

# Privilege, solidarity and social justice struggles in South Africa: A view from Grahamstown

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## Abstract

The last decade has seen a significant increase in the number and prominence of social movements in South Africa. Many of these movements are supported by relatively privileged individuals who are not themselves victims of the injustices the movements oppose. In this paper, I draw out some of the possibilities and limitations of the role of privileged individuals in supporting social movements struggling for social justice, looking particularly at the role of students in supporting such movements. The paper is based on research on the relationship between one such movement, the Unemployed People's Movement (UPM), and a student organisation, the Students for Social Justice (SSJ), both of which are based in Grahamstown, South Africa. While acknowledging that privileged supporters of such movements can play a constructive role in social justice struggles, I use the experiences of the UPM and SSJ to explore some of the tensions that are likely to emerge and that need to be addressed when the relatively privileged participate in popular struggles. In particular, I discuss the likely difficulties privileged supporters will experience in bridging social divides and in contributing meaningfully to the theorisation of popular struggles.