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Affective dimensions and the psychosocial work performed by naked body protests

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ABSTRACT

This paper is about the liberatory affective states associated with participation in naked body protests. The article will also touch on notions of gender as performative and located within the habitus, since affective states are intertwined with gender performance, embodiment and social construction. Exploration of these phenomena is done by analysing interview data from 16 women who participated in various naked body protests in South Africa. These include protests in Dobsonville, Soweto in 1990 and student protests at four universities in 2016. The study draws upon Wetherell's theorisation of affect, especially their concept of affective practice. The findings illustrate that affects are always embedded in acts and practices, including forms of protest. In addition, using Judith Butler's gender performativity theory, the study demonstrates that naked body protests have performative possibilities that both reify and challenge gender.

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Introduction

Drawing from affective experiences of naked women protesters who were interviewed in a larger study on affective dimensions of naked body protests in South Africa, the paper elaborates three aspects of what function this form of protest appears to serve. Firstly, the study uses Wetherell's theorisation of affect, especially their concept of affective practice, which is defined as an activity where emotion is the principal focus (Wetherell et al., 2018). The study illustrates that affects are always embedded in acts and practices, including naked body protests. This article is concerned with the agentic, actively transgressive, and empowering aspects of naked body protests which will be discussed in the results section. It is important to note that the women protesters also experienced negative affects and have endured traumatic experiences, even long after the naked body protests, which has been considered in previous work (Mathebula, 2022).

Secondly, a psychosocial understanding of Bourdieu's habitus is utilised to better understand how the external social world is experienced and mediated by the interior world of the psyche. The psychosocial approach seeks to make meaning of the social world and how, in this instance, naked women protesters act upon their environment.



Figure 1. Dobsonville women protesting for housing on 12 July 1990. Source: The Star (1990)

Lastly, using Judith Butler's gender performativity theory, the study shows that naked body protests have performative possibilities that both reify and challenge gender. The study illustrates that through naked body protests, women disrupt the expected performance of their given gender identity.

Collectively, these theories point to the fluidity of identity and the potentialities of embodiment for creating new possibilities. Judith Butler's gender performativity theory is relevant in this study because it illustrates the fluidity of one's gender in that gender is real to the extent of its performance. For Butler, gender is a performance that the individual enacts (Butler, 1988). The women protesters in the study use naked body protests to disrupt gender identities and go against the prescribed ones. Braidotti encourages women to dare to be different as difference is generative and driven by an affective energy that opens opportunities for change and a better life (Braidotti, 2008). The nomadic notion of affect as espoused by Braidotti (2010b), shows that humans cannot be seen with a tunnel vision which renders them static and singular. Rather, they should be apprehended in their plurality of being and multiplicity of performance. Nomadic affect coheres with other theories of the body in that it promotes fluidity of being and personhood as practice, rather than essentialism. In other words, identity is fluid and constantly changing, hence it is also possible for one's habitus to change. This is echoed by Butler's (1990) theory of performativity that understands gender as a performance, and thus fluid and changeable rather than rigid, immutable and inflexible.

In the following section, I first give a brief history of naked body protests in Africa in order to contextualise as well as locate the protests and protagonists of this study within a longer lineage of women's naked protests against oppression. There are a number of naked body protests but the study mainly focuses on the well-known ones in South Africa and other parts of Africa. The examples of protests were also chosen because of the range

of power relations that they challenge, varying from colonialism, institutional exclusion and patriarchy.

African naked body protests

This paper provides an inexhaustive account of naked women's protests in the African continent. These are not the only naked body protests that have happened but are the most prominent, and the most appropriate for considering decoloniality as discussed in the article. I briefly outline the Aba Women's war of 1929 in Nigeria, the Durban Beer Hall protest of 1959, the 1990 anti-housing demolition in Soweto, the Ugandan Women's protest of 2015, the student protests in South Africa, 2016, and the protests at South Africa's Gender Summit, 2018.

Aba women's protest

The 1929 Aba Women's war is one of the most widely known and earliest recorded naked women protests on the African continent. The Aba women in Nigeria protested against socio-political and economic oppression during the colonial era (Akin-Aina, 2011; Zukas, 2009). They protested against imposed market tolls on communal land, taxes and forced labour. During the protests, the women sang insulting songs against colonial officials. They slapped the men's stomachs in a derisive manner (Bastian, 2002). The protests went on for two months from December to January 1929 with up to 4000 women participating in the protests wearing nothing but palm leaves (Anoba, 2018; Zukas, 2009). It is not clear exactly how many women were killed. According to Matera et al. (2011), 'in the course of the protests, more than 50 Igbo and Ibibio women were killed by British troops and an unknown number were wounded and otherwise traumatised' (Matera et al., 2011, p. 2). Diabate on the other hand, asserts that 'following the historic exhibition, the forces of colonial administration shot dead more than one hundred women' (Diabate, 2020, p. 175). Tamale (2016) posits that '... in the end, the women of Eastern Nigeria succeeded in halting the offensive colonial policies and even secured a few seats in the native courts' (Tamale, 2016, p. 8).

Cato Manor Beerhall protest

On the 17th of June 1959, South African women from Cato Manor, Durban, participated in a series of boycotts against beerhalls. According to the Native Beer Act of 1908, it was illegal for women to brew and sell traditional beer. Police raided homes and destroyed home brewed liquor so that men would be forced to use municipal beerhalls and buy the beer sold there. In response, women attacked the beerhalls and destroyed equipment and buildings. Some went to the beer halls in traditional dress with their breasts exposed, and when they got nearer, the police tried to stop the women. When they saw that the police wanted to stop them, the women turned and pulled up their skirts. The police closed their eyes and the women passed by and went in (Reed, 2015).

Dobsonville housing protest

On 12 July 1990, the Soweto municipal police arrived with the South African Police to demolish about 60 allegedly illegal shacks erected in a land between Dobsonville extension 1 and 2 (Meintjes, 2007; The Star, 1990). As the police moved to dismantle the shacks, the women shack-dwellers stripped off their clothes, ululated, taunted the police, and shouted in anger and pain (see figure 1). The women took off their clothes in protest and in an effort to fend off police (Meintjes, 2007). They sang and danced and held up printed placards demanding homes and security of tenure (Meintjes, 2007). Ultimately, the women were given the land, although this did not happen immediately. The combination of the action by the women and the coverage of the event by the media were instrumental in countering the brutal force of the apartheid police.

More recent naked body protests have included a 16 April 2015 demonstration by Ugandan women, where they stripped naked in front of the Minister of Land and the Minister of Internal Affairs over a land dispute (Rwakabukoza, 2015). Other naked body protests that will be drawn upon in the study include the Rhodes University #RUReferenceList (Msimang, 2016); the Wits University #IamOneInThree protest and the Wits University #FeesMustFall (Vallabhjee, 2016).

Affect, embodiment and habitus

Drawing on Bourdieu, Lane (2012) indicates that habitus is affective in nature. He argues that the practical dispositions incorporated into the habitus operate at the affective level, often bypassing conscious thought altogether (Gould, 2009). ‘The habitus, that practical sense, is acquired – and thus has a relation to the social – but it is also embodied, inculcated at the level of non-conscious, bodily knowledge’ (Gould, 2009, p. 33). According to Judith Butler, that noncognitive process of embodiment is a literal incorporation made into a second nature; it is what makes the social in us feel like second nature, like our own individual thoughts, values and feelings. That acquired practical sense becomes one’s nature (Butler, 1997; Gould, 2009).

Wetherell (2012) explains that the origins of people’s powerful likes and dislikes often remain unclear. Yet these prove deeply motivating, propelling individuals in and out of lifestyles and consumption patterns, leading individuals to flinch or cringe away from some situations while gravitating towards others. For Wetherell, ‘sharp bursts of affects are also action oriented. They constitute a strong push to do something – flee, remonstrate, appeal, move closer, etc’ (Wetherell, 2012, p. 29). It is apparent that unconscious habitual ways of being carry active resonances and shape behavioural practices.

Based on infant, cross-cultural, and neurobiological studies, Tomkins (1962) determined that there are nine affects. These include interest, enjoyment, surprise, distress, anger, fear, shame, disgust (a reaction to noxious tastes), and dissmell (a reaction to noxious odours). The first three affects (interest, enjoyment, surprise) are termed positive affects, and the other six (distress, anger, fear, shame, disgust, dissmell) are categorised as negative affects. Deleuze (1988) on the other hand, conceives of active (caused internally) and passive (caused externally) affects. Active affects are not dependent on external forces.

The psychosocial approach

The psychosocial theoretical approach seeks to make meaning of the social world and of how people act upon their environment (Woodward, 2015). For Wendy Hollway, one of the leading exponents of psychosocial research, the term psychosocial refers to ‘an intellectual project to understand the mutual effectivity of psychological and social realms in the production of identity, action and relating’ (Hollway, 2006, p. 15). Similarly, Winlow and Hall (2009, p. 286) define the psychosocial approach as ‘the social scientific attempt to understand the subject as an interface between the psychological and the social.’ For Diane Reay (2015, p. 10), the psychosocial is about ‘inquiry into the mutual constitution of the individual and the social relations within which they are enmeshed’. Reay (2015) argues that there are strong links between the psychosocial and Bourdieu’s concept of habitus. Reay explains that the concept of habitus elaborates the link between people’s inner emotional worlds and the external social world. Habitus enables us to better understand how the psyche is formed through the social (Reay, 2015). It allows us to expand our understanding of how the past is played out in the present, and to get a better grasp of the degree of ease and/or discomfort with which people respond to and internalise the wider social world as they move across a range of familiar and unfamiliar fields.

Bourdieu on the habitus

The term habitus was coined by French theorist and sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. It can be defined as culturally and socially acquired ways of moving and thinking (Bourdieu, 1984). It can also be understood as a disposition formed during the early life experiences of an individual, that keeps changing and developing throughout one’s life (Shahriar, 2014), evidenced in gestures, mannerisms, taste, accent, attitude, dress sense, dispositions and posture. Habitus can also refer to aspects of ethnicity and class within a culture; it reflects one’s class background and one’s social history. In habitus, one’s background becomes internalised or habituated into the way one thinks and acts. The values that one was brought up with begin to affect the way the body moves, and the way one thinks; one comes to inhabit a certain way of being without conscious awareness. These acquired ways of thinking, being and moving become natural to the individual. Habitus allows us to understand how our culture, history, class, and background change the way we think about and act in the world (Bourdieu, 1984).

Gender performativity

‘One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one’ Simone de Beauvoir, 1949

‘Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a stylised repetition of acts’ (Butler, 1988, p. 519). Butler illustrates how malleable gender is by comparing it to a dramatised or theatrical character role. The performed gender is one of definite character, whose acts create its interior or internal identity. These definitive character acts are expected to adhere to socially assigned roles. Within each person’s gender performance, there is awareness of the ‘proper’ societal roles and

behaviours associated with their gender. These roles are used by society to understand and justify gendered behaviours or actions (Butler, 1988). The script of gender performance is transmitted from generation to generation where individuals witness, reproduce and internalise gender related actions through repetitive acts.

Butler writes that ‘performing one’s gender wrong initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect, and performing it well provides the reassurance that there is an essentialism of gender identity after all’ (Butler, 1988, p. 528). When an individual obeys the constructs of gender, they are rewarded with the comfort of acting within an accepted frame of reference. When they deviate from the expected behaviour, they are faced with a disagreement stemming from a discrepancy between their expected gender roles, and the roles they perform/ed (Barret, 1998; Butler, 1988). As will be argued further, women who engage in naked body protests may also be seen as deviating from the script of subordinate, well behaved woman.

It will be evident that Butler holds a constructionist view of gender and argues that the performance of gender itself creates gender. The act of performing itself creates the act that it seeks to create, and through repeated performances of the act, reality is reproduced (Butler, 1988). Judith Butler’s gender performativity theory is utilised in this paper to illustrate that gender is experienced as real in its performance (Butler, 1988).

Methodology

I assume a poststructuralist African feminist reading of black women’s bodies. In this regard, I see the body as invested in its own theorisation at the confluence of multiple intersecting identities, temporalities and geographies. Since black women’s bodies have historically been appropriated for colonising and patriarchal missions, I use critical discourse analysis (CDA) to make meaning of how their bodies speak for themselves and back at society. CDA deals with the discourse dimensions of surfacing ideology, power abuse and the inequalities as well as injustices (Van Dijk, 1993). This coheres with Wetherell’s (2012) contention that affect can be read discursively. Consequently, through the use of CDA, I read the protesting body as affecting the world and as being affected by the social systems within which it moves. I read interview data, bodies and their affects as texts that exist in the social world.

Upon ethics approval (H18/10/22) and institutional permissions to carry on with the research, I began setting up appointments with prospective participants to conduct the interviews at times convenient to them. I utilised purposive and snowball sampling methodologies since the sample depended on the referrals that I was able to secure. Data sampling ended when the data reached a point of saturation. Saturation means that on the basis of the data that have been collected, further data collection is unnecessary as it yields the same results (Saunders et al., 2018).

After 16 participants were interviewed, my sense was that the study had reached saturation. The participants were women who had participated in naked body protests. The sample was sought in communities where there had been a reported history of naked protests such as Dobsonville (a township just outside Johannesburg) and university campuses such as the University of the Witwatersrand (Johannesburg) and Rhodes University (Makhanda). I carried out face-to-face interviews at locations that were convenient to the participants. Some opted to be interviewed at their homes, others at

Table 1. Sample characteristics.

Place of protest in South Africa	Reason for naked body protest	Number of interviews and pseudonyms	Participant age range	Year of protest	Province
Dobsonville	Housing/eviction	4 Lisa Mercy Thabisa Pinki	60–75	1990	Gauteng
Rhodes University	Rape culture on campus (#IamOneInThree)	5 Beauty Zukiswa Lolly Lwandle Sihle	20–40	2016	Eastern Cape
Nelson Mandela University	Rape culture in solidarity with Rhodes (#IamOneInThree)	1 Mampho	20–40	2016	Eastern Cape
University of the Witwatersrand	Rape culture in solidarity with Rhodes (#IamOneInThree)	1 Sibu	20–40	2016	Gauteng
University of the Witwatersrand	#FeesMustFall/Outsourcing	3 Busi Lucy Liz	20–40 60–70 60–70	2016	Gauteng
Gender-based violence and femicide summit 2018	Gender based violence	1 Patricia	20–50	2018	Gauteng
TUT Rape 2019	Rape on campus	1 Siviwe	20–40	2019	Gauteng

a restaurant or at university, while others were interviewed by phone as they were far away. Participants who engaged in naked body protests participated in one-on-one interviews of a duration of approximately 60 to 90 minutes. I use pseudonyms in order to protect the women's identities. Table 1 summarises the characteristics of the sample of the women interviewed.

Findings and discussion

Based on the data gathered for this study, in what follows, I present some of the affects evoked by the different naked body protests in order to surface the psychosocial work performed by the protests. The affects reported to be present by the women protestors included relief, joy, empowerment, anger, rage, and fear. Since this paper is concerned with the agentic, actively transgressive, and empowering aspects of naked body protests the focus of the discussion is on the positive affects. The bravery that propelled the women to act and stage naked protests in an attempt to strive for better life resulted in positive affects, such as joy, relief and empowerment.

Relief

When asked what affects were evoked by their participation in the *#RUR*ReferenceList naked body protest at Rhodes, Beauty explained that they had a sense of relief. The *#RUR*ReferenceList protests were against gender-based violence that was occurring on the Rhodes University campus. In this protest, alleged rapists were named by the protestors. I interviewed Beauty over the phone as they were in Kwazulu Natal and I was not able to see their facial expressions during the interview, but I could hear the change in the tone of

their voice as they became excited to share the feeling of relief. Yannis Hamilakis (2017) defines affects as assemblages that cohere around in-betweenness. He suggests that sensoriality and affectivity, memory and multi-temporality are key features of assemblage thinking. In this instance using assemblage thinking, I had to imaginatively connect to Beauty and picture their facial expressions and their body language in general as the tone and temper of voice changed from time to time depending on what part of the protest they were narrating to me.

Beauty told me that they did not experience shame as society would have expected. It is interesting that they were the only woman who said that they experienced relief. The relief theme was important and too strong to leave out, hence its inclusion in the results section. Beauty was relieved that all the pent-up anger that had sedimented within them had come out into the open through the naked body protest. In this case, relief might be seen as cathartic and as a positive affect.

The relief came from a place where you sit in the same lecture venues with these people and you're expected to behave a certain way, umm even if you're going out to the club, you see them at the club, and you can't act out. I can't go and swing a punch at that person because then I'm just attacking them on the whim, nobody knows what they did . . . you know behind closed doors. So, in that environment, where I was able to say such and such a person did one, two, three, four to me, there was definitely a big relief there!. (#RURReferenceList protest interview 2019, Beauty, protester)

Crossley (2004) explains that engaging in behaviour proscribed by society may provide a psychological feeling of rebellion against dominant social values, which, in turn, creates a sense of freedom, independence and protest. This aligns with Beauty's experience. By expressing their anger and rage through naked body protests, Beauty and fellow protesters' bodies come to be vehicles of resistance against dominant cultural norms (Bordo, 1993), thereby defying the expected habitus of being subservient and not express their anger. I could sense the pleasure in their voice as they said the words *there was definitely a big relief there!* Brittney Cooper (2018) argues that black women are restricted when it comes to expressing their rage. However, Beauty and the other women expressed their outrage during the naked body protest, and Beauty personally experienced a release of pressure through public validation. For Beauty and other women protesters, this was more than just a naked body protest. It was also about manifesting bodies that had been violated in secret. In Butler's (1988) terms, it could be argued that the performative act of exposing their breasts went against the prescribed behaviour of only exposing their breasts in private spaces for the satisfaction of their husbands (Tamale, 2016).

Joy

Joy was experienced by the women protesters when they achieved the outcomes they wanted their naked protests to yield. Liz, Thabisa and Lucy were gripped by an affective joy. Liz was a janitor at the university and had protested in solidarity with the students during #FeesMustFall¹ and against outsourcing in 2016. Thabisa had protested for housing in Dobsonville, in 1990. Lucy had protested in the #IamOneInThree naked body protest in 2016 as well as the #FeesMustFall 2016 naked body protest. I interviewed Liz in their home in the presence of their daughter and grandson. The daughter was

eagerly awaiting my arrival and wanted to be present when I interviewed the mother. For the interview Liz was wearing their traditional Tsonga regalia, a beautiful purple and green *xibelani*,² with red, orange, white and green ribbons towards the hem across their body like a sash. They wore a blue *doek* or headscarf with red patterns to cover their hair and had a whistle in their mouth. To complete the look, Liz wore a necklace made of yellow beads with red and blue patterns. For shoes, they wore white flat takkies. Liz came to meet me at the gate and gave me a welcome *xibelani* dance. I joined in the dance. It was a warm welcome. We conducted the interview in Tsonga, as Liz was more comfortable to have the interview conducted in their home language (which I also speak). Liz spoke with much enthusiasm and joy when they told me that they were happy during the protest. Their joy and smile were contagious and I could not help but smile with them as they were relating the event to me.

The joy and relaxed mood I experienced is the opposite of the affective anxiety I felt as I was driving to their home. When Liz gave me directions, they told me that the area they live in is a squatter camp. I toyed with the idea of meeting them there or asking that we meet in a different place where I would feel 'safe.' I finally decided to go to Liz's place out of respect because they were an elderly person, and also because I wanted to interview them in their home where they felt comfortable.

So, for me, hai! I am happy. I am happy . . . Errr, I can say I am happy but also not happy . . . Because we work very hard, we work under difficult conditions with a mop! And now they have even put cameras, you have to clock with your fingerprints at 7 O'clock. I don't use my own transport. (#FeesMustFall protest interview 2019, Liz, protester)

Liz was happy that their salary improved as a consequence of the naked body protest, but noted that the working conditions were unsatisfactory. As a result, Liz experienced both joy and sadness simultaneously. The structural conditions have remained in place and their working-class position in the university means that Liz is under extra surveillance since the addition of cameras and biometric access systems.

Thabisa's joy came about when they were finally given a piece of land that they had been fighting for during the naked body protest. When Thabisa was called to sign for a site, they were filled with joy. *I was then shown my site. The way I was so happy that day!* (Dobsonville protest interview 2019, Thabisa, protester). I met Thabisa at the creche that they run in their community. Thabisa wore a denim skirt, a black top that had thin white strips and a white bucket hat with black training shoes. Thabisa was a tall medium built woman who was feisty and confident. We conducted the interview in Sesotho and Zulu as they spoke these languages and I can also speak them. Thabisa decided to give me their life story first, before we could talk about their protest. To think through the meaning of insisting on telling one's life story and not following the interview questions, I draw on the interview Canham (2014) conducted with a woman who expressed themselves through tears for the most part of the interview. Canham was forced to read this participant's tears differently by working with the participant's body as a present material. Canham could not just listen to the woman's words but was compelled to take the actions of the woman's body into consideration as well. This experience taught Canham that engaging in research is not simply an extractive process, but requires one to follow Ahmed's advice of listening out for an absent presence of history (Ahmed, 2004). Ahmed asserts that the

participant's history provides useful supporting information for understanding their narratives and experiences. In a similar vein, I learnt that one has to let the participant express themselves in any way they feel comfortable, including telling their life story first. This disrupts narrative and temporal distinctions between ostensibly different topics. Following a feminist ethic, it is also important to let black women tell their truth in whatever manner they choose (P. Collins, 1991; Lewis & Baderoon, 2021).

There were high and low emotions as Thabisa related their life story to me. I left Thabisa's place feeling sad for them, mostly for the painful experiences they had gone through in their life. It took me two full days to recover from the interview that had affectively moved me to a place of sadness. Rowling (1999) writes that what has been ignored in dealing with interviews about sensitive issues is the researchers' well-being. Rowling asserts that advice textbooks often emphasise the importance of protecting the participant by keeping them anonymous for instance. Another emphasis is on maintaining interviewer/interviewee distance in conducting research. Rowling further explains that distance could suggest detachment, indifference and coldness to emotional responses of participants. I had no way of dealing with the sadness I was feeling after the interview with Thabisa. I shared their pain and can only hope that they were affirmed in this sisterly sharing. In their standpoint theory, Patricia Collins asserts that black feminist thought consists of ideas produced by black women that clarify a standpoint of and for black women. Collins adds that black women have a unique standpoint of their experiences. Black women may also have shared or common experiences among themselves as a group. At the same time, while black women might share similar experiences due to race, they might also have different experiences because of class, age, religion or sexual orientation. As such, the role of black women intellectuals is to produce facts and theories about black women's experiences that will clarify a black woman's standpoint for black women (P. H. Collins, 1996). Since naked protest is praxis, this study contributes by explicating the mutually constituting nature of naked protest and theory.

Lucy and I met in a restaurant in their suburb. They showed up wearing black pants, a black top, sunglasses, a beautiful red necklace and brown sandals. Lucy had a smile that warmed one's heart and made me feel at ease. In the excerpt below, Lucy relates how during the #IamOneInThree naked body protest in solidarity with Rhodes University students, Lucy and other women protesters at Wits put bloody pads on police cars in a bid to get them to move from campus.

There's a time they were threatening us with violation of state whatever. We were like 'you are actually going to have egg on your faces when this thing comes to the media to say you arrested students that were protesting against militarisation and sexual harassment for them placing pads; bloody pads on your cars.' Whether the blood is real or not is a conversation for another day. ... but what makes me happy is really what we achieved, is we got them to remove the nyalas [police armoured vehicles] from the piazza. (#IamOneInThree protest interview 2019, Lucy, protester)

Lucy and fellow women protesters experienced joy and triumph when they saw police moving their cars from campus. These women are enlisted in the service of calling out sexual harassment and police brutality towards women protesters on campus. They engage affectively/discursively towards a new configuration of social relations and they

challenge the status quo (Mulcahy & Witcomb, 2018; Wetherell, 2012). For these women, using bloody pads as protest is similar to baring one's body, taking ownership of something about womanhood that is often constructed as shameful and hidden.

As Butler (1988) argues, gender is not natural, it is merely generated by repeated performances. This means that performing gender creates the space for gendered beings to resist any prior characterisation of their gender. They use gender to undo the work of gendering. These women disrupt the expected performance of their given gender identity by staging naked body protests and using bodily products to bring about change. We also see the women going against their expected/internalised habitus (Bourdieu, 1984) in which they would be expected to be submissive and obedient, but instead challenge patriarchal authority in the form of the police. The use of 'bloody' pads by the protesting students signals the menstrual curse, an association of which the women in the study may or may not have been consciously aware. The women in Cote d'Ivoire wear a red cloth called the *kodjo* for menstruation. Zéka Togue asserts that the *kodjo* is believed to symbolise the woman's power to curse, to give life, and whose word is sacred when they take off and waves the *kodjo* to curse their oppressors (Togue, 2011 in Diabate, 2020).

Below is a quote from Sihle, who protested against the sexual harassment of women at Rhodes University. I interviewed Sihle over a WhatsApp video call as they were in the Eastern Cape at the time of the interview. Sihle talked about the fact that they were not alone and that the support from other women and staff members made her feel proud. Here we might consider the value of solidarity but also the positive affects that circulate and stick to assembled bodies (Ahmed, 2014). Sihle sounded happy and smiled warmly as they related this part of the interview.

[smiles] *I was . . . I was proud, and I was happy, that it was not just me alone. There were so many other students, there were so many staff members, who were with us, who were supporting us. And I felt that 'You know what, if the entire university could do this, it would mean so much, so, so much to so many women and victims of sexual violence.* (#RURreference list protest interview 2019, Sihle, protester)

Affects are always embedded in acts and practices and constitute an essential part of the practical activities with which bodies relate to other subjects and objects (Zembylas, 2018). Miklošević and Babić (2018) study on a heritage exhibition found that participants reported that they felt good and consoled that there were other people like them. This is similar to Sihle's assertion where they note: [smiles] *I was . . . I was proud, and I was happy, that it was not just me alone.* Sihle is happy that naked body protest was an affirmation that there were women protesters who empathised with themselves and with one another. The congregation of oppressed bodies as an act of revolt affirms the existence of the problem, signals the shared nature of the oppression, and demonstrates that those assembled will not tolerate their continued violation. Solidarity is a central tenet of African feminism (Mohanty, 2003).

While joy was a common affect both during the protests and afterwards, it is useful to consider other affects that lie beneath or alongside the happy affect. This is because most of the gains of the protests were fleeting and very often were related to the de-escalation of the violence of state agents, such as police. The eradication of institutional discrimination such as the surveillance of janitors, elimination of gender-based harm, and the

provision of free quality and decolonised education are more difficult objectives to achieve. The Dobsonville protestors appear to have made the most significant gains as they eventually obtained the rights to the land. This should, however, be read in relation to context of the political moment of the transition from apartheid to democracy. Therefore, while joy is an important affect, it is important to understand it alongside negative or low affects, or as sometimes short-lived as entrenched forms of oppression continued to be experienced.

A further positively felt affect that was evoked by participation in the naked body protests was the feeling of power, as discussed below.

Empowered and powerful

In this section, the focus is on the feeling of empowerment that the women experienced during the naked body protests.

... One patriarch ten sjamboks. And so I also had the sjambok (a heavy leather whip) in my hand, and there were also the struggle songs, the speaking, the singing, and so for me that moment was affirming. I felt affirmed, I felt empowered, I felt powerful somehow. Because when you ... when you have been raped and when you experience rape, it makes you feel, for me it made me feel weak ... Uuuh it made me feel very vulnerable. Uuum, it made me feel like an object and not a person. And so I remember that moment feeling empowered ... right ... I have my sjambok, I have my sisters around me ... (#IamOneInThree protest interview 2019, Sibü, protester)

Peterson (2010) asserts that empowerment can be multi-dimensional. For example, it is possible for a woman to simultaneously experience empowerment on one level and disempowerment on another level. Sibü explains that the rape experience made *me feel weak ... it made me feel very vulnerable*, while the naked body protest made them feel *affirmed and empowered*. Although the experience of rape had removed their power and agency, Sibü reclaims these during the naked body protest and refuses to be a victim. The solidarity of other women and the sjambok represent feminist armour and protection against perpetrators. Sibü has the power to intimidate rather than to be intimidated.

From a psychosocial point of view, as human beings in society, we are always both subject and object. We are shaped by our environment but at the same time we can act on the environment (Woodward, 2015). The rape made Sibü feel weak and vulnerable, but they chose to act and do something about this by taking part in the naked body protest as a way of resisting the suppression imposed on them by the man who raped them. As objects for another we are not necessarily victims of derogation and suppression (Cahill, 2009). As subjects we are not necessarily autonomous and free, since the social is interwoven with the psychological. We can however choose not to allow our environment and habitus to turn us into victims exclusively. Foucault (1998) explains that the process of subjectification (how we become who we are) works both to constrain and enable possibilities for how we understand ourselves and other people, and how we experience and act in the world around us. The choice to be passive and remain a victim is as much an effect of power as is the choice to be active and reclaim one's agency (Gavey, 2012) through the staging of naked body protests as Sibü and the rest of the women protesters have done. For Butler (1993) the subject is constituted in what is not a singular act or incident, but a ritualised production. However, in disrupting repeated

performance lies the possibility for one to resist prior subject characterisations. Sibú's public embodiment of potency and self-exhibition allow them to move out of the victimhood state into the state of feeling empowered and claiming back their power. It is however important to note that even after the protest, one can have moments of feeling helpless as the protest does not suddenly make one an 'overcomer'. In the moment of the protest though, Sibú experienced a sense of power and affirmation that they continue to recollect with positive affect.

In the excerpt below, Beauty recalls the fearlessness that they and others experienced in the midst of threatening police presence.

So, we definitely felt powerful. We felt powerful the most when we were on the ground, or on the streets and were protesting through the streets or through the campus. Because then there would be all of this police presence, and their guns would not scare us as much as they would if we were protesting for anything else. (#IamOneInThree protest interview 2019, Beauty, protester)

As Braidotti (2010a) argues, opposition, or naked protesting in the case of this study, is not about negativity, but about the transformation of negative into positive passions. The moment of protest was not pleasant, and some of the affects experienced by the women were not positive. However, as Beauty explains, it was empowering for them to take up public space even in the presence of police; especially because they were protesting against closing down of space associated with the rape culture on campus. For Beauty and fellow women protesters, it was particularly empowering to occupy the often restricted spaces, where women are not free and safe *'on the ground, or on the streets and were protesting through the streets or through the campus.'*

Like Beauty, in the excerpts below Mercy and Thabisa recall their fearlessness and sense of potency that resonates with the idea of 'killing rage' articulated by Hooks Bell (1995). Amongst other things, Hooks Bell (1995) asserts that killing rage has to do with black women gaining strength to confront sexist, racist, patriarchal restrictions by sharing knowledge and resources with one another, as opposed to uniting on the basis of being victims.

Hey! We were fighting that day. Like I said, when the police approached a man, we the women would rush there to protect that man and stop them from being arrested. And I was not afraid of anything, especially [mentions name of fellow woman protester] also had so much power and cheekiness. I was not afraid of anything, I did not fear a boer (white Afrikaner) man . . . I was not afraid, I never had any regrets. I just told myself we would also kill them. (Dobsonville protest interview 2019, Mercy, protester)

Thabisa, a protagonist from the 1990 Dobsonville protest contends, *'At the time when I was naked, I felt so powerful . . . the power to even hit a policeman'*.

Mercy, Thabisa and the other women dared to be undutiful daughters who speak and fight back (Braidotti, 2010a; Foucault, 2001). They both assert that they were not afraid of anything, including the police. For instance, articulating a killing rage, Mercy adds that *I told myself I would also kill them*. When I spoke to them twenty-nine years after the 1990 protest, Thabisa could still relay the power they felt as they remembered that they fought until the policeman had to scoop them off the ground with the forklift of a bulldozer. The power felt by the women also goes against the expected habitus and gender

performativity of being submissive and fearful women in society (Bourdieu, 1984; Butler, 1988, 1990).

However, despite the power and strength Thabisa felt during the protest, Thabisa still felt some shame as they mention that they had not removed all their clothes, while their friend had removed everything. This points to the complexity and simultaneity of affects as illustrated in the quote below.

When the bulldozer approached my shack, I took off my clothes. [Name of a fellow woman protester] had started first and removed everything even the panty. At least I was still wearing my bra, panty and boots. I fought with the bulldozer until they scooped me up and put me inside the bulldozer. (Dobsonville protest interview 2019, Thabisa, protester)

Invoking Spinoza, Gatens (1996) asserts that the human body is totally open to its surroundings and can be composed, recomposed, and decomposed by other bodies. Once we open up and expand our power to be affected, however, then begins the work of discovering the ways to repeat or prolong those affects that are beneficial and prevent the detrimental. 'Increasing one's power to be affected and thus enlarging their sphere of interactions will multiply one's potential to experience joyful encounters just as shooting more arrows while blindfolded will increase their chances of hitting the target' (Hardt, 2015, p. 219). As the preceding excerpts suggest, the naked protests resulted in the women feeling affectively empowered and affirmed. The women engaged in 'nomadic becoming', which is a process of expression, composition, selection, and incorporation of forces aimed at positive transformation of the subject (Braidotti, 2010b).

Conclusion

The study has illustrated that affects are always embedded in social acts and practices, including naked body protests. This has demonstrated that social practices can arouse a range of affects, both positive and negative, and that these are often intertwined. People are constantly affected by the external world, but at the same time, they also affect the outside world. According to Deleuze (1988) this is not necessarily a bad thing, as the power to affect and be affected, enables humans to strive for better living conditions; to strive for a life full of joy. In this instance, protesting for better living conditions in an embodied and collective manner allowed women protestors to feel emotions of joy, pleasure, freedom, potency, fearlessness and liberating anger. Wetherell's concept of affective practice suggests that affects can be agentic. Theoretically, it can be inferred that it is possible for women protesters to be agentic and take control of their affects and to primarily express those affects that would allow them to find the agency bring their grievances to the fore in a particular embodied form, such as feelings of empowerment. It is evident that for some of the women the experience of certain feeling states that were previously the purview of men, such as aggression, fearlessness and special power, was exciting and liberating. Changing their gender habitus through a particular form of performativity evoked affective states that in turn fuelled their liberatory practice. It was evident that even several or many years later, in recounting these events the interviewees still carried the excitement and pleasure associated with this risk-taking period of their lives.

Following Butler's theory of performativity, it may be possible to demystify extant stereotypes or dominant negative beliefs that surround women. Stereotypes and dominant ideologies work through repetition (Rosello, 1998). They can therefore be debunked in the same way they are created. These beliefs can include the fact that it is not usual for women to take part in protests, or naked body protests as this is 'unladylike'. The women in this study undermined the solidity of this belief by choosing to be naked in public without shame or apology. Building on a long lineage of African women's naked body protests the women in this study normalise the notion that women can be anything they want, including being undutiful.

Notes

1. #FeesMustFall was a student movement that demanded free education and a decolonised curriculum.
2. The name *xibelani* usually refers to the dance style while the skirt itself is referred to as *tinguvu*. However, the term *xibelani* is sometimes used to refer to both the dance and the skirt.

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Notes on contributor

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