as an educator of gender and sexuality as well as the limitations in a stark way. I said to him, as our conversation drew to a close, "My measure of success in this class is knowing that you are thinking about things you wouldn't normally think about. If you went through your entire university education only being comfortable, only reinforcing your own ideas, I will have failed." As the student told me that he was starting to think about the school experience from the perspective of LGBTQ+ learners, I felt my shoulders relax. Maybe he would be a different teacher to those learners. But I was quickly stopped in that easy denouement when he added, "But it is still against my values."

These types of conversations have become more common, where, even when I can see that students vehemently disagreed with being tolerant and affirming of those who are gender and sexual minorities, they were able to engage with me openly rather than simply trying to silence the conversation. I had a student come to my office looking unsettled after one of these lectures and share his personal beliefs in a way that was vulnerable and deeply respectful; this student was clearly disrupted by the ideas in the lecture, and needed a space to process this where he would not be judged. He left my office thanking me for listening to him even though we did not agree.

I recently hosted a lecture with over 400 first-year students on sexuality and gender identity before their first teaching experience at schools, giving them strategies on how to sensitively create classroom environments that could offer learners from gender and sexual minority groups a degree of comfort and safety that they mostly did not experience in their communities. A few students walked out of this lecture, and one male student was almost violently shaking his head whenever I moved to a new slide, clearly hoping I would notice and perhaps be disrupted by his displeasure. Despite this, the lecture went smoothly, against my expectations, and a large number of students came up to me afterwards, some to thank me for discussing the topic so frankly, and others to ask me for further information. An older, male student came to speak with me after the lecture, and due to my past experiences with male students being vocally unhappy with discussions of gender and sexuality, I expected the worst. However, the student said that he greatly appreciated the lecture, and that he wanted to know how to implement some of the ideas in the township school where he taught, where the community was generally very conservative. I could not answer him fully, but I told him that he could be an advocate for acceptance, even in small ways where he could normalise and affirm gender and sexuality diversity.

These interactions, even in the face of continued attempts at disruptions, have changed the nature of my lessons around gender and sexuality, and have opened the space for deep critical reflection with students that would likely have been impeded and silenced before. In the last few years, during large-class lectures, I have had a student speak about her experiences of discrimination as a black lesbian woman, another grapple openly with how she struggled to reconcile her community's gender norms with traditional feminism, and many more sharing stories of how they struggled in their own teaching practice when they worked with gender nonconforming learners and witnessed bullying and discrimination firsthand. These types of conversations, while not new in South African higher education institutions, seem to take on a different character in the wake of the FMF movements. They demonstrate a greater awareness of intersectionality and the importance of protecting vulnerable groups, a hallmark of FMF activism. They show affective, personal and critical engagement with these topics, something I read as reflective of how university spaces are being renegotiated to be more inclusive.

Even when students feel disrupted by these topics, and even when they in turn attempt to disrupt classes, the form of engagement now allows for sensitive, compassionate engagement to emerge from the rest of the class. What is more, like the lesbian student who spoke up about her own experiences, those on the margins are also much more willing to "disrupt" spaces that seek to actively exclude them, including the voices and systems of patriarchy and heterosexism that are still dominant in academia and in South Africa as a whole.

As Boler and Zembylas (2003) note, "A pedagogy of discomfort recognizes and problematizes the deeply embedded emotional dimensions that frame and shape daily habits, routines and unconscious complicity with hegemony" (2003, 108). In light of the

emerging discourses of decolonisation, symbolic exclusion, rape culture, intersectionality and other important dimensions of the Must Fall movements, discussions of gender and sexuality are able to shift from limiting and often dismissive discourses of culture and religion, and instead invite engagement that can bring about deep reflection in classrooms.

Conclusion

In the Must Fall movements, gender and sexual minorities were often seen as "disruptions" to the dominant focus on class and racial inequalities by the cisheteropatriarchal elements within these movements. However, queer advocates, allies and bodies refused to be erased or silenced, and asserted their belonging as Africans, as South Africans, as members of the movements and as part of the university community broadly. Despite the attempts to silence them, these voices asserted themselves and recognised the structural and ideological forces that sought to reject them, even within the protest movements. The preponderance of male students vocally disrupting discussions of gender and sexuality can be linked to the many men who sought to deny the queer and feminist underpinnings of the Must Fall movements, or to divorce these concerns from the larger decolonial project. Wanelisa Xaba powerfully explains:

> Middleclass Black men in the movement strategically aligned themselves with radical Black feminists in order to steal their intellectual labour, and their class privilege sheltered them from criticism of their "private school patriarchy". Individuals in the movement whose politics are informed by homophobic and patriarchal interpretations of Pan-Africanism, Black Consciousness and Decoloniality fail to recognise the critique and reimagination of gender, sexuality and bodies (in reference to differently abled bodies) as a crucial part of decolonisation. This must be called out for what it is—the internalisation of White supremacy and the normalisation of violence against minority groups. (Xaba 2017)

The reflections above speak to this desire to silence, importantly demonstrated by a range of students and not simply male students. This desire to silence has often been the catalyst for classroom disruptions, but there have been encouraging changes in the ways that other students have dealt with these moments. The Must Fall movements, I contend, have played a large part in allowing students to value their voices and in enhancing critical reflection around the realities of gender and sexuality in South Africa. Even in personal discussions with students who challenge pedagogies of acceptance, affirmation and honesty, I have noticed that they are more open to listening to opposing viewpoints and are less assured in their impulse to silence.

The potential of these discussions is great, and this article argues that educators should purposely include discussions of gender and sexual diversity, particularly at the current moment with calls to decolonise education and to advocate for those who are oppressed in intersectional ways. While not every discussion will end in the student "changing

their mind", the productive critical reflection that becomes possible can have major impacts on transforming public discourse on gender and sexuality, and might allow for the pre-service teachers to become agents of change when they teach in schools and interact with young people, even if just in small acts of affirmation, normalisation, and empathy.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the ways that I have personally been disrupted by these classroom interactions as well as by the changes in the university setting after the Must Fall movements. I have grown as an educator during this time, and this might have impacted how I teach gender and sexuality differently now; while many of the changes might be social and institutional, I am aware that some of them are also personal, and might make me able to better handle moments that previously would have stifled classroom discussion. As has been shown in the autoethnographic reflections above, the discourse has altered dramatically even in just a few years, and this creates powerful affordances for educators. In pre-service teacher education, harnessing these multiple forms of disruption could alter the ways that these future teachers engage with learners in schools, and could be extremely valuable in improving the lives of gender and sexual minorities in South Africa.

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