

Epistemic Freedom in Africa

Deprovincialization and Decolonization

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Chapter 9

Rhodes Must Fall

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9

RHODES MUST FALL

Introduction

Cecil John Rhodes was a leading British imperialist whose imperial ambition was to colonize the whole of Africa and turning it into a colony of Britain. After more than 100 years, Rhodes continues to live in the form of memorials and statues, a university that is named after him (Rhodes University in Grahamstown), a prestigious scholarship known as the Rhodes Scholarship, a Rhodes Professorial Chair of Race Relations at Oxford University and a Foundation known as Mandela-Rhodes Foundation that conjoined the name of a leading African decolonial fighter to that of the notorious imperialist (see Maylam 2005; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2016b). One wonders why such a racist who openly declared that he valued land over the lives of African people received such recognition and symbolization that transcends the colonial/apartheid period.

One strand of explanation is that there is no doubt that Rhodes was a major historical figure and that his memorials and statues are recognition of history not celebration of his violent colonial deeds. Is keeping the memorials and statues of Rhodes, who committed genocides, dispossessed Africans of their lands, colonized them, exploited them and looted their resources, under the pretext of preservation of history not tantamount to asking a raped woman to keep a big picture of a rapist in her bedroom as a sign of an event which took place and that cannot be erased? Is keeping Rhodes' statue at the centre of UCT too different from keeping Adolf Hitler's statue in Israel? Even Germans have been too ashamed to erect statues of Hitler, even in Germany itself. It is these questions that led to the second strand of argument, which is decolonial in orientation and views the continued existence of Rhodes' memorials and statues in South Africa as a sign of colonial/apartheid arrogance and refusal by those who benefitted from his colonial plunder to express repentance and tolerance of the feelings of those who Rhodes abused.

It is the decolonial perspective that sparked the Rhodes Must Fall movements in South Africa in 2015. In decolonial thought Rhodes is a symbol of genocide, enslavement, conquest, colonization, apartheid, material dispossession and author of inequalities haunting South Africa today. Thus, the attacking of the statue was a decolonial symbolic gesture of confronting a system of coloniality. It is therefore not surprising that what emerged as Rhodes Must Fall quickly mutated into sub-nomenclatures and hashtags such as Fees Must Fall, Open Stellenbosch, Transform Wits, Patriarchy Must Fall and many others. This is how decoloniality announced itself in South Africa, drawing inspiration from such earlier decolonial movements as the Black Consciousness as well as Fanonian decolonial thought.

However, to gain a deeper understanding of this movement, it is vital to open the canvas and contextualize it within the evolving and contested idea of South Africa at the national level.

At the continental level, Rhodes Must Fall is part of the three phases of African protest movement (anti-colonial protests of the 1950s and 1960s; the 1980s and 1990s waves of anti-austerity protests that dragged into the Arab Spring/Arab Awakening that engulfed North Africa). At the planetary level, it is part of those political and epistemological decolonial formations that are targeting global coloniality as it is currently represented by neoliberal capitalism. Only through such an approach that simultaneously historicizes, contextualizes and theorizes, will we develop the correct vocabulary of naming the student protests that broke out in South Africa in 2015 and 2016. They were part of a resurgent decolonial struggles of the twenty-first century. They demonstrate that decolonization is a true liberatory idea, which has defied many attempts to bury it.

At the centre of the Rhodes Must Fall is an ideological amalgamation of radical black feminism, black consciousness, Fanonianism and Pan-Africanism as constitutive parts of decolonial thought. Decolonial thought has never been a singular closed system of knowledge feeding into decolonial struggles. The demands of the Rhodes Must Fall movements were clearly framed by a broader demand for decolonization of the university in South Africa. More specifically, the demands can be categorized into free, quality, decolonized education; end to sexism, patriarchy and racism; decommissioning of all offensive colonial/apartheid iconographies; restoration of use of indigenous African languages in teaching, learning and research in universities; and re-humanizing those outsourced workers through insourcing of their services. This is why the student activist Athabile Nonxuba defined Rhodes Must Fall movements as propelled by ‘an oath of allegiance that everything to do with oppression and conquest of black people by white power must fall and be destroyed’ (cited in Booysen 2016: 4).

Theorizing and contextualizing protests in Africa

The leading South African sociologist Bernard Makhosezwe Magubane (1977) posed five arguments about the importance of theory and history in the analysis

of contemporary developments. First, he emphasized the importance deployment of ‘comprehensive theory of social change, for an understanding of the laws of motion that define the epoch and the social formation under examination’ (Magubane 1977: 148). Second, he noted that ‘Fragmentary descriptions, however voluminous and detailed, provide no substitute whatsoever for sustained reasoned theoretical argument’ (Magubane 1977: 48). Third, he criticized academics involved in Southern Africa studies of ‘participating in the tacit intellectual consensus to avoid seeing the present problems as historical problems’ (Magubane 1977: 148). Fourth, he reiterated that ‘Once again, the detailed examination of tress eliminates the forest from sight’ (Magubane 1977: 148). Finally, he criticized liberal scholars for contributing ‘little or nothing to our understanding of the current era in Southern Africa’ and only succeeding in obfuscation of ‘the complexities of the social movement in Southern Africa’ as they avoided genuine and rigorous historicization of issues (Magubane 1977: 148).

Indeed, the current ‘uprisings’ rocking ‘postcolonial’ Africa in particular and the world at large have revealed the core inadequacies of existing social theories, particularly the Marxist and liberal analyses. For example, from both a Marxist and liberal understanding, the contemporary world is facing a ‘middle class revolt’ (Branch and Mamphilly 2015: 201). The thinking is that a disgruntled professional class that is globalized is pushing for deeper liberal democratization. If it is not the middle class that is identified as the drivers of protests, then it is the ‘precariat’ class/new proletariat/multitudes of precarious working classes of unemployed, underemployed and indebted experiencing the harsh effects of global capitalism (Harvey 2012; Branch and Mamphilly 2015: 203).

This analysis is inadequate at many levels. While it tries to provide a universalist interpretation of contemporary complex politics of protest, it remained locked in narrow class analysis that obscures the complexities and multifaceted issues at play in the contemporary protest movements. What it then missed are the varying historical contexts within which contemporary African protests have emerged. The reality is that Rhodes Must Fall movements defy easy class analysis because they are an amalgam of many class and non-class issues of gender, culture, language, symbols, curriculum, finance and epistemology. The very category of ‘middle class’, which is increasingly being used today, tends to encompass a bulk of property-less people who were highly indebted whereas the category ‘working class’ embraced millions of what can be correctly termed ‘working poor’ like security guards and cleaners who were paid R2000 per month in South Africa. This is why Adam Branch and Zachariah Mamphilly argued ‘A realistically defined middle class would comprise only a narrow silver of Africa’s population, set against a backdrop in which nearly half of all Africans live in extreme poverty, with numbers growing’ (Branch and Mamphilly 2015: 1).

Race rather than class is still an invisible but active organizing principle of informing unchanging patterns of inequality, poverty, Eurocentric curriculum, alienating university cultures, use of ‘foreign’/colonial languages of instruction and

standing colonial/apartheid symbols. Like all other protests, Rhodes Must Fall movements were riddled by tensions, contradictions, ambivalences and violence, making them difficult to interpret from a singular class perspective. But it is not only Marxist and liberal theories that were limited, existing social theories coming from Europe and North America in their market (materialist/class analysis), sociological (race theory), psychoanalytical, culturalist, poststructuralist, postmodernist and postcolonial versions have reached an 'epistemic break'/crisis/exhaustion (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015).

It was Immanuel Wallerstein (1991) who revealed that nineteenth-century social science's presumptions were previously considered to possess a 'liberating of the spirit' served 'today as the central intellectual barrier to useful analysis of the social world'. This delving into the epistemological questions and crisis is important because the Rhodes Must Fall movements were loudly calling for what Brenda Cooper and Robert Morrell (2014) termed 'Africa-centred knowledges' as a form of cognitive justice.

What is fuelling contemporary African protest movements in general and South African student movements in particular cannot be simply reduced to a crisis of capitalism as an economic system. In the Rhodes Must Fall movements particularly, there is a clear revolt against epistemological domination and cultural extroversion. A modern civilizational crisis better encapsulates what is generating protests. Aime Cesaire (1972: 31) described European civilization predicated on imperialism and colonialism as a 'decadent civilization' and 'dying civilization' as far back as 1955. A crisis of civilization is also highlighted by Cornel West (1987) who wrote of 'a pervasive and profound crisis of North Atlantic civilization' as he tried to understand the specific problems of black Americans. Slavoj Žižek (2011: x) also underscored the enormity of a civilizational crisis when he posited that the global capitalist system was approaching 'an apocalyptic zero-point' in the process, producing ecological crises, inequalities and poverty, struggles over raw materials, food and water as well as 'the explosive growth of social divisions and exclusions'.

Adam Branch and Zachariah Mampilly (2015) provided a good contextualization of contemporary African protests in recent African history. They correctly emphasized 'the need to look inward to Africa's own past and its own history of protest before looking outward to events in the rest of the world in order to explain today's continental protest wave' (Branch and Mampilly 2015, p. 2). This approach is very important as it addresses the problem that Mahmood Mamdani (1996) described as writing 'history by analogy'. Mamdani specifically revealed the problem of 'received democratic theory' in these revealing ways:

For a curious feature of current African politics is to draw prescription from a context other than the one that gave rise to its problems. Whereas the source of demands is the existing African context, the framework for solutions is generally a received theory of democracy which has little to do with contemporary realities in Africa.

(Mamdani 1992: 2228)

He went further to state:

The framework of received theory is a set of assumptions which do not always reflect realities on the continent. The clash between assumptions and realities can either lead to sterile attempts to enforce textbook solution or be rich source of creative reflection.

(Mamdani 1992: 2228)

What emerges poignantly from this analysis is that any comprehensive and correct understanding of protest politics in Africa must focus on actually existing protest politics and in its complex dynamics. Branch and Mampilly (2015) categorized the actually existing protest politics into three broad waves while concentrating on the identification of the active motive forces/social bases of each of the protests. The first wave was that of anti-colonial protests that culminated in 'political independence' of Africa. The second emerged in the 1980s and 1990s ranged against single-party, military dictatorships and austerity measures imposed by Bretton Woods institutions. Today, we are facing a 'third wave' of protests of which we are engage in understanding 'what political transformations it may foretell' (Branch and Mamphilly 2015: 3). What is clear is that the ideology of 'fallism' that involved removal of colonial statues is framed by a broad resurgence of decolonial demands and decolonial politics.

The anti-colonial protests of the 1950s and 1960s were spearheaded by a 'detrribalized' (see Mamdani 1996) urban 'underclass' of Africans who constituted a 'political society' (Chatterjee 2011) of those who had nothing to lose and everything to win in the dismantlement of colonialism. These Africans had a very conflictual relationship with the colonial state – 'a relation defined by an alternation between neglect and direct violence, between extra-legality and illegality' (Branch and Mamphilly 2015: 20). This social category of Africans faced urban controls, night searches, forced removals and overt violence of the state. The category 'worker' does not include these people's identity within a colonial political economy and governmentality: they were dispossessed and unemployed. They were uprooted from rural areas, separated from their kinsmen and women, they lived in 'the shanty town' and constantly faced the full force of colonial power.

This 'political identity' made them to constitute in Frantz Fanon's (1968: 129) analysis 'one of most spontaneous and the most radical revolutionary forces of a colonized people'. What emerges from this analysis is: 'Different political identities, based on different relations to state power, produce different forms of political action' (Branch and Mamphilly 2015: 21). Unlike workers in a colonial environment who tend to protest for higher wages or improved working conditions while conscious of preserving their jobs, what Fanon termed the 'lumpenproletariat' do not fight for reforms – they are propelled 'by a more radical need to transform the very conditions of life, which are enforced by an arbitrary and violent state power' (Branch and Mamphilly 2015: 21). It was this social base that provided the foot soldiers of the anti-colonial forces. But the anti-colonial struggles did not succeed in delivering a genuinely 'postcolonial' dispensation. As eloquently articulated by Grosfoguel:

The heterogeneous and multiple global structures put in place over a period of 450 years did not evaporate with the juridical-political decolonization of the periphery over the past 50 years. We continue to live under the same 'colonial power matrix'. With juridical-political decolonization we moved from a period of 'global colonialism' to the current period of 'global coloniality'.

(Grosfoguel 2007: 219)

Inevitably, the second wave of protests of the 1980s and 1990s were sparked by a combination of realization of the 'myths of decolonization' (see Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013b), failure of the 'postcolonial' redistributive developmental state, dictatorship, austerity measures and repression that was encouraged by Bretton Woods institutions (Onimode 1992). The activists included nascent civil society, students, workers and intellectuals. The struggles were multifaceted to the extent that the concept of 'third wave of democratization' occludes the complexities, ambivalences, ambiguities, diversities and other alternative readings of protests and the concomitant diverse imagined horizons (Branch and Mamphilly 2015: 65–66).

The 'third wave of African protest' is what we are seeing today, of which Rhodes Must Fall movements are part. At the forefront seems to be a category called 'the youth', tired on being put in a permanent state of what Alcinda Honwana (2013) termed 'waithood'. Branch and Mampilly (2015) have distilled broad causes of the current wave of protests. First: 'The multiparty regimes and neoliberal economies that emerged from the upheavals of the late 1980s and early 1990s have proven unable to meet popular aspirations for fundamental change' (Branch and Mamphilly 2015: 67). In short, the changes of the 1990s left the 'precarious livelihoods of urban political society' unresolved, hence today's vehement 'rejection of the neoliberal economy by Africa's poor' (Branch and Mamphilly 2015: 70). The second condition precipitating current protests is the continuing lack of accountability, poor delivery of service and use of violence by the state even under multiparty democracy (Branch and Mamphilly 2015: 72). In all this, the Arab Spring/Arab Awakening that emerged in North Africa seem to fall within the second wave of democratic transition that took place in the rest of Africa in the late 1980s and 1990s (Juma 2011).

Having framed the core issues of protest from the continental perspective, a turn to South Africa is in order. Julian Brown (2015) argues that 'a consensus politics' of 1994 and the post-apartheid dream of a rainbow nation has collapsed and in the cracks and fractures of South Africa's political order has emerged an 'insurgent citizen', new forms of activity, new leaders and new movements. Brown posited that 'our existing society has inequality at its core. The formal political order seems to separate from the social and political worlds of ordinary citizens, and the poor' (Brown 2015: 148).

The spectre of the paradigm of difference in South Africa

A problematic paradigm of difference produced a conflict-ridden and contested idea of South Africa. Economic and social inequality haunting South Africa is a

consequence of the colonial/apartheid implementation the paradigm of difference. The root of all political, economic, social and epistemological problems haunting South Africa today and provoking current citizen uprisings are genealogically and historically traceable to the implementation of the paradigm of difference.

Valentin Y. Mudimbe (1988: 4) explained that the paradigm of difference enacted 'the colonizing structure responsible for producing marginal societies, cultures, and human beings'. As articulated in the previous chapters, the other name for the 'paradigm of difference' is the 'colour line' (Du Bois 1903). It is a very troublesome line because it gave birth to other lines such as the gender line, the class line, the sexual orientation line and many others (Gordon 2000: 63). The paradigm of difference is the mother and father of all forms fundamentalisms and politics of alterity.

In South Africa the paradigm of difference produced apartheid, which was institutionalized in 1948. Its short-sighted ideologues celebrated and sold it to their white constituencies as 'separate development' (a colonial euphemism for legalized racial inequality and oppression). Chief Albert Luthuli (2006: 148) correctly characterized the institutionalization of apartheid as 'a tragic failure of imagination' in which 'We Africans are depersonalized by whites, our humanity and dignity reduced in their imagination to a minimum'. What was 'tragic' was its inscription of what Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2007) termed 'impossibility of co-presence' through such legislation as the Native Land Act of 1913, Urban Areas Act of 1923, Extension of University of Education Act of 1959, among many others that not only demarcated land but segregated people as well as students into black and white spaces and white, black, Indian and coloured universities (Davies 1996, pp. 319–332).

What was even more 'tragic' was apartheid government's official attempts to 'de-nationalize' the majority black indigenous population through forced removals from urban areas and pushing all black people into invented 'Bantustans' as well as fragmenting black people into rigid tribal identities (Neocosmos 2010: 20). This created a misnomer that Michael Neocosmos (2010) rendered as a shift from 'foreign natives' to 'native foreigners'. Since then, South Africa has been haunted by complex struggles not only for simple inclusion and equality by those who were excluded, peripherized and pauperized but for humanity itself.

The very idea of South Africa became spoiled from its birth by this paradigm of difference and its practice of 'impossibility of co-presence' and 'de-nationalization' of indigenous people. Inevitably it unfolded and fossilized as a highly contested and conflict-generating identitarian phenomenon. Here was born the core problem of South Africa, which is that of 'a struggle to become South African' and human by those who were excluded (Dubow 2007: 72). This problem can be rendered as an idea, a national question, and a liberation challenge. As an idea, it was well captured by Kader Asmal (2001: 1) in these words:

Here was born an idea, a South African idea, of moulding a people from diverse origins, cultural practices, languages, into one, within a framework

democratic in character, that can absorb, accommodate and mediate conflicts and adversarial interests without oppression and injustice.

At the centre of this idea were such national questions as ‘What is the post-apartheid nation?’ ‘Who belongs or is excluded, and on what basis?’ ‘How does a “national identity gain its salience and power to transcend the particularities of ethnicity and race?”’ (Bundy 2007: 79). Inevitably, the contested idea of South Africa imposed itself on the liberatory discourse and agenda as a challenge of how to resolve the related questions of being human, nationality and citizenship. This liberatory challenge was well expressed by C. R. D. Halisi (1999: 4):

In a very fundamental sense, the struggle for liberation required black activists to confront nascent questions of citizenship and national identity – how the ‘people’ are to be defined, who belongs to the political community, and what are the criteria of inclusion and exclusion.

In short, the still unresolved idea of South Africa has a long history beginning with Dutch settlement at the Cape and their inauguration of a violent colonial politics of a moving ‘frontier’ of genocide, enslavement, conquest, dispossession, displacement, colonization and exploitation. This was followed by Anglicization as an imperial phenomenon accompanied by conquest, racism, dispossession, exploitation and segregation. British liberal pretensions that made them to claim to be more civilized than the Dutch (Afrikaners) was only used as a colonial weapon rather than a genuine desire to restore humanity as well as civil and political rights to the dispossessed and dehumanized black indigenous people. Anglicization as an imperial and colonial project directly locked horns with Afrikanerization as a colonial process of institutionalization of racism and denationalization of black people. The competing Dutch/Afrikaner and British imperial and colonial projects resulted in open conflicts that became known as the Anglo-Boer Wars that only ended in 1902 with the signing of the Treaty of Vereeniging (Dubow 2007). What emerged from the treaty of 1902 was an agreement to construct South Africa into a white state with the British and Afrikaners in charge. This was concretized through promulgation of the South Africa Act of Union of 1910 (Dubow 2007).

As the British and the Afrikaners accommodated each other into an invented white South Africa they behaved as though indigenous African people were non-existent. They all featured in the discussions as providers of cheap labour. Inevitably, such exclusion and total neglect provoked various forms of African resistance that branched into black republicanism, cultural nationalism, Pan-Africanism, black consciousness formations, socialist-class-based imaginations, liberal nationalism and non-racialism (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2008; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013a). The consequence of the African struggles against apartheid, which are document in previous chapters of this book, culminated in what Julian Brown (2015: 1) termed the ‘social consensus’ of a ‘New South Africa’ founded on rainbowism (inclusive and democratic society).

Alexander Johnston (2014) termed it an ‘improvised nation’. But Brown (2015: 1) depicted the discourses of a successful transition, miracle and ‘new South Africa’ as ‘a dated’ stories because ‘South Africa is once again in flux – caught in a moment in which the boundaries of politics and society are unstable’. As far back 1999, R. C. D. Halisi correctly predicted the current ructions and convulsions rocking post-apartheid South Africa, arguing that there were resilient rival populisms cascading from ‘competing visions of liberation’ that were bound to have an ‘impact on the evolution of South African citizenship’ (Halisi 1999: 133). Indeed, it is not only the popular democratic traditions that are durable, but also there are deep-seated ‘race-conscious political sensibilities’ that are equally powerful (Halisi 1999: 133).

Thus, the rise of such political and social formations as the EFF, BFLF and Rhodes Must Fall cannot be divorced from the long-standing contestations over the idea of South Africa. These movements are challenging what Johnston (2014) has described as an ‘identity of convenience’ as they continue to fight for a ‘South African idea’ based on the imaginations, knowledges, experiences and aspirations of the formerly enslaved, colonized, racialized, dispossessed and dehumanized. The current struggles, which have produced what Brown (2015) termed ‘insurgent citizens’, are deeply etched within the painful reality of living an illusion of an insider, a citizen and a human rights-bearing human being, while the reality is still keeping black people outside through economic and epistemological exclusion that produce a property-less people. At the forefront of this struggle are students, many of whom were born after the dismantlement of juridical apartheid but were experiencing cultural alienation, exclusion from higher education due to high fees and exposure to ideas of dead white men as a form of education inside universities. In reaction, they have turned the university into a site of struggles.

The university as a site of struggle

As noted in previous chapters, the existing universities in Africa did not grow from the African seed. They were never a product of deliberate and slow growth from the African socio-cultural and politico-economic developments (Pratt 1965). They are transplants from Europe and North America. It was this transplantation of universities into Africa that provoked resistance from early African elites like Edward Wilmot Blyden and J. E. Casley Hayford (Ashby 1964; Blyden 1967). The point here is that the struggle for access to higher education and an African university goes as far back as the 1860s and 1870s.

While the colonial regimes increasingly opened new universities in Africa after 1945, they were all transplantations from Europe. This is why Robert R. July (1987) emphasized ‘The first universities in black Africa were imports, their purpose the indoctrination of a foreign culture’. The previous chapter documented how colonial education negatively impacted on Africa. The first casualty was the ‘mother tongue’ of African people that were replaced with colonial languages. The second was African cultures and knowledge that were never taken seriously.

The result of colonial education was the production of deeply alienated colonial subjects. Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986: 28) eloquently described the crisis of alienation in these revealing words:

It starts with a deliberate disassociation of the language of conceptualization, of thinking, of formal education, of mental development, from the language of daily interaction in the home and in the community. It is like separating the mind from the body so that they occupy two unrelated linguistic spheres in the same person. On a large social scale it is like producing a society of bodiless heads and headless bodies.

If one takes into account desocializing implications of colonial education then it is not surprising that decolonization entailed revival of indigenous cultures, reaffirmation of African identities, rise of nationalist historiography and other initiatives aimed at reversing alienation imposed by colonialism. Initiatives such as the 'African personality', 'Ethiopianism', 'Negritude' and many others were part of the decolonial drive to epistemic and cultural liberation (Owomonyela 1996). The challenge was that the African elites spearheading these initiatives were 'men of two worlds, true cultural hybrids' which created a lot of contradictions, ambivalences and ambiguities in the way they spearheaded decolonization (July 1987:13). Those who were highly conscious like Kwame Nkrumah pushed for both political liberation and epistemic freedom. They made commendable efforts in turning inherited 'universities in Africa' into 'African universities' that reflected African traditions and cultures. This drive to transform 'universities in Africa' into 'African universities', became known as 'Africanization' and was part and parcel of the African national project (Falola 2001).

Turning to the genealogy of South African universities, it is clear that some of them pre-dated 1945. However, they were all born into a toxic environment marked by a rigid paradigm of difference and practices of impossibility of co-presence. Racial categorization of universities in accordance with race and ethnicity became the norm. South African universities became a detestable reflection and macrocosm of a society bifurcated by an indelible human-invented paradigm of difference and racial fundamentalist impossibility of co-presence. These racially and ethnically bifurcated universities became consumers and sites of reproduction of Eurocentric ideas, including even those that were designated for African people. Those that were designated for blacks deliberately taught a poor version of Western epistemology that Isaac Bongani Tabata (1959) described as 'education for barbarism'.

Bantu Education according to Tabata (1959: 13) became a 'monstrosity' that existed to 'arrest the development of the African people'. Its counterpart was 'Coloured Education' for the Coloured people and the overarching objective was to 're-create for the subject races a social order belonging to the pre-industrial age' (Tabata 1959:13). As a colonial instrument of control Bantu Education produced a people whose purpose was 'minister the whites' through provision of

cheap labour. It deliberately incapacitated 'the African student from reaching the required standard for entering a university' (Tabata 1959: 46).

Tabata was very correct in concluding:

This Apartheid in university education is not simply a matter of separating the races at the universities. It is an end result, the logical completion of a systematic process not only of robbing Non-Whites of education but turning a whole population back to barbarism. To put it another way: if Bantu Education is the bricks of that immense edifice, the retribalization of a whole people, the Apartheid university is its coping stone.

(Tabata 1959: 48)

Tabata (1959) concluded his book with a chapter entitled 'Bantu Education Must Fail', that is, it must 'fall'.

What is important to note is that the bifurcation of universities along racial and ethnic lines impinged on the formation and fossilization of student movements and student politics. White student formations began as Christian 'ecumenical' movements and they also branched into the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) formed in 1924 that was dominated by English-speaking white students who pursued liberal politics of protest; Afrikaans Studentebond formed in 1933 that were part of the broader Afrikanerization nationalism project; and South African Students Organization formed in 1968 that embraced black liberation thought in general and black consciousness politics that challenged the entire edifice apartheid colonialism (Heffernan 2015). White liberal students actively protested against particular actions of the apartheid government such as the 1968 decision to block the appointment of Archie Mafeje at UCT and against particular pieces of legislation, not targeting the very edifice of apartheid colonialism. This is why Richard Rathbone (1977: 108) wrote: 'Poor NUSAS was detested by government for being radical and detested by blacks for being insufficiently radical: in short the liberal dilemma'. Between 1968 and 1973, the 'black ethnic universities' became the real site of struggles particularly the University of the North (now University of Limpopo).

There were various reasons why these 'black ethnic universities' became a site of struggles. They were initially placed under the authoritarian Department of Native Affairs and were run by entirely white Vice-Chancellors together with entirely white university senates that were not critical of apartheid but were eager to sustain it (Nkondo 1976). As noted by Brown:

At black universities, administrators generally assumed responsibility for suppressing protest that took place on their campuses. Protesting students were either expelled or suspended for an indefinite period of time, and consequently were forced to leave the university grounds – and often to abandon their studies. When students did not willingly obey the university's expulsion order and chose to remain on the campuses, the administrators

rarely hesitated before inviting the police onto their campuses to enforce their shaky authority.

(Brown 2010: 728–729)

The political consciousness of the black students reflected the harshness of the world outside the university. But the inside ‘black ethnic universities’ black politics, just like in outside society, was criminalized. By 1970 the students at the University of the North had fully embraced black consciousness thought and were speaking of ‘liberation first before education’ and were directly linking their struggle within the broader context of psychological liberation of black people (Heffernan 2015: 179). The university administrators responded with mass expulsions of students in 1972. These expulsions spread the Turfloop spirit to other campuses and black solidarity was expressed through the Alice Declaration where the oppressive politics practiced in ‘Black Institutions of Higher Learning’ was condemned strongly and this was followed by student protests at universities of Fort Hare, the Western Cape, Zululand and Durban–Westville (Heffernan 2015: 180).

However, what is commonly ignored in existing analysis of student protests is how the spirit of Turfloop (the spirit of black consciousness and protest) spread to Soweto and resulted in the Soweto Uprising of 1976. Heffernan captures how the expelled students from Turfloop spread to teach in schools in Soweto, spreading the spirit of protest and black consciousness, focusing mainly on the role of Onkgopotse Abraham Tiro, a former university student leader and firebrand who taught History and English at Morris Isaacson High School in Soweto (Heffernan 2015: 181). Black consciousness politics permeated the South African Students Movement (SASM) that was already active in Soweto. Tsietsi Mashinini passed through Tiro’s tutorship and he became the leader of Soweto Students Representative Council (SSRC) that actively participated in the organization of June 1976 Soweto Uprising (Schuster 2004). This background is important because it genealogically links the Turfloop spirit, Soweto spirit and the current Rhodes Must Fall spirit as a continuum with ruptures and breaks in a living spirit of student protest.

The interesting and noticeable feature is the change of site of struggles from the previously black ethnic universities to the previously white-English and Afrikaans universities. Even though the protest began at the predominantly black TUT it captured the nation’s imagination when it shifted to UCT, Rhodes University, Wits, University of Stellenbosch, University of Pretoria (UP), University of North-West (UNW–Potchefstroom campus), UKZN and UJ as well as the University of South Africa (UNISA) (Ndlovu–Gatsheni 2016a).

This is where transformation, Africanization and decolonization have been painstakingly slow. Of course, such universities as Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) and the Western Cape have also been rocked by student politics. The key reason being that a decolonization, which gets deep into epistemology, curriculum, pedagogy, institutional cultures, access, language, demographics and symbolic representation, is yet to take place in all South African universities.

The limits of transition and transformation of South Africa

Adam Habib (2013) described the South Africa compromise of 1994 as resulting in a 'suspended revolution'. He identified strong institutional constraints as well as a complex 'balance of forces' as key factors that resulted in the suspension of revolution (Habib 2013). This is an important intervention that enables a better understanding of the limits of the promises of a radical transition and transformation in the 1990s following the unbanning of political organizations and release of political prisoners and the notions of forgiveness, reconciliation and a 'new South Africa'. Resolution of student grievances, deracialization of society and decolonization of universities were among the causalities of suspension of revolution.

At one level, CODESA, which was meant to enable black and white people to find each other and the TRC aimed at breaking the long-standing practices of impossibility of co-presence through truth-telling and forgiveness, did result in suspension of open warfare and overt hostilities but did not deliver social, economic and cognitive justice (Mamdani 2015; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2016b). The adoption of a new South African Constitution in 1996, which was meant resolve the paradigm of difference and bury the curse of a de-nationalized black majority, is today protected by those who benefitted economically from the transition and they are refusing any prospects of its amendment. The rainbow nation ideology that was a declaration of a new humanity of right-bearing citizens united into one nation that is culturally, racially and ethnically diverse but equally is unravelling as Mandela is experiencing posthumous public trial for failing to deliver on economic, social and cognitive justice.

The number of pieces of legislation and frameworks as well as commissions that have been rolled out so far in an endeavour to transform education in South Africa reveal serious limits if analysed from a decolonial perspective. For example the National Commission on Higher Education (1994) simply emphasized access and alignment of qualifications without a focus on epistemological change. The National Qualifications Framework (1998) emphasized adherence with international standards and training of students as a potential workforce for a global economy, revealing how the question of internationalization was privileged over decolonization. The National Plan for Higher Education (2001) openly emphasized a shift from access and transformation to adaptation to global knowledge-driven world (Kamola 2011: 121). What is clear from a close analysis of these policy frameworks is that the intended transition and transformation became entangled and captured between and betwixt powerful forces of human rights versus market-driven neoliberalism; internationalization/globalization versus indigenization; Africanization, and decolonization; as well as imperatives of rights versus imperative of justice (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2016a).

To further reveal the limits and difficulties of transformation, Africanization and decolonization of South African universities, it is important to briefly reflect on three empirical examples. The first example is the Mafeje Affair (1968–2007),

which is a case of exclusion during and after apartheid (Ntsebeza nd). During apartheid the state was blamed for having interfered with the appointment of Mafeje to a Senior Lecturer in Anthropology in 1968 but what boggles the mind and is hard to explain is why Mafeje was blocked twice in the 1990s when he expressed an interest in joining UCT. In 1990, Mafeje took initiative and indicated his willingness to join UCT only to be given a 1-year Visiting Senior Research Fellow, with a salary peaked at Senior Lecturer level for someone who has been a professor for over twenty years outside South Africa. The 1-year offer was explained as a result of 'the current financial circumstances', whatever that meant, and the peaking of the salary at senior lecturer was never explained, perhaps it was also due to 'the current financial circumstances' (Ntsebeza nd: 7–8). In 1993 Mafeje applied for the AC Jordan Chair in African Studies at UCT but a technicality was used to exclude him: that Mafeje had not advised the appointments office of his change of address when he left Namibia to go to Egypt (Ntsebeza, nd: 10).

The second is the Makgoba Affair (1994–1995). This example speaks directly to challenges of transformation and Africanization. Eddie Webster (1988: 3) argued: 'The Makgoba affair provides a deep and tragic insight into the South African transition. As with the rest of South Africa, black and white, are struggling to find a common project.' Malegapuru William Makgoba was appointed the first black Deputy Vice-Chancellor at Wits in 1994 and he began to champion the discourse of Africanization of the university, claiming that Eurocentric education was still the mainstay of teaching. As noted by Webster (1988: 2–3), Makgoba had 'entered a racially polarized campus' deeply entrenched 'in the ways of the old South Africa' where 'institutional change will take a long time'. Between 1995 and 1996, Makgoba found himself engrossed in a bitter struggle as his academic credentials were investigated and questioned, where he was accused of having embellished his CV, accused of being administratively incompetent and of tarnishing the image of the university (Makgoba 1997). James M. Statman and Amy E. Ansel (2000: 279) deployed the concepts of discursive ecology and hidden scripts to reveal:

The Makgoba affair was profoundly unsettling in that it revealed and perhaps heightened the terrible racial, political and class-fault-lines suddenly found lying so close beneath the dominant discursive patina of reconciliatory rainbowism.

The then Vice-Chancellor of the university, R. W. Charlton (1996), indicated that the Makgoba Affair 'acted as lighting conductor for some of the tensions of society in transition' and somehow admitted that it was basically about transforming the university 'rather than the allegation convening Prof. Makgoba's managerial performance, his public statements, the accuracy of various versions of his CV, and his conduct in relation to the personal files of members of the staff who lodged complaints against him' (Charlton 1996: 3). Whatever the real truth behind the Makgoba Affair is, its entanglement in the politics of transformation is important and indicates the difficulties, tensions, contradictions and oppositions inherent in

trying to actively advance Africanization in this case from the top. Makgoba eventually lost his position as a result this affair.

The third example is known as the Mamdani Affair (1995–1998). It is specifically about the challenges of curriculum change, particularly how ‘Africa’ is to be taught in a post-apartheid society and how to give content to a Centre for African Studies (Mamdani 1995a; 1998). The crisis began soon after Mahmood Mamdani was appointed as AC Jordan Chair in African Studies at UCT, particularly with regards to the introduction of a core of the foundation semester course of Africa that he crafted as ‘Problematizing Africa’. Mamdani’s proposed course was worlds apart from ‘versions of Bantu Education, Bantu Studies called African Studies’ that was taught at UCT (Mamdani 1995b; 1998). The course was subject to contestation by a ‘Working Group’ that hastily designed another course that was said to be primarily about equipping students with learning skills necessary for students entering higher education rather than Africa as subject matter. Mamdani staged a one-man protest against this politics of curriculum making (Kamola 2011). Rhodes Must Fall emerged within this complex background to continue the decolonization struggle.

Aluta Continua: The Rhodes Must Fall movement

The Rhodes Must Fall movements broke onto the national stage like a tsunami that shocked the complacent national government and university leadership including some conservative academics. The students forcefully brought the idea of decolonization in a society that had sunk into capitalist neoliberal reality back into the public arena. Emerging two decades after the so-called democratic transition of 1994, Rhodes Must Fall became one of the most dramatic mass actions. While it emerged within a formerly white UCT, directly provoked by alienation cultures and offensive colonial/apartheid iconographies, it gave birth to other strands such as Fees Must Fall, which directly focused on material concerns of the students. The attack on colonial/apartheid symbols soon fanned out of Cape Town to the Howard Campus of UKZN and the culprit was a sculpture of King George V (Jansen 2017: 48).

The student themselves have depicted the Rhodes Must Fall as a revolutionary attempt ‘from below to disrupt this unequal, racialised social and economic order. It rekindled and questioned the idea about the university in a postcolonial society’ (Chinguno *et al.* 2017: 16). On the importance of the movement, this is what the student themselves wrote:

One of its most important contributions is that it produced a new generation of post-apartheid activists and a new form of politics and claim-making driven by social justice and the need to address inequality, poverty, and unemployment in the broader society. It brought together, at its peak, various student formations from different ideological traditions and across diverse academic spaces to critique the state and the socio-economic order.

The movement brought back critical student movement to the fore and presented students with an opportunity to reclaim their position as the protagonists of transformation in society.

(Chinguno *et al.* 2017: 17)

Continuing the self-definition and self-understanding, the leading activists in the Rhodes Must Fall movements stated:

The Fees Must Fall movement on the other hand represents a rejection of the neoliberal education system and has forged new collective identities and an unprecedented process of collective learning. A collective identity—the ‘Fallists’ was forged through mobilization cutting across political and ideological, economic/class difference within the student movement. Drawing from our lived experience in the movement we define a fallist as an activist who rejects a hetero-patriarchal order and all forms of oppression and prejudice, drawing from intersectional lenses to understand resistance, and advocates for free and decolonized education without exclusion of others.

(Chinguno *et al.* 2017: 16)

What is also distinctive about the Rhodes Must Fall movements is that what had begun as a protest against the existence of a statue of Cecil John Rhodes at the centre of UCT soon gave birth to various formations that picked different but relevant issues that needed to be resolved within different institutions across the country. For example, while at UCT the nerve-centre of protest became colonial/apartheid iconographies, Wits became the key site of Fees Must Fall protests. One can, therefore, argue that there were different sites of decolonial struggles that were targeting diverse offensive immediate issues. At Rhodes University, the very name of the university became a rallying point for decolonial resistance – as the students wanted it immediately changed. TUT has always been a site of student struggles against high registration fees. At UNISA, perhaps because it is a Open-Distance e-Learning (ODEL) institution that charges reasonable fees, the students picked the labour issue of outsourced workers as its rallying point.

The activists who actively participated in the Fees Must Fall at Wits have collected and written down their experiences in a book entitled *Rioting and Writing: Diaries of the Wits Fallists* (Chinguno *et al.* 2017). It is one of the most important ways through which students have to take control of the narrative of the student movements and counter those narratives that seek to denigrate, caricature and delegitimize this important moment in South Africa.

Analytical speaking, there are two broad interpretations of the Rhodes Must Fall phenomenon. The first is the hostile neoliberal interpretation. Jonathan Jansen’s book *As by Fire: The End of the South African University* (2017) symbolized the hostile neoliberal camp. But this camp also has another less hostile but still neoliberal interpretation represented by an edited volume entitled *Fees Must Fall: Student Revolt, Decolonization and Governance in South Africa* (2016) by

Susan Booysen. Unlike Jansen's outrightly hostile interpretation of the student movements, the edited volume by Booysen even included student voices. But what emerges from this work is the idea of a reformist movement that was provoked by poor state governance by the ANC and the emphasis that the students were 'rising against the liberators' rather than neo-apartheid and neoliberalism (see Booysen 2016). In the liberal interpretation of the Rhodes Must Fall phenomenon, there is a push for the use of the term 'transformation' and deep cynicism about the term 'decolonization'.

In the neoliberal interpretation, the preferred solutions include diversification and creation of cosmopolitan universities through simply increasing the number of under-represented demographic groups (Habib 2016). Curriculum change in the neoliberal interpretation entailed adding works of Africans without changing the scaffold of Eurocentrism. The pertinent language question is reduced to an issue of communication and instruction rather than dignity and identity restoration. The demand for decommissioning of colonial/apartheid iconography is interpreted to mean diversification of symbols to reflect diversity of society drawing from both Western and African traditions. It is the neoliberal perspective that has concluded that the Rhodes Must Fall movements' demand would result in the 'end of the South African university' (Jansen 2017).

There is a very disturbing intellectual arrogance cascading from the neoliberal interpretation of the demands of the students. The students are heavily criticized as a bunch of people who have misread the work of Steve Biko and Frantz Fanon (Jansen 2017). The decolonization as a rallying point is also caricatured as vague and meaningless. For example, Jansen argued:

Decolonization, it is not clear, has become the radical replacement for that ANC keyword transformation. The word is supposed to do what the old one did not: namely, radically change society itself. But of course words do not change society. [. . .] Moreover, invoking the language of decolonization is best a distracter from the challenges of producing, acquiring, and using knowledge to advance our understanding of a complex world and to deeply transform our communities. These challenges have nothing to do with decolonization and everything to do with broken public schools, failing health-care system, and corrupt government.

(Jansen 2017: 168–169)

Jansen (2017: 171) emphasized that decolonization was doing nothing other than 'replays of language and politics from the 1960s in a globalized century where interdependence is key to planetary survival'. This hostile neoliberal interpretation of Rhodes Must Fall is countered by the decolonial perspective (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012; Santos 2014; Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Zondi 2016). The decolonial perspective acknowledges the current epistemic and systemic crisis within which the Rhodes Must Fall emerged as a logical decolonial movement. This interpretation accepts that the student movement is a decolonial phenomenon driven by

a combination of Steve Bantu Biko's black consciousness ideology and Frantz Fanon's decolonial interventions. What the students are demanding is the decolonization of the very idea of the university, its institutional culture, management style and epistemological foundations so as to attain cognitive justice (Santos 2014; Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Zondi 2016). More importantly, while the neoliberal interpretation of the student movements emphasizes the need for interdependency in a globalized world, the decolonial perspective highlights the mushrooming of such movements as 'Black Lives Matter' in the United States and 'Why My Curriculum Is White?' in the United Kingdom and many others in understanding the planetary decolonial insurrection.

Thus instead of adopting a hostile and dismissive attitude towards Rhodes Must Fall, it is important to note that these new intellectual student movements point to the need to rethink the future of university education within a context of possibilities that are radically different from the problematic neoliberal tradition. What was highlighted by Rhodes Must Fall was the centrality of the solidarity of students and the proletariat as fundamental stakeholders in the decolonization struggles. Building on what the students put on the table, it becomes possible to envision a university of the future and its key features. The first key feature is that of multilingualism. The second is ecologies of knowledges as defined by Santos (2007; 2014) or what Francis B. Nyamnjoh (2017) termed conviviality, which 'depicts diversity, tolerance, trust, equality, inclusiveness, cohabitation, coexistence, mutual accommodation, interaction, interdependence, getting along, generosity, hospitality, congeniality, festivity, civility, and privileges peace over conflict, among other forms of sociality' (Nyamnjoh 2017: 5). These ecologies of knowledge have to enable 'convivial scholarship' which is well defined by Nyamnjoh:

A truly convivial scholarship is one which does not seek a priori to define and confine Africans into particular territories or geographies, particular racial and ethnic categories, particular classes, genders, generations, religions, or whatever other identity marker is ideologically en vogue. Convivial scholarship confronts and humbles the challenge of over-prescription, over-standardization, over-routinization, and over-prediction. It is critical and evidence-based; it challenges problematic labels, especially those that seek to unduly oversimplify the social realities of the people, places and spaces it seeks to understand and explain.

(Nyamnjoh 2017: 5)

More importantly according to Nyamnjoh (2017: 6): 'Convivial scholarship does not impose what it means to be human, just as it does not prescribe a single version of the good life in a world peopled by infinite possibilities, tastes and value systems.'

The third feature of a university of the future is one that is socially responsive and banishes epistemicides, linguicides, culturecides, racism, sexism, patriarchy, tribalism, xenophobia and classism so as to become a home of everyone. Such a

university has to be fully recapitalized to enable access even by those without capital and must be fully grounded in its context while remaining globally competitive.

Conclusions: from transformation to decolonization

The above analysis reveals how the discourse of transformation that was articulated in neoliberal terms of human rights and democracy became nothing but a lullaby aimed at keeping the victims of apartheid asleep within a neo-apartheid dispensation. Unless one accepts these core limits of transformation, it would be impossible to fully understand why university students have suddenly burst onto the political stage speaking the decolonial language of changing the very idea of the university from being a 'Westernized' institution into an 'African university'. The students are very specific that the decolonial change has to be realized in restoration of cognitive justice premised on the fact that African people have produced knowledge and that knowledge must be placed at the centre of the 'African university'.

The students are also pushing for the use of indigenous languages in universities. More specifically, students are demanding the implementation of 'the right to education' that was promised in the Freedom Charter of 1955. The students' emphasis is on quality, relevant, free and decolonized education in their life time. It is not surprising that the issue of alienating institutional cultures features prominently as a grievance in the student protests because political decolonization never succeeded in delivering epistemological decolonization, which was capable of containing cultural imperialism. University institutional cultures are deemed by students to be Eurocentric, anti-black, racist, sexist and patriarchal. Therefore what we are witnessing is rapture, not simply from transformation to decolonization but from the idea of South Africa to the South African idea, this time defined and shaped by descendants of the enslaved, colonized, racialized, dispossessed and dehumanized. They are loudly proclaiming that their lives matter and they were born into valid and legitimate knowledge systems that have been pushed out of the academy.

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