

## **Research article**

### **The generation who would**

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The position of young people in politics is often overlooked and missing from the conversation however, this is of no indication that they are not interested in politics or the shaping of the political climate in their respective countries (Jennings-Edquist, 2019). The theorisation of the space young people occupy in the political sphere has noted that expanding the field of who has political footing and power to make social change has led to viewing the lived experiences of youth in a different light and recognising them as active beings who have voice instead of 'future becomings' who will eventually have voice (Pauliina & Jouni, 2013). Research has also indicated that young people are more likely to use alternative modes to obtain and engage with political content and authorities (social media, protests, rallies) while being more critical about the political parties they vote for if they decide to vote (Newham & Roberts, 2019; Jennings-Edquist, 2019).

The legacy of Youth Day in post-apartheid South Africa amplifies the theorisation above and continues to be the background for the marginalised voices of young people today. On the 16 June 1976 thousands of young black students took to the streets of Soweto to march against the governmental order to include Afrikaans as a compulsory medium of communication in black township schools which only further problematised the bantu education act (Act No. 47 of 1953) that was enforced on young South Africans of

colour. The objective was to fade out local and indigenous languages that were already prohibited in these schools while increasing the frequency and commonality of the language(s) of the oppressor (Ramphela, 2015; SAHO, 2013). The march was intentionally done in a peaceful manner with the aim to draw attention to the injustice placed on young people of colour. However, the protest was interrupted by the police who killed hundreds of young South Africans. The use of extreme police force in 1976 shows parallels to the current acts of police brutality and the use of extreme force to disperse protestors in the US today, in response to the Black Lives Matter movement (Ramphela, 2015; SAHO, 2013).

The Soweto uprising was done to combat and overcome inequalities and oppression during that time, forever changing our socio-political landscape. This was nothing short from revolutionary but the uprising of youth, the fight against injustice and the struggle for an inclusive space for all South African's did not stop in 1976. The student led protests that have occurred across South Africa had shaken the nation while highlighting the snail pace of democracy and the need for immediate change. In 2015, students in almost every institution of higher education in South Africa protested against the proposed increase of tuition fees across the country (n.d., 2016; Newham & Roberts, 2019). Despite the current government's attempt to calm protests by subsidising the increased amount the stark realisation had already set in for far too many South Africans that this increase will likely prevent many students from entering higher institutions. The protest gained its momentum under the #FeesMustFall and continued to gain traction and drew attention to other hidden issues such as the call for free education that was promised since 1994; the decolonialisation of higher education and institutions; the need for diverse academics;

and changes to the curriculum holistically (n.d., 2016; Newham & Roberts, 2019).

In the following year, numerous student-led protests took place across the country, both tertiary and high school students collectively band together to protest the rising rates of gender-based violence and sexual violence in South Africa (n.d., 2019). These protests were attempting to draw attention to the safety of young South African womxn at institutions of higher education and demanded that the Minister of Higher Education at the time take action. The current rates of gender-based violence are so high that it is regarded as a national crisis and South African statistics have reported that femicide in South Africa is five times higher than the global average. It was also reported by the South African Police Force in 2016 that a womxn is murdered every four hours while the updated statistic recorded in 2017/18 indicates that a womxn is murdered every three hours (Mogoathe, 2019; Central 2019; Wilkinson, 2019). The horrifying statistics and realities of South African womxn continued to anger the nation and gain momentum on various social media platforms with hashtags such as #AMINEXT, #ALLMENARETRASH, #ITSTARTSWITHME and #ENOUGHISENOUGH, among others. However, the fight to stop femicide and reduce the rates of gender-based violence continues.

University students are not the only ones addressing forms of oppression and violence, former and current high school students from Model C schools across the country have highlighted the different ways their high school(s) continue to hide and dismiss the use of racism and prejudice against students of colour by detailing their experiences of institutionalised racisms in light of the Black Lives Matter

movement. Although instead of organising mass protests and rallies, they have used various social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram to deliver their message and to give voice to their lived experiences. Students are demanding high schools to take action in terms of their hair policy and the decolonisation of the school syllabus (Karrim, 2020).

While international research has shown that young people are exposed to societal power relations in terms of politics including but not limited to culture, education, climate change and geo-economic developments, transnational conflict, emancipation of the subject and inclusive policies (Pauliina & Jouni, 2013). It has been shown that young people in the contemporary world do not believe nor do they trust that their governments are doing enough and/or progressing change at an effective pace, instead they have become more instrumental in organising and fighting inequalities, injustice and oppression in every shape and form. Young people such as Greta Thunberg (17), Jamie Margolin (17), Amariyanna Copeny (12), Isra Hirsi (16), and many others have advocated for inclusive policies, people of colour in spaces, recognition of marginalised identities, the rights of indigenous communities, and climate change (Burton, 2019). Young people have also taken an active stance in issues such as housing costs, mental health, support services, education, human right issues, LGBTQIA+ rights, refugees and asylum seeker rights and gender equality – these are only some of the issues these young revolutionaries aim to change and make more progressive, inclusive and effective (Jennings-Edquist, 2019; Burton, 2019).

Politics is a complex field to navigate and for those who were often thought to be lacking in understanding or too young to grasp its complexities are changing the political landscape

for future generations. The youth of contemporary South Africa continues to dismantle the regime of apartheid through decolonising education and higher institutions, and changing the ideals of masculinities while trying to end femicide and gender-based violence altogether. The younger generation is paying attention to racial notions and speaking out against it: making the unity of the rainbow nation more practical.

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