

THE “DECRIMINALISATION” OF THE #FEESMUSTFALL MOVEMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA: AN ASANTEAN PERSPECTIVE

Kgothatso Brucey Shai

www.orcid.org/0000-0002-1169-7996

University of Limpopo

kgothatso.shai@ul.ac.za

Rachidi Richard Molapo

www.orcid.org/0000-0001-5890-1299

University of Venda

richard.molapo@univen.ac.za

ABSTRACT

During the struggle against colonialism and apartheid in South Africa and Africa, the liberation pioneers promised all citizens access to decent education. The premise was that the education the colonial authorities made available to Africans was poor compared to that of white people. What was more, only some middle-class Africans were given access to higher education. The initiation of the protest movement #FeesMustFall in 2015 seemed to mark a crossroads in South Africa in terms of opening the doors of learning to all. However, some scholars and politicians argue that the country's higher education sector is still untransformed and inaccessible to most people. Still others argue that the #FeesMustFall movement's call for aggressive transformation of higher education has been hijacked by a “third force” to undermine the Government. In this article we critique the competing perspectives of the ongoing public discourse on the #FeesMustFall movement based on interdisciplinary critical discourse and Afrocentric theory in order to gain a nuanced but critical understanding of this movement and its implications for the future. Notwithstanding the reservations about some of the bad elements of the modus operandi of the fallist movement, our major finding, as reported on in this article, was that the demand for quality and free higher education in South Africa was reasonable. Nevertheless, a decision to meet this demand might not be economically sound in respect of the immediate future.

Keywords: Afrocentricity; decriminalisation; #FeesMustFall; higher education; imperialism; #RhodesMustFall; transformation

UNISA 
UNIVERSITY
OF SOUTH AFRICA
PRESS

Commonwealth Youth and Development
<https://upjournals.co.za/index.php/CYD>
Volume 15 | Number 1 | 2017 | #3035 | 16 pages

<http://doi.org/10.25159/1727-7140/3035>
Print ISSN 1727-7140
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INTRODUCTION

The year 2015 was a watershed one in South Africa’s higher education landscape. In this year, the country witnessed the outbreak and mushrooming of a series of hashtag movements that were mainly led by students but supported by many people from civil society and the public and private sectors. These hashtag movements included #RhodesMustFall, #OpenStellenbosch, #TransformWits, Black Student Movement and #FeesMustFall (Luescher 2016; Naicker 2016). Some of these movements only operated on certain university campuses (e.g. #OpenStellenbosch) whereas others’ activities cut across the entire higher education landscape in South Africa (e.g. #FeesMustFall). Central to the campaigns of these movements have been grumblings in institutions of higher learning about uncertainty, violence, exploitation, and dominance of the Africans of blood by the Africans of the soil (Lushaba 2016; Meko 2016).

This article embraces Mazrui’s (2004) dual typology of Africans. In South Africa, the term Africans of blood refers to the black majoritarian segment of the population. In contrast, the term Africans of the soil denotes the white minority (also known as Europeans in terms of apartheid population classification). The foregoing analysis demonstrates that while the context of the contemporary struggles of the students in South Africa is not the same as the one prior to the dawn of majority rule in the 1990s, the realities and practicalities on the ground show that the cauldron of uncertainty, violence and exploitation has stubbornly entrenched itself after the official demise of apartheid (Lushaba 2016; Phaswana 2016). It is argued that the inhumane practices of the past self-generate and renew themselves even though in the new dispensation the democratic imperatives force the advocates of these practices to operate under cover.

It seems that the present political environment in the country and the world at large leaves the perpetuation of malpractices at South African universities to naturally transit from acts of simplicity to complexity in order for them not to be easily detected by law enforcement authorities. The continuity of these practices in South Africa’s universities, which resonate with Verwoerdian apartheid philosophy, shows the extent to which South African society is untransformed. The latter argument should be understood within the context of academia being the microcosm of society (Khunou 2016). Logically, if the academic environment is polluted, it means that the society where it is conceptualised is much polluted. The very meaning of the name “university” indicates that both students and staff are drawn from all corners of the country and the world; hence it can be said that the lack of adequate transformation of South African society more than 20 years after initiating majority rule in 1994 is reflected in the academic sector (Lushaba 2016).

It is on this basis that the student campaigns between 2015 and 2016 have received sympathy from the majority of the country’s citizens. It is not farfetched to assert that widespread sympathy for the student campaigns is reminiscent of the anti-apartheid

and colonial struggles of the masses in the 1970s and 1980s in South Africa and other parts of Southern Africa. The relevance of linking these historical and contemporary imperatives to the analysis of this discourse finds true expression in the African proverb that “the river that forgets its source will soon dry up”.

To add, the renewed mass activism characterising the student campaigns, which was also a characteristic of anti-colonial and apartheid campaigns, is a direct vindication of the belief expressed in this article (a belief that is shared by many others) that, like other liberation movements turned ruling political parties, the African National Congress (ANC) has failed to adequately transform its liberation rhetoric into reality in respect of the higher education, labour and health sectors. Characteristically, the issues articulated by the leaders of the student campaigns between 2015 and 2016 found a fertile ground for germination through the broken moral and political contract between the political elite and the South African population.

While the calls for the student campaigns in the period under review appealed to the majority, it is worth noting that they were also perceived and embraced with reservation within certain circles. This article explores the #FeesMustFall movement from an Afrocentric perspective. This does not mean that other student-led hashtag movements that preceded the #FeesMustFall movement were insignificant, but the activities of the latter attracted the attention not only of domestic entities but also of the international community. Hence, the activities of the #FeesMustFall movement were to a certain extent constitutive of investment risk as their manifestations almost brought the whole of South Africa to a standstill and resulted in the concomitant shutdown of almost all institutions of higher learning in the country. While some of the genuine concerns of the #FeesMustFall campaign also appealed to those who opposed its strategy and tactics, the reality is that the discourse of this movement has been polarised.

Besides the African majority who identified themselves with the #FeesMustFall movement, there was a minority group that criminalised and demonised it due to its violent strategy and tactics. This group included the then South African Minister of Higher Education and Training, Blade Nzimande; Acting National Police Commissioner, Lieutenant General Khomotso Phahlane; ANC Secretary General, Gwede Mantashe; and the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) President, Collen Maine (Africa Country 2016; eNCA 2016; News24 2016; Nkwanyana 2016).

While violence as espoused by the #FeesMustFall movement may be deemed bad, it is the well-considered view of the authors of this article that the framing of such an argument has been intentionally biased and its epistemic locus is the Euro-American paradigm, which also serves as the bedrock of South Africa’s jurisprudence and academia. It is for this reason that the following section of the article introduces Afrocentricity as an alternative theoretical lens to decipher the discourse on the #FeesMustFall movement in South Africa.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMING: DECRIMINALISATION VIS-À-VIS AFROCENTRICITY

In the human and social sciences, conceptualising and contextualising terms is not a straightforward and conventional undertaking. This notion also applies to the conceptualisation and contextualisation of highly sensitive and politico-legally charged terms such as decriminalisation. For the purpose of this article, decriminalisation refers to an act of lessening penalties for certain unlawful acts (Uitermark and Cohen 2005). However, the definition of decriminalisation (the opposite of which is criminalisation) can also be extended to mean the legalisation of an act that was previously subjected to the status of criminality (Ritter 2017).

Taking a cue from the conceptualisation of the term “decriminalisation” and the competing narratives on the “fallist movement” in South Africa, foregrounding this article on alternative theory becomes an apparent necessity. Accordingly, this article is underpinned by the theory of Afrocentricity as articulated by scholars such as Asante (1990, 2003). It also draws on the works of like-minded Afrocentric scholars such as Modupe (2003), Mazama (2003), Diop (1987) and Maserumule (2015). Afrocentricity is fast emerging as an alternative theoretical tool in academia, particularly in the human and social sciences. Among the pillars of Afrocentricity is the central belief that science is not neutral but biased (Zulu 2016). In fact, what is generally accepted as scientific or science is made up of the inter-subjectivities of a certain dominant group of people. This analysis also hinges on the reality that science or epistemology is driven by a particular philosophy, and consequently its content and direction are largely shaped by the context and culture of the people who produce it (Burke 1991; Shai 2016). Ideally, such culturally and contextually conscious knowledges should reflect the cultural value systems of the communities who consume them. In relation to this, this article takes the stand that Africans collectively have a spectacular know-how of various aspects of life, including the global political economy (Shai 2017). Therefore, carving a safe space for sustainable conversation between the elements of Afrocentricity and other progressive ideas, concepts and theories from Africa and beyond is crucial for the production of knowledge of reality: a precursor for the realisation of amicable and irrevocable solutions to Africa’s challenges and problems (Asante 2003; Burke 1991; Gouldner 1980).

Categorically, Asante (as cited by Modupe 2003, 62–63) has conceptualised and explained three key elements of the Afrocentric theoretical framework as entailing: (1) The process of learning that is centred on Africans, their history, culture and continent; (2) The pursuit of “intellectual interest in the African and the formation of a psychological identity direction, based upon that interest, in the direction toward Africa”; and (3) self-awareness of viewing and affecting the world in a manner that prioritises African

interests and that is suggestive of the quality, kind and amount of the aforementioned two elements. These three key elements of Afrocentricity are embraced and used as the analytical categories of this article. Asante (2003) presents them in a condensed manner whereas Modupe (2003) correctly synthesises them in a way that enriches the narrative and analytical thread of any piece of work that adopts Afrocentricity as a theoretical telescope. There is no gainsaying that Afrocentricity is relevant to this article because most of the academic works on the #FeesMustFall movement are purely empirical and their epistemic position is either unapologetically or unconsciously Euro-American.

As a means of contributing towards epistemic rebellion and justice, Shai’s (2017, 6) Afrocentric invocation that “a blend of both empirical and non-empirical aspects produces holistic findings about [the] central questions” about any phenomena being probed, holds sway in this discourse. However, the said author’s propagation “is a near impossible exercise in instances wherein the researcher limits himself to either empirical or non-empirical methods”. It is within this context that this article wholly rejects the binary standing of knowledge as, for instance, empirical or non-empirical, evil or good, positive or negative, objective or subjective. Above all, the relevance and timeliness of the introduction of previously marginalised and silenced theories such as Afrocentricity in this article find expressed articulation in the African proverb that “borrowed water will not quench your thirst”. It is on this ground that it is posited that if Africans are to excel in their trade (knowledge production, management and dissemination), it becomes imminently necessary for them to base their research (and articles like this one) on values, standards, cultures and systems that are rooted in African agency (Asante 2003).

Regardless of the coherence of Afrocentricity and the appreciation of its solid nature across the colour line, one observes that, with the exception of a few and not-so-visible scholarly insights of a few African academics, the popular public discourse on the fallist movement has been largely anti-colonial: but the strength of the white establishment has made it difficult to transit from this to a more meaningful discourse of decolonisation and Africanisation. It is the argument of this article that while decolonisation is a workable means for propelling the fallist movement, the goal should be “to Africanise and Africreate” in the true sense of the words. In the case of South Africa and Africa at large, there is no alternative but to Africabrate, which is about nothing else but Africanisation and pan-Africanism. This implies that the rejection of Eurocentric dominance and supremacy in the knowledge structure of the global political economy and other aspects of life by the majoritarian Africans without offering feasible alternative scholarship and other contributions would be of minimal consequence. In this context, there is no alternative to Africanisation.

The white establishment, in resisting the transformation of higher education and other societal sectors, including the economy of South Africa, finds strength and solace in the undisputed fact that “this system [coloniality] develops the intellects of

the elite and political leaders and alienates their minds from the societies and peoples they are supposed to protect and represent” (Sooliman 2016, 168). In the end, the ability of the white establishment to successfully denounce transformation of the South African society, particularly its higher education sector, resonates with the co-control, ownership and management of the knowledge structure of the global political economy by the white monopoly capital which has the propensity to respond to the dictates and expectations of its international Euro-American counterparts (Shai and Iroanya 2014). While at face value the common goal of capitalists (who are mainly whites) in South Africa and beyond is to maximise profits at all costs, this article’s position is that their key unifier is the desperate desire to maintain white dominance and supremacy in all material terms (Shai 2016).

Based on the foregoing analysis it is clear that institutions of higher learning in South Africa will change at a snail’s pace “unless mind-sets start to shift” (London 2017). To add, if the class structure of South African society can be transformed, the higher education sector has the potential to follow suit. In the following section, the authors of this article grapple with a variety of views across the spectrum that appeal to the legitimisation of the #FeesMustFall movement.

JUSTIFICATION FOR DECRIMINALISING THE #FEESMUSTFALL MOVEMENT

There is a popular expression in political literature which says that “if you do not know where you come from, then you do not know where you are going”. This expression is in sync with the juxtaposition of the troubles faced by the majoritarian Africans in South Africa and contemporaneous and historical perspectives, and of the call of the slain South African politician, Steve Biko, that “we must relate the past to the present and demonstrate evolutions of the modern black man” (Mekoa 2016, 157). In the same breath it is wrong to limit the analysis of the fallist movement to immediate conditions. A balanced view can be painted when one locates the operations of the fallist movement in historical imperatives and complements such with contemporary frames. The fertile ground for this link has also been debated by scholars such as Richard Tuck, among others. According to Tuck (1991), history is the study of the politics of the past while politics is the study of the history of the present.

Flowing from the above, one notes that the anti-apartheid colonialism rhetoric as espoused by various liberation movements-cum-ruling political parties, such as the ANC in South Africa, the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) in Namibia and the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), was embedded in unfulfilled promises for decent jobs, better education and health care after independence or in the new dispensation (Khapoya 2010). In South Africa, for instance,

the Freedom Charter (Congress of the People 1955), which has served as a political instrument and moral contract between the ANC-led Congress Alliance (including the Communist Party of South Africa and other structures not mentioned here) and the previously oppressed African masses and other marginalised groups, it is unequivocally stated that “The doors of learning and culture shall be opened” to all. It is further stated that “Education shall be free, compulsory, universal and equal for all children; Higher education and technical training shall be opened to all by means of state allowances and scholarships awarded on the basis of merit” (Congress of the People 1955, 3). In analysing the statement that “Education shall be free”, the Education Policy Consortium (2015) maintains the official ANC-led Government narrative that such a clause does not include higher education and training. This clause is also not explicit in terms of its interpretation, and its reference is therefore limited to basic education. Thus, it is safe to argue that the official narrative (propaganda) of the Government as confirmed by the Education Policy Consortium is driven by nothing else but the desperate desire to qualify the incompetence of the political elite in effectively handling challenges relating to the funding of the higher education sector in South Africa (Isike and Ogunnubi 2017; Mbeki and Mbeki 2016; Sebola and Tsheola 2015).

If one is to critically reflect on the open letter penned by Lushaba (2016) and numerous statements attributed to the leaders of the fallist movement, it becomes apparent that while the ANC has had reasonable achievements in respect of the massification of universities, the truth of the matter is that it has not been able to efficiently alter the colonial/apartheid patterns of higher education. Quality education is still a privilege for minority whites and a few children from black elite families. The payment model of historically white universities, such as the universities of Cape Town and the Witwatersrand, naturally excludes children from financially disadvantaged families to access their facilities. They charge unreasonable and exorbitant fees for tuition, accommodation and other related services. In addition to the fact that the composition of student and staff population is still largely white, the foregoing assertion partly explains the reason why historically white universities were the biggest targets of the #FeesMustFall campaign. While the private sector and the Government provide bursaries, and loans are channelled through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), these have the propensity of leaving many students trapped in debt due to increasing levels of unemployment in South Africa. Some of these challenges are not specific to South Africa and can also be observed in other African countries with a colonial history. The curriculum in almost all South African universities does not reflect the values and aspirations of the majority of this country. The staff complement (particularly at a senior level) in some universities (e.g. the University of Pretoria and Stellenbosch University) does not reflect the realities of population dynamics in South Africa. This is by no means an accident: it was a well-orchestrated plan by the white establishment to ensure that the negative effect of

apartheid/colonialism on the majority of Africans is stubbornly perpetuated even long after apartheid has officially ended.

In the post-1994 era, the promise of a free and quality higher education has been given legislative and political effect through the incorporation of more or less similar calls in the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and the resolutions of ANC elective congresses; the one in Polokwane (Limpopo province) in 2007 (ANC 2007) and the other in Mangaung (Free State province) in 2012 (ANC 2012). As the macro-policy framework, the RDP sought to position South Africa as the hub of economic development in Southern Africa and Africa at large (Shai 2009). If Nelson Mandela’s assertion that “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world” is anything to go by, it is sensible to recognise that there is no way in which South Africa can drive the process of sustainable socio-economic development if its higher education sector is in peril, largely being reminiscent of the posture of Bantu education (Nkuna and Shai 2016). It is also in the spirit and letter of section 29 and subsection 1(b) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 that “Everyone has the right to further education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible”. Regardless of this, there are some within government circles who have reservations about South Africa’s desirability for and affordability of free higher education (Parker 2015). They advance economic reasons to qualify their claim that the calls for quality free education as advocated by the fallist movement are unreasonable and therefore not in sync with what lawmakers had in mind when they conceptualised section 29 and subsection 1(b) of the Constitution. This argument is contested by some in certain circles who cite developing countries such as Cuba, Botswana and Burundi as success stories for the provision of free and quality education. Taking cognisance of the malaise of political constraints, such as the Nkandla debacle, the state capture saga and the prevalence of shoddy Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) deals, these naturally neutralise and invalidate the case against providing quality and free higher education in South Africa on the basis of simple cost analyses (Isike and Ogunnubi 2017).

While the authors of this article identify themselves with the case for the provision of quality higher education on the basis of historical, political, moral and humanitarian grounds, it is also their view that it is good to benchmark with other developing countries such as Cuba when confronting challenges pertaining to retarded levels of the transformation of higher education in South Africa. However, it is also important to contextualise the lessons drawn (Sizani 2016) as the political and socio-economic calculus of South Africa is not necessarily the same as that of other developing countries that may be providing free and quality education to their citizens.

It is emphasised that, at a political party level, the case for the #FeesMustFall campaign has also had a qualitative effect. For example, the ANC resolved during its

2007 elective conference to “progressively introduce free education for the poor until undergraduate level” and it undertook “to focus on the quality of education” in South Africa (ANC 2007). These are the two critical clauses constituting the Polokwane conference’s ANC resolutions that have relevance to higher education and to the focus of this article. Five years down the line, the ANC resolved at the Mangaung conference in 2012 that “The policy for free higher education to all undergraduate level students will be finalised for adoption before the end of 2013” (ANC 2012).

The focus on the ANC at the expense of other political parties in discoursing about higher education transformation in South Africa should be understood within the context that this party is not only ruling the country but is dominating its political landscape. It is on this basis that in the case of South Africa, in contrast to the theory of governance, the reality is that there is no watertight separation between the state and the ruling party. What can be deduced from the foregoing analysis is that there seems to be the political goodwill on the part of the ANC-led Government to provide free and quality education, but the global pressures of the dominant neo-liberal order are not making it easy (Bond 2007; Shai and Iroanya 2014). As a result, the political and governmental efforts to translate what appear to be good postulations on higher education into meaningful actions are usurped by capitalist global forces. In addition, Mbeki and Mbeki (2016, 103) attribute the failure of the ruling elite to deliver free and quality education to all, in particular higher education and training, to such delivery hinging on “hostility toward the welfare of the worker”. The said authors add that “the ruling elite is anti-education as it sees this as a threat”.

CASE AGAINST THE #FEESMUSTFALL CAMPAIGN

In contrast to the case for the #FeesMustFall movement, there is also a counter-thesis that is not so strong. The arguments against the #FeesMustFall movement are rooted within the ANC, Government, student bodies, civil society and beyond. It is interesting that at a certain point, especially towards the end of 2016, some of the people who had supported the #FeesMustFall movement earlier swiftly joined the bandwagon of those who renounced some of its activities. The latter group was not necessarily for the criminalisation of the fallist movement but against some of the elements of its modus operandi. Public violence, arson, intimidation, character assassination, malicious damage to both private and public property and the disturbance of public order were some of the manifestations that later characterised the fallist movement. Table 1 below provides details of the costs of damage at affected universities as a result of student protests based on preliminary assessments as of 15 March 2016 as reported by the Ministry of Higher Education and Training (Nkwanyana 2016). According to Nkwanyana, the estimated costs are based on reported incidents of campus unrest for the period October 2015 to January 2016 (see Table 1).

Table 1: Estimated cost of damage relating to campus unrest: October 2015–January 2016

Institution	Estimated cost of damage
University of Stellenbosch	R352 000.00
North West University	R612 000.00
University of Limpopo	R1 786 294.52
University of Johannesburg	R345 000.00
University of the Western Cape	R46 544 446.00
Walter Sisulu University	R351 287.19
Tshwane University of Technology	R5 073 747.73
University of KwaZulu-Natal	R82 000 000.00
Cape Peninsula University of Technology	R689 850.14
University of Cape Town	R1 415 693.14
University of Zululand	R4 500 000.00
Rhodes University	R250 000.00
University of the Witwatersrand	R1 410 223.00
Total	R145 330 541.72

Source: Nkwanyana 2016

The extent of the devastation, as indicated in Table 1, provided fertile ground for the criminalisation of the fallist movement by the judiciary, the security establishment, politicians, court of public opinion and other interested parties. The position of the security establishment has been that the fallist movement has been infiltrated by a third force for reasons that are not related to the genuine cause of the movement, reasons that have never been divulged by the state security apparatus. The theory of the third force within the fallist movement is shared by Maine and Mantashe (as cited in Sooliman 2016) who believe that the campaign was penetrated by bad elements who sought to use it as a platform to engineer regime change in South Africa. This narrative has germinated seeds of political, ideological, class, gender and colour divisions within the fallist movement, which have achieved nothing except to weaken the #FeesMustFall campaign. The reality that various dimensions of the #FeesMustFall movement are fragmented and that its pioneers are not permanent students renders its sustainability in doubt.

The foregoing narrative is in sync with South Africa’s political climate at the time, which witnessed repeated calls from within and outside the ANC for President Jacob Zuma to step down as the head of State and Government following widespread revelations

that he had breached his oath of office (Mogoeng 2016). The judiciary’s central focus on the activities of the fallist movement has been its criminal dimension. It is generally believed in legal circles that there is no sound basis to use violence to achieve certain ends, including but not limited to the transformation of higher education in South Africa. Hence, the new democratic dispensation has unveiled numerous legal mechanisms for registering one’s concerns, grievances, challenges and problems regarding any issue in society. The authors of this article contend that ubuntu/botho and other African cultural value systems are often missing in the interpretation of the law statutes of this country. This situation is the by-product of the reality that the development of legislative bodies in South Africa has been heavily influenced by and immersed in Roman-Dutch Law to the detriment of the indigenous legal system.

Furthermore, others argue that inasmuch as students have a just struggle to wage, it should never be at the expense of the safety and security of others and of private and public property. What seems to be missing from the dominant discourse on the fallist movement is the lack of appreciation of the extent to which factional politics has contributed to the escalation of this campaign to uncontrollable levels and violent proportions. As cited by Kubayi (2016), Oliver Tambo, the exiled president of the ANC, in 1977 counselled his comrades in Angola as follows:

You might think it is very difficult to wage a liberation struggle. Wait until you are in power. I might be dead by then. At that stage you will realize that it is actually more difficult to keep power than to wage a liberation war. People will be expecting a lot of services from you. You will have to satisfy the various demands of the masses of our people. In the process, be prepared to learn from other people’s revolutions. Learn from the enemy also. The enemy is not necessarily doing everything wrongly. You may take his right tactics and use them to your advantage. At the same time, avoid repeating the enemy’s mistakes.

The above words attributed to Tambo represent an oasis of wisdom and in fact it is not farfetched to say they were prophetic of what is currently happening in the ANC and South Africa. Prior to 1994, successive National Party (NP) regimes that presided over white minority rule in South Africa criminalised and demonised the forces opposed to their segregationist policies, branding these as terrorists or murderers. These labels were often pinned to cadres of the liberation movements such as the ANC, the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC) and the Azanian People’s Organisation (AZAPO). Such labelling and framing were exploited by the NP’s propagandists to shape public opinion in South Africa and beyond towards their favour. If the NP Government was able to vilify the pioneers of liberation in South Africa to entrench its apartheid rule, and assuming that Tambo’s counsel was well-considered and received by his comrades, it can be argued that the ANC is using the very same strategy to disparage the fallist movement and any tentacle that is seen to be constituting a threat to its rule.

While the possibility of the infiltration of the third force in the fallist movement cannot be wholly dismissed, these authors’ contention is that such allegations have

been deliberately blown out of proportion by the ANC for the purpose of shifting the focus from the genuine struggles of the students, their supporters and sympathisers. The chaos theory points out that wanton violence against an unethical system and all its manifestations can be ethical depending on the standard of measure used (Nabudere 2012, 40).

It is also important to appreciate that other push and pull factors may be propelling the fallist movement to engage in criminal activities. Among other things, the violence engulfing South Africa’s universities explains the violent culture of this country which dates back to the heydays of the anti-apartheid struggle (Shai and Mothibi 2015). Also leaning on the counsel of Tambo, one appreciates the fact that violence was one of the means the ANC and other liberation movements used to fight and defeat apartheid. As such, it makes sense for the fallist movement (which includes members of the ANC) to regard public assets as soft targets for getting the ANC-led Government to adequately and with a sense of urgency attend to the plight of the majoritarian Africans in South African universities.

One of the key lessons that can be learnt from the protests (e.g. the recent one in Malamulele) and campaigns (e.g. the fallist one) across the country is that violence has become one of the most efficient ways to communicate with the ANC-led Government. In fact, violence appears to be the language that the ANC-led Government understands best (Nkuna and Shai 2016). Even if there are a few bad elements in the fallist movement who engage in criminal activities, it is factually wrong to attach negative connotations to the entire campaign. Contextually, the combination of the narratives that blatantly criminalise the fallist movement is well captured by Sooliman (2016, 168) when he avers that whiteness is the only mode of description and analysis that captures the essence of the reflections on “the statements by Gwede Mantashe and Blade Nzimande during the months of September 2016 in response to the student protests”.

CONCLUSION

As has been established and indicated in this article, the #FeesMustFall campaign started at the University of the Witwatersrand but it soon became a national issue. Political and economic instability is the common denominator of the political landscape of South Africa and also of many countries in Africa. As such it is politically, morally and historically correct for the fallist movement to demand quality and free higher education, although a decision to meet this demand might not be economically sound in respect of the immediate future.

The transformation of the higher education sector and the provision of quality and free higher education should be the long-term goal of the South African society as a whole and it should not be the only focus of the Government. The tendency of the Government is to create a lot of problems when resolving a single problem. While it is fashionable to talk about quality, decolonisation and free education in the public space,

the theoretical framework of this article is Afrocentricity, and in line with that it is proposed that a transition needs to be made from decolonised to Africanised discourse. There could be success stories in Africa and elsewhere in respect of the provision of free and quality higher education, but a one-size-fits-all approach that disregards the unique conditions of a country cannot hold water.

The fallist movement’s call for the provision of free and quality higher education enjoys sympathy at both government and political party levels in South Africa, and its envisaged value for the entire society is indicative of the fact that the narrative regarding its criminalisation cannot be sustained. This article posits that the experiences of the student protests in South Africa between the years 2015 and 2016 problematise the perception that this country has good policies. It is concluded that the only time to know if a country has a good policy is when such a policy has been implemented.

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