

MASCULINITIES IN STUDENT POLITICS: GENDERED DISCOURSES OF STRUGGLE AND LIBERATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LIMPOPO

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Abstract.

The article examines the role of discourses of struggle and liberation in the performance of gender in student politics at the University of Limpopo. Moving from an understanding of how discourses of masculinity intertwine with the discourses of student activism and the struggle against apartheid, the article analyses the elections held for the Students' Representatives Council (SRC) at Turfloop Campus in October 2006. It is argued that male student politicians draw on struggle history and revocations of African traditionalism in ways that keep them at the centre of student politics, while female students are kept on the margins as a muted group. The article aims to show how male and female students position themselves as gendered beings in the realm of student politics; and how, in the process, discourses of gender and the struggle translate into social practice. The analysis shows that it is not fruitful to view discourses of gender in isolation from other discourses. Rather, the reading of the student elections points to the need for a careful examination of how discourses of gender are entangled in broader discourses of hegemony at the political level; and not least how organisations and individual actors engage with these discourses.

INTRODUCTION.

When I began my ethnographic fieldwork at the Turfloop Campus of the University of Limpopo in 2006, I was puzzled by the views aired and rhetoric used by male student politicians. Why did they claim that they were “prepared to die” for better registration systems or hot water in student residences? What kind of symbolism were they drawing on when they used election posters stating that: “Our history is written in blood and no amount of lies can change it?” Why did many students see it as mandatory for the president of the Student Representatives' Council to be “a real man”, proven by his sexual record rather than his political acumen? Why did they argue that female students were “useless in politics, because they cry in the board rooms”? The short answer to these questions is that in the realm of student politics in Limpopo, discourses of gender are often entangled in powerful political discourses of the struggle against apartheid, which creates a field defined by masculine norms.

The current analysis builds onto insights gained in recent studies of masculinities in South Africa (most notably Morrell, 1998, 2001; Reid & Walker, 2005; Shefer, Ratele, Strelbel, Shabalala & Buikema, 2007), where Connell's conceptual framework of hegemonic masculinity has been applied to the understanding of how powerful and dominant versions of masculinity subordinate less dominant masculinities as well as women (Connell, 1995). Simultaneously, the argument is inspired by criticisms of that very framework developed in anthropology (Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 1994) and psychology (Wetherell & Edley, 1999), according to which hegemonic masculinities are generally seen to be overly categorical, sealed off from other social forces (or hegemonies) and not adequately located in specific socio-cultural contexts. Connell, Hearn and Kimmel (2005:3) have recently pointed to the paradox that: "as studies of men and masculinities continue to deconstruct the gendering of men and masculinities and assumptions about them, other social divisions, such as age, class and disability, come more to the fore and are seen as more important". However, although Connell and his colleagues have made the call for intersectionality in analyses of gender (Connell, 1995; Connell, Hearn & Kimmel, 2005), publications on men and masculinities often fail to accomplish this. This is partly because studies carried out under the heading of hegemonic masculinities display an unfortunate tendency to reduce men to distinct character typologies along the lines of Connell's four subcategories of: hegemonic, subordinate, complicit and marginalised masculinities (Connell, 1995).

This article, therefore, attempts to understand the ways in which student politicians "do gender" (see Butler, 1999) in the specific context of a former black university on the South African periphery. The approach adopted subscribes to the idea that gendered difference and inequality "are constantly negotiated and recreated *more or less* in repeated interactions, but [that] no interaction is identical" (Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 1994:44). This means that hegemonic ideologies can never totally define experience, but that the "meaning of specific interactions must be located in the interpretations of the actors, subjects and their audiences" (Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 1994:44). The present analysis therefore pays attention to the ways in which gendered discourses are entangled in struggle history and how this complex of meanings is used by student politicians contesting positions on the Students' Representative Council. Flowing from an interest in the processes by which subject positions in discourse are taken up by organisations and individual actors (see Wetherell & Edley, 1999; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), the article aims to contribute to an understanding of how gendered discourses translate into social practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW.

In global masculinity studies the trend has been to study organisations of the political right rather than organisations of the political left (Donaldson, 1993). The analysis of student politics will, however, show that the latter like the former may also draw on masculine discourses of warfare and violence that become hegemonic in their own right. This is particularly relevant in South African masculinity studies where, over the last decade, considerable attention has been paid to the links between masculinity and actual violence. However, only a few scholars (notably, Unterhalter, 2000; Xaba, 2001; Erlank, 2003; Suttner, 2007) have taken an interest in masculine discourses at the political level. Since these scholars differ in perspective and approach, it is worthwhile to briefly introduce and discuss the ground that has already been covered.

In an analysis of black masculinities in the 1980s and 1990s, Xaba (2001:107) identified a dichotomy between “struggle masculinity” and “post-struggle masculinity”, where the former is seen as something possessed or exercised by “the foot soldiers of the revolution” and the latter is a product of the new South Africa, with its emphasis on human rights and gender equality. According to Xaba, traits of struggle masculinity have become very visible in post-apartheid South Africa, because “exiles” and “comrades”, who did not succeed in securing for themselves an official positions in the new South Africa, have become rather marginal and left with only the option of taking up crime to secure their position and material welfare (Xaba, 2001). Xaba (2001) stresses that struggle masculinity was tainted by negative attitudes and behaviours towards women, because it existed side by side with street masculinity or the gangster identity known as the *tsotsi* identity. These masculinities are seen as the opposite of what Xaba refers to as “post-struggle masculinity”, which is understood to be founded on respect for law and order, the restoration of public order, and respect for state institutions like the police (Xaba, 2001). Xaba (2001) points to ANC leaders as bearers of post-struggle masculinity, because they have used their government power to further a human rights inspired policy framework with a clear emphasis on gender equality and women’s rights (Xaba, 2001). While Xaba is right in underscoring the recent developments in South Africa, his rigid juxtaposing of struggle masculinities and post-struggle masculinities is a neat example of how Connell’s analytical framework is often used to reduce complex realities to fixed masculinities that are either good (resistant) or bad (hegemonic), and where internal contradictions, historical complexities and processes of translation from discourse to lived experience are insufficiently explored.

With regard to ANC leaders, Xaba thus differs from Unterhalter (2000), who has identified traits of struggle masculinity in the functioning of current ANC government ministers. Based on a literary study of the autobiographical writings of anti-apartheid struggle heroes, she shows how the struggle for freedom and the project of nation-building have been cast as the right and duty of men alone, and how “heroic masculinity” entails giving oneself to the struggle and thereby finding a place in history (Unterhalter, 2000). Where Xaba (2001) sees struggle masculinity as something of the past; as a sort of marginalised, “left-over masculinity” from the anti-apartheid struggle, Unterhalter (2000) reads heroic masculinity as a political discourse that is still celebrated and embodied by the current leadership. In Unterhalter’s account no mention is made of positive developments made towards greater gender equity over the last decade.

In readings of masculinities in nationalist discourse and the ANC respectively, both Erlank (2002) and Suttner (2007) take a slightly different route, when they stress the significance of how black men were denied full manhood during apartheid. Coming from a critical feminist angle, Erlank points to the intersection of masculinity and political discourses in the creation of a liberation movement seeking to restore “full manhood” to black men of a “virile nation” (Erlank, 2003:653), where women were expected to be supportive and “function as a catering auxiliary” (Erlank, 2003:655). Coming from within the ANC-movement, Suttner (2007) appears more eager to legitimise the struggle for manhood in light of the humiliation and oppression suffered as a consequence of the denial of manhood. Citing Delius, Suttner (2007) points to the interface between African traditions of male circumcision rituals and the struggle

against apartheid, because the armed wing of the ANC (MK) drew on warrior traditions celebrated at the initiation schools and used this rite of passage to recruit new members. In this way initiation into manhood simultaneously became an initiation into the struggle. While Suttner thus agrees with Unterhalter and Erlank that in the liberation movement warfare and a willingness to fight were seen as attributes of manhood (Suttner, 2007), he maintains that the restoration of manhood was a legitimate struggle objective at the time (Suttner, 2007).

The question that arises is how these discourses of struggle and masculinity relate to 18- to 25-year-old university students of today, who were approximately 4 to 12 years old when apartheid came to an end in 1994? Alexander (2006: 26) notes that: "there is a noticeable distinction between those old enough to have had direct experience of 'the struggle', and possibly had their education interrupted as a consequence, and those who are younger" and follows Nuttall (2004) in her characterisation of them as "generation X" and "generation Y" respectively. In relation to Turfloop, many students have suffered apartheid-related losses, like the death of a parent or a sibling, which make them victims of apartheid in a very direct sense. Many of the socio-economic conditions that inspired the struggle may not have changed that much since 1994. The following quotes from Xaba about 1980s' township youth apply equally well to present-day Sovenga, a township that surrounds Turfloop Campus:

"Numerous factors conspired to produce "struggle masculinity". The upbringing of youth in poor households of impoverished and poorly serviced townships, coupled with the relations they had with state institutions, engendered opposition to the state" (Xaba, 2001:110).

"During those days, being a "comrade" endowed a young man with social respect and status within his community. Being referred to as a "young lion" and a "liberator" was an intoxicating and psychologically satiating accolade" (Xaba, 2001:110).

"... 'young lions', especially those who were in leadership positions, were coveted by women. In fact, some tended to have access to more than one woman at a time, either as a girlfriends or sleeping partners. Indeed, the more status a man had, the more women there were to whom he had access" (Xaba, 2001:110).

In spite of these similarities, there are, of course, obvious differences to be noted between marginalised former liberation soldiers and present-day student politicians in a university environment. While it is difficult to pinpoint what kind of students are more likely to take part in student activism in terms of class position and family background, many of the leading members of the SRC at Turfloop that I interviewed came across as students from lower-middle and working-class backgrounds; the ones "who tend to bear the brunt of existing inequities, the ones with the most to gain from social and political reforms and the individuals most likely to be caught up in the competition for status" (Lipset, cited in Dawson, 2006:281). Furthermore, the legacy of the struggle is not only about the fight against the apartheid system and Bantu Education specifically; it is also a narrative that inspires anti-authority activities of youth more generally (cf. Morrell, 2007:76). What is striking is that student leaders at Turfloop today find it so easy to identify with heroes who gave their lives in the struggle against racial oppression, which has everything to do with the received version of history

communicated to students through the history of Turfloop as struggle site (see Unterhalter, 2000).

TURFLOOP AS A SITE OF STRUGGLE.

According to the “myth of creation”, tribal leaders and dignitaries met in 1956 to decide on the establishment of a college to serve the then Northern Transvaal region. They met under a tree on the farm known as Turfloop, where the present campus is located. The ideology of racial separation was a determining factor for locating the institution in a rural township 30 kilometres east of the urban metropolis of Polokwane (formerly known as Pietersburg). The naming of the township itself was drawn from the three main ethnic groups of the area - Sotho, Venda and TsoNga – Sovenga, which underscored the ethnic basis of the University College (cf White, 1997:75). In 1959, the University College of the North was established under the trusteeship of the University of South Africa with the specific aim of serving the black population (Maja, Gwabeni & Mokwele, 2006). From 1970 onwards it started operating independently as the University of the North, which remained the name of the university until it was merged with the Medical University of South Africa in 2005 to become the University of Limpopo.

As the second-largest black university (second only to Fort Hare in the Eastern Cape) the then University of the North had a proud history of student activism. It was at the Turfloop Campus that the legendary black consciousness leader, Steve Biko, along with others, launched the South African Students’ Organisation (SASO) in 1969. The organisation aimed to promote a positive identity amongst black students (cf Dawson, 2006:278). In many ways the student activism at the time can be seen as a response to the ambivalent feelings that students were experiencing in a situation where they had to enrol in an institution designed as part of a system to oppress them. In an interview with three retired black lecturers, who studied at the college back in the early 1960s, the following statements were made about these ambivalences:

“It was more of an embarrassment to be here - but all of them [enrolled students] - we had no option but to be here and we were made up of students fresh from high school ...[...] .. all of us - we were not happy to be here, and that was the year they banned ASA and ASUSA. ASA was a student organisation of the ANC and ASUSA a student organisation of PAC. So there was a lot of tension. We were not free and the lecturers - we were all suspecting them to be the special branch, to be informers. So, it was a very difficult time.”

“We as students, our attitude was that we are here because we have no choice and - eh - our attitude was not to identify with the college because it was an imposition on the blacks and we were consciously aware that it was meant to train a product of a different type from the product trained at the so-called ‘open universities’.”

Not surprisingly, Turfloop came to have a history of tension, riots, demonstrations and unrest. Students were expelled for their political activism and the phenomenon of informers sowed distrust in the student community (White, 1997). It was not until the inauguration of SASO at Turfloop in 1969 that black students came to have a student organisation of their own. With the black African freedom movements lingering in neighbouring countries in the 1970s, black South African students had plenty of

inspiration to draw from in their struggle. An article called "Turfloop tension" published by the Sunday Express on 20 October 1974 provides a clear example of how Turfloop was viewed by the white rulers: "Turfloop has been the scene of Black student militancy almost since the day it opened in 1960. It has been the stronghold of SASO, the Black students' movement and has provided it with three presidents. Strife reached a peak two years ago when a student leader, Abram Tiro, was summarily expelled for criticising the Bantu Education system in a speech at a graduation ceremony. This sparked off Black and White student demonstrations - and a corresponding police crackdown - around the country. Now the militancy at Turfloop has been given a fresh spurt by the triumph of the Frelimo terrorist movement in Mozambique" (in White, 1997:109).

It is telling that it is exactly this impressive struggle heritage that the present-day University of Limpopo is using in trying to compete in an open market tertiary sector. In the "About us" section of the University's website, long lists of all the Black Consciousness Movement leaders emanating from Turfloop take centre stage, compared to academic achievements, as evidenced by the following passage from the website: "The period between 1970 and 1980 witnessed a number of developments and tensions within the University. The student population championed the cause of change which was inspired by the Black Consciousness Movement, while the management, which was white, sought to curtail the student political activity. During this period student organisations grew in strength by supporting the anti-apartheid struggle. Acclaimed leaders like Dr Frank Chikane, Abraham Tiro, Cyril Ramaphosa... [seven more names mentioned] ... and others made their mark in student politics in various fields of academic endeavour at the institution. UNIN alumni count among the best in Southern Africa" (University of Limpopo, nd).

The fact that the University presents itself with an emphasis on the struggle merits of former students who were often expelled from the institution, rather than through highlighting the skills and knowledge that potential students may acquire at the institution, bears testimony to the power of the struggle narrative. In this regard, Unterhalter (2006) found that the autobiographies of struggle heroes only refer to schools and universities as struggle sites, where the truth of racial oppression was revealed and became a source of identity through "heroic masculinity". Apparently, only scant reference was made by biographers to skills acquired in institutions of formal learning and how these skills equipped liberation leaders to organise and perform their struggle activities, which were, by the way, portrayed "almost exclusively in terms of encounters with men." (Unterhalter, 2000:167). As Unterhalter has further remarked, the commitment to the struggle has been driven by a received version of history, where comradeship was a proxy for the nation and struggle work was guided by an "unshakeable confidence in certain principles and sense of self" (Unterhalter, 2000:166). When male student politicians continue to stress comradeship and their readiness "to die for hot water in the student residences" it is partly because they still subscribe to this world view, where male leaders are supposed to expect nothing and be willing to sacrifice everything (Suttner, 2007).

The Turfloop Campus of today still celebrates the self-sacrificing struggle heroes: student residences, buildings and lecture halls are named after the most prominent leaders in South Africa and beyond. Although the heroes range from Nelson Mandela

to Kwame Nkrumah, the most celebrated name in struggle history at the University is definitely that of local hero Abraham Onkgopotse Tiro whose life story was recited to me over and over again in conversations with students and members of academic staff. Tiro was the president of the SRC at University of the North in the early 1970s. At a graduation ceremony held in April 1972 he described the paradoxical nature of Bantu Education through a devastating critique of the fact that the family members of black graduates were not allowed to attend the ceremony, while the families of white academic staff were present in numbers. The University administration was humiliated by the speech and decided to expel Tiro who refused to make an official apology (White 1997:104-107; Mawasha, 2006:72-73). On campus, Tiro's expulsion was followed by mass protests as an expression of black solidarity. So heated were the fights that police arrived on campus and the entire student body was expelled, with all SASO activities suspended. Beyond Turfloop, SASO organised sympathy protests at all the black universities, which led to SASO leaders being periodically banned across the country. Tiro's continued struggle activities saw him murdered by a letter bomb in Botswana in 1974. Other students took over at Turfloop and during the height of the apartheid crisis years in the 1980s the campus was transformed into a virtual battleground for clashes between students and the South African Defence Force or the police.

Although student activism is still the order of the day, it is obviously for reasons that are not directly related to the struggle against apartheid. In brief, the post-apartheid tertiary sector has seen a difficult transition from the racially segregated system under the former regime to an open and free-market, competitive system since 1994. The new system brought with it new and less favourable funding regimes and increased competition over students (Nkomo & Swartz, 2006). In this setup the former black universities have been particularly prone to funding shortages and decreasing levels of students, since black students (and the best qualified black academics) have now been allowed entrance into the well-funded, former white universities in the urban centres of Johannesburg, Cape Town and Pretoria. After the turn of the millennium the ANC-led government has pushed through merger reforms in an attempt to turn the tertiary education sector around and make universities more responsive to public service needs (Nkomo & Swartz, 2006). The policy frameworks are very ambitious, but they seem to be somehow out of tune with the reality on the ground. Given the funding shortages, the University of Limpopo keeps increasing the tuition fees and costs related to on-campus accommodation, which means that the majority of students who come from poor backgrounds find themselves in jeopardy during the annual registration, while students of the black upper or middle class often drift to the former white institutions.

Whereas struggle leaders like Biko and Tiro were clearly fighting a different kind of battle, they remain the mythical forebears whose legacy the student politicians of today wish to honour in their own struggles. This is one of the reasons why student politicians still claim that they "will fight to their last drop of blood" in trying to reduce photocopying fees. In pursuing this perspective a bit further, the next paragraph takes a closer look at the numerous ways in which the imagery of struggle is re-enacted and made real during the competition for power in the SRC.

DISCOURSES OF STRUGGLE AND REVOLUTION.

“Our history is written in blood and no amount of lies can change that”, is the message pasted on the back of the t-shirts distributed to supporters of the Pan-Africanist Students’ Movement of Azania (PASMA), which is the student wing of the Pan-African Congress (PAC). PASMA draws on the ideology inherited from the Black Consciousness Movement started by Biko and promotes a racialised policy of Africanisation. During the presentation of manifestos at the Tiro Hall at Turfloop, the PASMA presidential candidate claimed that “we are going to fight to the last drop of our blood to ensure that we achieve an increase in student subsidies”. Through this sustained emphasis on their willingness to “bleed” for the students, PASMA leaders establish a clear connection with the bloody struggle that their organisation had been part of in the past. But PASMA was not alone in making claims to struggle history during the course of the SRC elections at Turfloop Campus in October 2006.

In a widely distributed poster, the South African Student Congress (SASCO) made reference to the 1976 uprising in which the children of Soweto marched and protested against being taught in Afrikaans. Using an iconographic photograph of the 1976 struggle in conjunction with the messages, “Realize the 1976 dream” and “Fight for quality student services”, SASCO could hardly have been more explicit in their references to the struggle history of the organisation. Despite the fact that SASCO is generally seen as the student wing of the ruling ANC (Dawson, 2006), the situation at Turfloop in October 2006 was slightly confusing, given that the ANC Youth League (ANCYL) had suddenly entered the game of student politics as an independent player. Nevertheless, the use of the photo claims the struggle history to be that of ANC rather than PAC (or PASMA in the realm of student politics).

With hindsight it can be noted that the ANCYL was acting in an overconfident manner when they entered Turfloop. Leaders of the league kept telling me and everybody else that they were sure of winning the elections, and that they did not even consider the option of losing. Through their political connections to the mother party they had access to resources in the forms of vehicles, t-shirts, money for pre-election parties and other social events. So confident were the leaders of eventual victory, that they were already planning the celebration party in the form of ordering food and DJs, when I conducted participant observation at one of their pre-election parties. Among the competing organisations, however, the ANCYL probably made the least reference to struggle history, although in their election leaflet, the tenth bullet point: “Vote ANCYL which was formed by comrade Nelson Mandela and later led by forever roaring young lion of the comrade Peter Mokaba (Youth League of the Ruling Party, the ANC)”. Perhaps this goes a long way in explaining how the competing organisations, notably PASMA, succeeded in framing the Youth League as “the ANC baby league” in their written materials and public speeches. Through this nickname the Youth League was ridiculed as a bunch of immature children who did not have any credibility in terms of holding student political office. The jokes about the Youth League were emasculating in the sense that it was not just adulthood, but rather manhood, that they were seen to be lacking. In intricate ways the apartheid theme of denied manhood thus made its way into the student elections at Turfloop in 2006. The “baby” mark left the members of the Youth League struggling to successfully represent themselves as the “young lions” or “comrades” of the North.

Irrespective of the organisations students belonged to, during the weeks of campaigning they addressed each other almost solely by means of military jargon, using titles such as general, commander, colonel and lieutenant. Many even dressed up in camouflage clothing or wore t-shirts with Ché Guevara emblems or green army caps. In terms of language, many turned to the use of violent metaphors and allegories when speaking of wars, bombs, bullets, fights, revolutions, killings, and oppression and liberation (Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 1994). In an introduction to how the concept of class intersects with masculinity, David Morgan (2005) has made a number of very pertinent remarks about the symbolism of class struggle: “Representations of class struggle and class differences traditionally drew from masculine imagery. Although the rhetoric might refer to ‘working people,’ the representations of the working class frequently included masculine symbols (such as the hammer or clenched fists) and emphasised collective solidarity. At the very least, such representations of solidarity dissolved gender differences in a large class identity and frequently went further than this to convey collective, embodied masculinity. The language was the language of struggle, of class war and conflict” (Morgan, 2005:170).

The primary embodied ritual of class struggle is the raised arm of the mass meeting, which is used by all the student organisations at Turfloop in combination with the struggle slogan: “Amandla” [Power]. Furthermore, three of the organisations also have a clenched fist or a hammer in their logo. The very idea of working-class symbolism in a university setting is in a way contradictory. The working-class symbolism draws on a masculinity that is collective, physical and embodied and oppositional, while the educational process that the individual student is going through is most likely to take him to a place where his performance of masculinity will be much more individualistic, rational, and relatively disembodied (Morgan, 2005). Obviously, this could be said about leftwing inspired student activism at any university campus across the globe; and the collective activism may be linked to what Lipset (cited in Dawson 2006) has called *protest-proneness*. Similarly, Nkomo has pointed out that students are likely to protest when there is a radical discrepancy between their worldview and that of the political authorities (Nkomo, cited in Dawson, 2006:280). In the case of students at Turfloop, while they came from impoverished working-class backgrounds, I think that one could also argue that they were professionals in the making. Their immediate outlook may have been determined more by the social position that they came from than the one they were likely to take up in the future.

I also would like to argue that the fact that student politics draw so heavily on discourses of the struggle against apartheid and the necessity of class struggle tends to marginalise the position of women in the struggle matrix. It is widely known that discrimination is often organised along the divisions of race, class and gender. In the case of student politics gender remains a neglected field. This could partly be due to the fact that traditional class analysis tended to marginalise women, since they have traditionally been seen as belonging to the domestic sphere and thus outside the formalised public sphere of production (Morgan, 2005). Similarly, men have been seen as both the agents of class and the holders of class power due to their dominant position vis-à-vis property and occupation (Morgan, 2005). Seen from this angle, the political subject has to be a man. Hence, the struggle has to be fought by men. This goes some way in explaining how the gender dimension can so easily be left out or forgotten in male student politicians’ struggle against inequality and oppression at the

University of Limpopo. However, it is necessary to explore and scrutinise the masculinities at play a bit further to fully appreciate the notions of gender that underpin them.

REASON AND EMOTION, GENDER AND POLITICS.

Generally, male students see themselves as being much more rational and in control of their emotions than their female counterparts. Among the Pedi, the group to whom the majority of students belong, fearlessness in men has always been a celebrated virtue as documented in the classical monograph written by Mönnig (1967:14): “The Pedi have a well-known proverb in praise of men who control their emotions: *Monna ke nku, o llela teng* [the man is like a sheep, he cries inside], which refers to the fact that sheep make no noise when slaughtered, for which they are greatly admired and which makes them highly desired sacrificial animals”.

In the same vein informants kept telling me that “real men don’t cry” and that it would be highly emasculating for them to be caught crying. When speaking of politics, male students often claim that women do not have the mental capacity to stay cool, objective and in essence make sound judgments. In an informal discussion with one of the male representatives of the student council I was told that “the girls are too emotional” and that “they cry in the boardrooms”. Clearly, in this account of gender the faculty of reason is equated with being male. While male students thus tend to assume a strong connection between rationality and masculinity (very similar to the connection identified by Seidler [1987] in Western Europe since the Enlightenment), men often see women as belonging to a world of emotion and desire. According to these lines of thinking, men have sex because they enjoy it, while women engage in sex because they need it. It follows from this that men are capable of controlling both mind and body, while women have difficulty controlling either of them. There is, however, always the possibility that a woman may succeed in seducing a man thereby becoming a threat to his faculty of reason. A case in point is that many of the female students actively involved in the SRC campaigns were dressed up in ways that were highly sexualised. For example, four female ANCYL supporters had torn their T-shirts across their breasts and went around handing out leaflets. The male ANCYL members stated in triumph: “Our female comrades are going to seduce the male voters!”

Likewise, female PASMA supporters had sewn the PASMA logo onto the buttocks of their jeans and drew attention to it by dancing around with green leaves sticking out of the rear pockets. While this was clearly also a festive celebration of a colourful campaign, it is somehow telling that I never heard a single political speech made by a female student politician during my eleven-month stay at Turfloop. In the sphere of student politics there seems to be an implicit understanding that they are simply not able to make rational contributions to the campaign and struggle, and thus they have to use their bodies and charms to fight for the worthy cause instead. Based on the view of the differences that exist between men and women, it is hardly surprising that many students see politics as a naturally male sphere of influence. I have had some difficulty in figuring out to what extent female students subscribe to these notions of how reason and emotion have been distributed among men and women. In one interview, though, I sensed that female students also hold themselves back and that there could be an element of the dominated group accepting the categorisation prescribed by the dominant group (see Bourdieu, 2001).

The interview in question was conducted with a female student, who was just about to receive her BA-degree in political science. On the day of the SRC elections I saw her touring all over campus in a T-shirt with the following message posted on her breast in capital letters: "BRING BACK ZUMA". Given that former Deputy President Jacob Zuma had just stood accused of rape and that had made several insensitive remarks about women in relation to his court case as well as to virginity testing in his home province of KwaZulu Natal, I found it interesting that she, as a female university student, was using her own clothing as a campaign to request that he be brought back to office. Like many other South Africans she believes that Zuma was a champion of the struggle against apartheid, and that he has earned his right to become the President of South Africa. The court cases against Zuma, she claimed, serve as evidence that some of his political opponents (most notably the then President, Thabo Mbeki) were trying to frame him as part of a conspiracy. Her support for Zuma also appeared to be based on ethnic identification, since she came from the province of KwaZulu-Natal. At one point in the interview we entered into discussions of the possibility of having a female president and the opportunity for her to participate in student politics on campus:

Q (student): "So, it's also a question of who is going to be the President on the other side, because honestly speaking I am a woman, I know that - I don't think the country is ready to be led by a woman."

B (interviewer): "Oh, why is that?"

Q: "Uhmhhh - [whispering] I don't think so. I don't know how to explain this. [Lengthy pause] I don't think a woman - as if it's the woman I know - the Deputy President - I - I - don't think she is ready to lead the country. Although they are saying they are empowering women and all that - but it's too early for this country to be led by a woman. Not that I am looking down at women - I am a woman on my own - but - eh - I don't think so. I am not sure ..."

B: "When you say the country is not ready - eh - for a female President - is it because of the people or because of that specific person lining up?"

Q: "No. it's not about the specific person. I think - ehm - women are not yet empowered, I think. That is why I am saying we are not ready to be led by a woman. So - it's like they are taking this empowerment - they are just doing it - so we don't have to do it in a sense that we have to put someone in a top position knowing already this person won't be able to do that."

B: "What about - I mean - you are not only a woman - you are also a woman qualifying right now with a degree in political science. What - what does it make you think - what about your own generation?"

Q: "My generation [...] we are not into politics - I think they are empowering women, which is one of the things to empower when it comes to politics - although it is difficult. You go into a class of international politics or political science - we are so few. Out of twenty you find that there are only three women - although - besides that - those three women - you can't talk in class. Men are always speaking. You want to speak - ahrrr - you feel somehow - I don't know - I am one of the people - I want to speak in class, but

the guys are always speaking. They will tell you - 'You are lying' - one, two, three - one, two, three. Somewhere somehow they are not building us - and to see that my generation is not involved in politics. They are all interested in this [...] music and everything - but when it comes to politics [...] - arhhh - one, two, three - you tell them - they don't even want to listen to us, but it's a very interesting thing - although it is challenging ..."

Later in the interview the student moved on to tell me how she enjoys following the progress of the SRC negotiations, but that she did not feel empowered to run for a seat, because she was still learning by observing what goes on. Meanwhile, she claimed that in 15 years time probably women will have been empowered for real. Then South Africa will be ready for a female President, while she herself would like to become an Ambassador to a foreign country. The ideas of this female student are telling and her case reveals something about the intricate ways of subordinate discourses. On the one hand she is definitely constraining herself in terms of her political involvement; on the other she is exercising political agency in a number of ways (remember how I identified her due to the political slogan on her T-shirt). Cornwall and Lindisfarne's (1994) observation that hegemonic and subordinate discourses are equally constructed seems pertinent in this regard. Drawing on James Scott's insights about "the weapons of the weak" (in Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 1994:24), they note that: "Those who dominate in any particular setting are constrained by the hidden transcripts of their subordinates, while the subordinates are neither passive nor mystified, but actively negotiate their position vis-à-vis those who are more powerful" (Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 1994:24).

It is also interesting that she seemed to think of disempowerment as a temporary condition; something that will definitely have changed in 15 years' time. What makes her case even more intriguing is the fact that she came across as someone who subscribed to a number of African traditionalist gender views when discussing issues of virginity testing, marriage and leadership. For instance, she dismissed the current President of the SRC at Turfloop Campus because of his inexperience and youth and because she did not see him as a real African man with leadership potential. While on the one hand she did not align herself with feminist ideas, she seemed insistent that as a female citizen there is a fair share that she that she will be able to claim in the future. It seems that she seeks to position herself in a grander scheme where she is simultaneously influenced by discourses of gender, ethnicity, leadership, education and empowerment, and where it is difficult to tell which one will take precedence over the others or how they will interact during the course of her life. The next paragraph looks at something similar; namely how the SRC president elect managed to engage with discourses of the struggle in ways that represented him as someone capable of winning the elections against the backdrop of many students' view of him as someone who was "not man enough" to run for office.

SEXUALITY, CLASS AND LEADERSHIP.

In studies of men in South Africa, it has often been noted that a very active and visible sex life is particularly salient to many young men's sense of their own and others' masculinity (Wood & Jewkes, 1998; Wood & Jewkes, 2001; Hunter, 2004), while women's sex life is subject to stricter social norms and expectations. In the same vein it is admirable, at the Turfloop Campus, for a young man to be seen as *lenyora* (Sotho for

tough guy, someone who is successful with women), while a young woman would not want to be dubbed *sefebe/isifebe* (Sotho/Zulu for bitch; a woman who sleeps around). Public opinion of the candidates running for the 2006/2007 SRC presidency (who were all male) thus centred intensively on the issue of their relationship status. The outgoing President from PASMA was a close to 30-year-old male student, who was in a steady relationship with a female student (called by some “the first lady”). He was eventually succeeded by his PASMA comrade of 21 years, who did not have a steady relationship nor seemed to have casual lovers. In conversations among students on campus considerable attention was paid to the issue of the new president’s supposed celibacy, his youth and his short stature. The fact that he did not have a visible and demonstrably active sex life reflected negatively on his public image as a leader. Combined with his relative youthfulness this made him vulnerable to claims that he was not enough of a “real man” to be the president of the SRC. This resonates with expectations of traditional patriarchs to demonstrate the extent of their authority and control through marrying many women (cf Hunter, 2004:126). While the new president did not live up to this ideal of masculinity, he performed his masculinities in other ways that convinced the student electorate.

In speeches made during the election campaign and immediately after the elections, the new President made an effort to situate and position himself vis-à-vis other student politicians. During an award-giving ceremony he thus went to some lengths to emphasise the numerous academic distinctions that he had earned during the course of his studies. This was not only a boasting strategy; it also sharply separated him from the old cadre of student politicians who – more often than not – failed to perform academically. At the same time, he was the PASMA character championing the use of struggle metaphors and liberation rhetoric. In every speech he would make reference to “Karl Marx, his greatest forefather” and outline the need for class struggle and revolution. He made this a part of his personal narrative, since he came from an impoverished household. Whereas he did not succeed in projecting himself as a “real man” in terms of his relations with members of the opposite sex, he was able to distinguish himself by virtue of his achievements in the realm of academia, while simultaneously using his own class background to engage meaningfully with the rhetoric of class struggle. This proved to be an effective strategy against the ANC-aligned SASCO that Alexander (2006:36) describes thus: “too tied into old-style politics, careerism and the administration of student councils to relate well to the majority of students, and because it is broadly pro-government it holds back from agitating on behalf of those with financial hardships”.

One can therefore argue that the new president managed to strike a cord that was attuned to the student electorate, who largely emanate from rural areas characterised by low levels of service delivery and few income generating opportunities. At the same time it shows just how contradictory the engagement of discourses of masculinities can be in the context of student politics. Although he did not live up to the ideal of a “real man”, successful with women, the SRC president and his organisation managed to dismiss the competing organisations as “babies” and “traitors”. To complete this complex picture, it should be added that the new president was also a dedicated Christian belonging to the Zionist Christian Church, which is a personal feature that he intentionally downplayed in public. For one, it would not necessarily go down very well with the PASMA supporters; and secondly, it did not go well with his explicit dedication

to Marxism. When asked directly, he claimed that he found it challenging to reconcile Marxism and Zionist Christianity. Still, he managed to do so and emerged the victor of the 2006-2007 SRC elections.

The case of the new SRC president bears testimony to the contradictions and complexities involved in the gendered discourses of politics and identity. There is no simple fix in trying to understand how different sources of identity such as race, class and gender intersect. Therefore, in the analysis of discourses of masculinity it is too rigid to think simply of distinctive masculinities that replace one another the way that Xaba (2001) has it. Different discourses of masculinity are not mutually exclusive or separate or bound in time. Rather, they are historically constructed, entangled in other powerful discourses, fluid and continuously in the making. Therefore the conclusion holds that this process of meaning making at the level of actors deserve more attention than they have been granted in most of the studies inspired by Connell's (1995) concept of hegemonic masculinities.

CONCLUSION.

This article set out to analyse how subject positions in discourse are taken up by organisations and individual actors, and how in the process discourses translate into social practice. More specifically, the intention was to show how student politicians at the University of Limpopo engage with discourses of the struggle and discourses of masculinity and how this influence has a negative bearing on women's participation in student politics. With reference to the literature on "struggle masculinity" (Xaba, 2001) or "heroic masculinity" (Unterhalter, 2000), this might come across as a classic example of what Connell calls "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell, 1995). The material presented, however, also poses challenges to such an understanding due to the overlapping hegemonies, the inherent contradictions and the agency of both men and women.

Firstly, if one, like Connell, follows Gramsci's thinking, hegemonic ideologies preserve, legitimate and naturalise the interests of the powerful (Gramsci, cited in Wetherell & Edley, 1999:536). Applied to the present analysis it would then seem as if struggle discourse is where the real hegemony is located, since the masculine discourses are by and large subsumed under or entangled in struggle discourse. Wetherell and Edley (1999) observe that Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity has become too sealed off from other hegemonic ways of being a person and that there is a need for new theoretical avenues to analyse overlapping hegemonies and the entanglement of gender in other domains. The ways in which the president elect engaged with discourses of class and academic achievement pointed in a similar direction. Probably, intersectional readings would not be the answer to this challenge, because the analytical outlook of hegemonic masculinities takes for granted that gender precedes other social divisions and that it is the relation *between* masculinities that is of chief importance (Connell, 1995).

Secondly, both the case of the president elect and the female student, who was supportive of Jacob Zuma, provide examples of individuals who subscribe to gender discourses that are at one and the same time complicit with, and resistant to, dominant masculine discourses. Hence, there is a need for analytical concepts that have the

capacity to embrace elements of complicity and resistance in any one individual (Wetherell & Edley, 1999).

Thirdly, hegemonic masculinity in Connell's account is such a powerful concept that it "acts" and "impacts" on the world in a reified manner thus making it difficult to see where the agency of individuals comes into play. Even if "the bearers" (Connell, 1995:77) of hegemonic masculinity are accorded a certain degree of agency, the agency of the subordinate would remain more or less invisible (Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 1994). Through the description of how female students used their body to campaign for different student organisations, as well as the explanations provided by the woman supportive of Zuma, it became clear that even people in subordinate positions have important choices to make in relation to agency. Similarly, the president elect was far from an "ideal macho man" due to his youth, short stature and "unsuccessful" record with women. Still, he managed to draw on other hegemonic discourses that allowed him to compete for the position of SRC president. As noted by Cornwall and Lindisfarne (1994:20), "powerlessness in one arena does not preclude having considerable influence elsewhere."

On these grounds, the analysis of the SRC elections points beyond a rigid model of masculinities, where individuals and organisations are too easily reduced to character typologies. Attempts to unfix the apparent boundedness of hegemonic masculinities through intersected readings will, unfortunately, not be sufficient, because it tends to presuppose that other social divisions are also fixed prior to the intersection. Recently, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) have tried to take issue with such criticisms in a rethinking of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, but they have maintained the plurality and fixed hierarchy of masculinities at the expense of approaches that take more of an interest in what anthropologists call social actors or what psychologist call subjectivities. Where anthropologists ask for theoretical models that allow for complex descriptions of people's everyday lives (cf Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 1994:44), psychologists would like to see a "specification on how hegemonic masculinity might become effective in men's psyches" (Wetherell & Edley, 1999:337). The present analysis therefore suggests that it is useful to think of multiple and overlapping discourses that influence social actors who are left to do the action. It follows from this that the existence of hegemonic discourses must be qualified and demonstrated through nitty-gritty descriptions of how meanings are invested and interpreted by social agents rather than being taken for granted.

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