

# **THE REBELLION OF THE BORN UN-FREES: FALLISM AND THE NEO-COLONIAL CORPORATE UNIVERSITY**

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## **Abstract**

South Africa's public discourse has been largely influenced by the recent student protests in higher education. Government officials, student leaders, higher education officials and the general populace have all participated in this national debate. This youth activism is led by various student political formations using the popular slogan of 'FeesMustFall' to mobilise their peers and broader society. Student leaders argue that the main strategic objective is to achieve free decolonised higher education. This article explores the socio-economic and political context driving these student marches across the country. It argues that the protest action is primarily caused by the following two phenomena: first, the broader societal discontent with persistent class, race and gender inequalities in South Africa. Second, the negative socio-economic impacts of a neo-colonial corporatised higher education model. The student demands are discussed in relation to these two broad structural trends associated with the transition to liberal democracy in South Africa. My core contention is that the student movement proposals are crucial for restructuring the neo-colonial corporate university.

## **1. Introduction**

The crisis in higher education has been at the centre of public discourse for the past two years. It has reignited historical debates on so-

cial justice, and the vision of an ideal post-*apartheid* South Africa. Students from various campuses across the country have mobilised around transformation demands. This movement — popularly referred to as Fallism or Fees Must Fall (FMF) — has illustrated that higher education is characterised by social exclusion. The ideals captured in the White Paper on Higher Education (1997) have not been achieved. According to this document, an inclusive system "promotes equity of access, fair chances of success to all", and more importantly: "eradicates all forms of unfair discrimination whilst advancing redress for past inequalities" (DOE 1997: 11). The data on throughput rates, curriculum reform, transformation and student movement political demands highlight the minimal progress made in attaining these three goals (Bentley *et al* 2006; CHE 2016; DHET 2017; Du Toit 2000). The race-class-gender inequality power nexus that is prevalent in broader society characterises the higher education system. And South Africa's national building rainbow nation thesis is being subverted by these systemic socio-economic disparities in all institutions (Gumede 2014; Mashiqi 2014).

The continuance of these trends after two decades of liberal democracy has incited a radical response from the student movement. Two main political demands characterise this generation's youth activism in universities: firstly, free education and, secondly, decolonising the academy. This article explores the context within which these demands are articulated, and the accompanying political agency associated with the Fallist movement. I argue that the current wave of student activism is motivated by mobilisation that seeks to challenge the pedagogy and governance practices associated with a neo-colonial corporatised higher education model. Furthermore, this movement also exposes the underlying youth-led political discontent caused by persistent race, class and gender disparities in contemporary South Africa.

Fallist advocacy is centred on a conception of free education that widens the discourse to appreciate both material and ideational freedom. This explains the qualitative shift in this generation's student politics, which transcend the political economy centred approach of the established student movement. The Fallist perspective on free education cannot be reduced to fiscal justice and socio-economic redress. It is also inspired by what Mignolo (2009: 15) describes as "epistemic disobedience": a movement challenging Eurocentric pedagogy in higher education (Mbembe 2016: 36). The emphasis on decolonial political thought is not new. Anti-imperial scholars and activists such as Fanon, Nkrumah, Nyerere, Du Bois, Aimee Cesaire and Biko developed this

tradition. Fallists have built on it by linking decolonial thought to their peculiar context (Dlakavu 2017; Ndlovu 2017). This conception of free education can only be understood within the context of the post-*apartheid* society discussed below.

## 2. Liberal triumphalism: The born free myth

Many scholars have documented the divergent political perspectives on South Africa's transition to liberal democracy. The literature focuses on the following two contending narratives: one, positive accounts that view the democratisation process as an ideal model for political conflict resolution and, two, critical perspectives which draw attention to the elitism that characterised the negotiated settlement (Bond 2008; Terreblanche 2012). Proponents of the former point out that the political accord underpinning the transition was crucial for avoiding civil war, nation-building and democratisation. The main thrust of this argument is to highlight formal political gains associated with the transition. Various institutionalised nation-building efforts have sustained the dominance of this view in formal public discourse over the past two decades.

However, Gqola (2001: 98-100) and other critics argue that the nation-building project derives its legitimacy from the language of formal racial equality and pluralism centred on the rainbow nation thesis (Gqola 2001; Dladla 2011). The underlying premise is that the transition established an egalitarian polity, which will obliterate the systemic race-based political and socio-economic inequalities associated with *apartheid*. Thus, future generations of black South Africans will not experience political discrimination, intergenerational poverty or inequality. Moreover, African youths will not be deprived of access to essential public goods such as quality education. This school of thought informs the popular notion of 'born frees', widely used in public discussions to describe the strata of black South African youth born after 1994.

The concept is not value-free or politically neutral. It was constructed to support the liberal triumphalism of the early transition era that reduced freedom to formal political liberties. My main contention is that this school of thought ignores the structural socio-economic inequalities reproducing a racialised capitalist social order. This view reduces racial inequality to a political phenomenon created by a racist state. Racism is divorced from the racialised capitalist political economy, which allocates and distributes resources in a manner that largely sustains black inferiority and white privilege. Supporters of this liberal perspective overlook the dialectical relationship between economic and

substantive political justice. The logical conclusion of this paradigm is the development of superficial racial pluralism, concealing the underlying neo-*apartheid* economics supporting white supremacy and privilege. In other words, the born free mantra — and its driving liberal version of non-racialism — ignores Biko's (1981: 133) observation that "the colour question in South African politics was originally introduced for economic reasons".

These words illustrate that resolving the colour question requires more than minimal liberal political emancipation, that is, voting rights, freedom of speech and association. Social institutions that were created to consolidate the ideological normative power of both settler colonial and *apartheid* capitalism have to be radically transformed (Dladla 2011: 10). It is also essential to dismantle the exploitative socio-economic power configuration that appropriated social assets as a means of legitimising white economic and cultural dominance.

This structural power relation has persisted through the following stages of modern racialised capitalist development in South Africa: colonial, *apartheid*, and neo-*apartheid* capitalism. The latter term refers to the reproduction of *apartheid* economic relations with two key alterations: the co-option of an aspirant black bourgeoisie and South Africa's accelerated integration into a neo-colonial global political economy. All these racialised capitalist phases are characterised by four main constitutive elements: (a) super-exploitation of mass marginalised cheap black labour; (b) black population's minimal access to quality public goods; (c) historic appropriation of black communal assets required for social reproduction; and (d) preservation of white supremacist ideology in social institutions (Magubane 1996; Maloka 2013; Terreblanche 2012). These tenants of racialised capitalism have produced social inequalities that have clear race, gender and class dimensions. The following section discusses how the black youth has been confronted by this race-based social inequality, and then relates these experiences to higher education. I use the term 'born unfree' to emphasise that African youths born after 1994 are not liberated from the economic challenges experienced by past generations.

### **3. Born unfree in post-*apartheid* South Africa**

South Africa is rated number 116 out of 188 countries in the Human Development Index, HDI (UNDP 2015). Inequality has increased rapidly over the past years, and the country has achieved minimal human development gains. According to the United Nations Development Pro-

gramme (UNDP) (2015), "South Africa's HDI value increased from 0.621 to 0.666 between 1990 and 2014, an increase of 7.2 per cent or an average annual increase of about 0.29 per cent". The socio-economic disparities can be observed in all areas of social development. South Africans have unequal access to essential social services such as education, health, housing, water and electricity. For example, South Africa's overall health expenditure amounts to 8.5 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). But the nation's health system is characterised by "gross inequality where 5 percent of GDP is spent on 16 percent of the population, while the remaining 3.5 percent of GDP is spent on 84 percent of the population" (Presidency 2014: 61). The five per cent mentioned in the quote is mainly spent on the upper middle class and affluent white population of the country, and the mostly poor African population has to rely on the remaining three per cent. The General Household Survey (GHS) in 2012 found that only 10 per cent of the African population had medical insurance and 75 per cent of the white population was on medical aid (GHS 2012).

The top 10 per cent of the richest households in South Africa account for over half of the nation's income (Presidency 2014). Black households constitute the majority of those receiving the lowest income in the country. The Living Conditions of Households in South Africa study found that the "overwhelming majority (87, 61%) of black African-headed households were earning less than R71 479 per annum (roughly R5 957 per month or R199 per day). Close to half of black African-headed households were in the bottom two income quintiles" (Stats SA 2015: 21).

Data from various research publications indicate that individual income has also decreased. South Africa's overall median wage was R3 039 in 2012; a figure well below the International Labour Organisation (ILO) recommended minimum living level of R4 500 (Stats SA 2014; Forslund and Reddy 2015). The African worker median wage was significantly lower than the national figure. Half of the black workforce in formal employment earned R2 600 a month in 2012 (Coleman 2014). Current reports indicate that the national median is R3 640. Disaggregated studies illustrate that the African median figure amounts to R3 120 while the white one is R11 441 (Isaacs 2016: 14-15). The share of wages in the national income has declined from 55 per cent in 1994 to 52 per cent in 2012 (Presidency 2014). This inequality is exacerbated by the high level of unemployment in the country (36 per cent).

The data on youth income and unemployment is more negative

than the national averages. By 2012 the youth constituted 72 per cent of the unemployed in South Africa (COSATU 2012). The official youth unemployment rate stood at 67 per cent in 2014 (Ranchod and Finn 2014). Reports from the ILO highlighted that the few young people employed were earning very low wages (ILO 2012). The median wage rate for young South African employees (15-24) in 2010 was significantly lower than the other cohorts. Half of young workers in formal employment earned R2 100 in 2010 (Stats SA 2010). Moreover, the number of permanently employed youth declined from 53 per cent in 2008 to 21 per cent in 2014 (Stats SA 2014). According to Manik (2015: 230-231), these negative youth development trends also permeate higher education. Only 27 per cent of undergraduates finish their studies within the specified completion period, and 28 per cent of black working class students on the national loan programme (NSFAS) complete their studies. The throughput rate for black youths is considerably lower than that of their white counterparts (Manik 2015: 230-231).

The evidence discussed above illustrates that the socio-economic power structure associated with a racialised capitalist system persists. However, it is mediated by a different political regime underpinned by a liberal constitutional capitalist state. Another crucial difference is the accelerated co-option of small sections of the African population into existing structures of a white-dominated private sector. The most alarming feature of neo-*apartheid* capitalism is undoubtedly its vivid impact on the livelihoods of young black South Africans. These 'born unfrees' constitute the core of the socio-economically marginalised in contemporary South Africa. The low levels of employment and income amongst young black people are caused by deeper structural inequalities of a racialised capitalist order. More worryingly, these disparities permeate institutions that are essential for social reproduction like higher education.

The FMF/Fallist political agency is largely motivated by this socio-economic context in which the legitimacy of the post-*apartheid* social order is being challenged. Higher education is the primary site of this struggle, because of its strategic location as a centre of knowledge and skills production in society. In other words, institutions of higher learning are embedded in the political struggles over the nation's intellectual project. They are sites that shape hegemonic cultural, political, historical and scientific paradigms, which inevitably influence the developmental trajectory of a country. High levels of political activism have always characterised universities in South Africa. This politicisation has taken different forms, and is largely determined by the following three factors:

(a) the institution's historical relationship with the state; (b) dominant and contested ideologies within institutions; and (c) governance and pedagogy. Fallism is a political response to the interplay between these dimensions across various universities in post-*apartheid* South Africa. These institutions are governed by a neo-colonial corporate philosophy that shapes power relations within and outside universities.

## 4. The neo-colonial corporate university

### 4.1 Epistemic coloniality

The following key features characterise the neo-colonial corporate university. First, it entrenches the ideological hegemony of both colonialism and coloniality (Mbembe 2016 Mignolo 2009; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012; Maldonado-Torres 2011). Coloniality refers to the sustenance of colonial power relations, knowledge systems, and political identities in the contemporary epoch. Coloniality has survived the various waves of formal political decolonisation, which did not obliterate all elements of what Quijano (2000) describes as a "colonial power matrix", comprised of various hierarchies: class, race, gender, religious, linguistic, cultural, and epistemological. Neo-colonial corporatised universities have played a pivotal role in maintaining epistemological fundamentalism by embedding thought based on a "premise that there is only one sole epistemic tradition from which to achieve truth and universality" (Grosfoguel 2007: 213). In the South African context this has produced the phenomenon of epistemic coloniality described succinctly by Mbembe (2016: 36) as:

The endless production of theories that are based on European traditions. These are produced nearly always by Europeans or Euro-American men who are the only ones accepted as capable of reaching universality; they involve a particular anthropological knowledge, which is a process of knowing about others — but a process that never fully acknowledges these others as thinking and knowledge producing subjects.

This dominance of Eurocentric theory entrenches the belief amongst students and academics that sound theory or epistemological frameworks are only developed in the global North. The corollary of this view concludes that the Western world shapes academic praxis, and non-Western societies are passive consumers of this Eurocentric knowledge. Epistemic coloniality strips the intellectual agency of non-Western academic work. This devaluation is achieved by implementing a variety

of strategies that sustain a metaphysical empire in which "theory is located in the North while the subjects to be studied are located in the South" (Grosfoguel 2007: 211).

The most prominent of these strategies is the presentation of Western modern scientific and political thought as a neutral intellectual endeavour devoid of racial and colonial beliefs (Chatterjee 1997; Lushaba 2009; Von Holdt 2014). According to Mignolo (2009: 4), this false notion is sustained by concealing what he defines as the "geo and body-politics of knowledge hidden from the self-serving interests of Western epistemology". Western modern knowledge rests on an imperial project that was primarily introduced to justify the subjugation of colonial societies. Theorists of the various empires constructed epistemology and conceptions of ontology that legitimised colonial conquest.<sup>1)</sup> These centred on one primary belief: colonial subjects are inherently inferior and sub-human (Dladla 2011: 2). Therefore, it is legitimate to appropriate their material and ideational resources using systemic violence in order to coercively integrate them into the modern world (Fanon 2008; Grosfoguel 2007; Lushaba 2009; Mignolo 2009; Maldonado-Torres 2011). The veil of scientific objectivity has concealed this fact by divorcing the producer of knowledge from his geographic and political location in the colonial hierarchy. According to Grosfoguel (2007: 213), this is achieved "by delinking ethnic/racial/gender/sexual epistemic location from the subject that speaks, Western philosophy and sciences are able to produce a myth about a truthful universal knowledge that covers up, that is, conceals who is speaking as well as the geo-political and body-political epistemic location in the structures of colonial power/knowledge from which the subject speaks".

The Eurocentric subject in South Africa's neo-colonial corporate university ensures that academia maintains its bias for European epistemological frameworks. This fundamentalism is inspired by the political goal of preserving the superiority of Western knowledge that legitimised colonial conquest. The false subliminal racist logic of "bringing civilization to the sub-human African by introducing him to culture, language, values and knowledge of his superior conquer" still persists (Dladla 2011: 3). In other words, the neo-theorists and scholars of the empire are taking forward epistemic coloniality by concealing its imperial base, and advancing assimilation using a prominent neo-colonial instrument: West centric international standardisation.



## **4.2 International benchmarking**

The second characteristic of a neo-colonial corporatised university is the obsession with international rankings based on world-class accreditation. This goal is inherently linked to the epistemic coloniality discussed above. Universities in South Africa are constantly competing to improve their positions on global indexes, which use indicators that are divorced from the national context. These measurements are formulated using Western elite university criteria that entrenches commodification of education. Rationalisation, commodified research output and market place credibility constitute the core principles of these rankings. The end result is budgeting that discards socially beneficial initiatives such as "redress; employment equity; academic development programmes and funding for needy students" (Webster 2010; Vally 2007).

Moreover, the term 'world-class' is uncritically accepted and institutionalised without examining its epistemological origins. This concept is value-laden and secures epistemic coloniality by making the Western university, and its associated pedagogical practices, the universal unquestionable measure of intellectual excellence. The underlying philosophy is motivated by what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2012: 2) describes as "control of subjectivity and knowledge which includes epistemological colonisation and the re-articulation of African subjectivity as inferior and constituted by a series of 'deficits' and a catalogue of 'lacks'". In sum, world-class assimilation is naturally linked to subverting the epistemic and socio-economic independence of universities. Institutions in South Africa have internalised this intellectual inferiority complex, and become conduits in the reproduction of Eurocentric development canons that fortify the neo-colonial epistemic project. This phenomenon also derives its legitimacy from the third feature of the neo-colonial corporate university: corporatisation and "market colonisation" of academia discussed below (Gordon 2010: 1).

## **4.3 Market colonisation and the corporatisation of academia**

The corporatisation or market colonisation of academia has been at the centre of higher education debates for years. Cox (2013: 2) defines this phenomenon as the "dependency of universities on the marketplace, and thus the corporatisation of the university system. The university culture increasingly privileges those disciplines that can patent, brand and market products through corporate partnerships over disciplines that

encourage critical thinking designed to engage democratic citizenship and to challenge the status quo!"

Market colonisation erodes critical pedagogy by placing cost-recovery at the centre of choices on research projects, programmes and curriculum. This in turn produces teaching and research primarily informed by profit, fiscal austerity, and quantitative assessment models (Gordon 2010; Mandlingozi 2006; Vally 2007). Meaningful intellectual inquiry and innovation is marginalised by market colonisation principles. In simple terms, ideas start to follow money instead of money following ideas. Moreover, this corporatised education model promotes a rudimentary economic view on qualifications and teaching. It develops an output ethos that reduces education to one's ability to find employment (Jansen 2001; Mandlingozi 2006). This explains the prioritisation of demand-led curriculum based on the policy directives of industry and corporate interests across various institutions. The end result is the production of graduates who perceive education as an instrument for employment only. Other crucial pedagogical attributes such as deeper intellectual, cultural and political reflection are marginalised. Legal scholar Mandlingozi (2006: 18) explains the need to transcend economic pedagogy when he states that: "Indeed, legal academics seek to move beyond providing legal education that is complicit in social injustice and inequality, it becomes necessary for them to make sure that they do not just produce 'graduates ready for the profession', but that they produce intellectuals".

This market-orientated higher education system is also characterised by a decline in state support for higher education. The primary reason for this trend is neo-liberal economic philosophy that urges governments to "open up education markets to international capital and foreign service providers" by decreasing loans, grants and subsidies (Vally 2007: 23). This process has been accelerated in South Africa as a result of implementing macro-economic policies that comply with liberal political economy prescripts (Bond 2008; Marais 2011; Mohamed 2010). The policy choices are largely informed by the drive to deepen South Africa's integration into a neo-colonial economic global hierarchy. Government's subsidy for university education in post-*apartheid* South Africa declined from 49 per cent at the beginning of 2000 to 40 per cent by 2012 (PWC 2014).

The state's expenditure on higher education (as a percentage of GDP) is very minimal when compared with other countries. According to the Council on Higher Education (CHE), South Africa currently allocates 0.75 per cent of its GDP to higher education (CHE 2016: 8). This

figure is below the Organisation for Economic Development and Co-operation (OECD) average of 1.2 per cent. Furthermore, the percentage of funds spent on post-school learning, as a portion the national education budget is 12 per cent, which is significantly lower than the African average of 20 per cent. The most alarming trend produced by this austerity is the sharp decline in "government funding per enrolled student (full-time equivalent) that fell by 1.1 percent annually between 2000 and 2010, while student tuition fees per FTE increased by 2.5 percent per year" (CHE 2016: 8).

This prevalence of neo-liberal austerity in a context characterised by soaring tuition fees is one of the primary catalysts driving both the crisis and protests that have accompanied this impasse. Most university leaders have responded to the crisis by using instruments of institutionalised authoritarianism and violence that are associated with neo-colonial corporate governance. This tyrannical governance regime is motivated by deeper political, economic and cultural factors explained in the next sections.

#### **4.4 Authoritarianism and violence of neo-coloniality**

The fourth characteristic of a neo-colonial corporate university is the development of despotic managerialism. This phenomenon is created by the market colonisation explored in the section above. Authoritarian corporate models of governance and management have been introduced in all institutions of higher education, with the primary objectives of increasing profit, efficiency and effectiveness. This has largely led to the subversion of democratic values such as social equity, redress and inclusive decision-making. As Rhoades (cited in Webster 2010: 1) explains: "social relations on campus are increasingly corporatised as faculties find their time, work and the products of their labour increasingly controlled by managers, who have extended their discretion at the expense of professional autonomy and arguably the public interest".

Corporate governance coincides with the migration of former chief executive officers, consultants, and business elites into managerial positions in universities. These managers seek to re-orientate governance towards market colonisation and despotism (Gordon 2010; Maimela 2015). According to Gordon (2010: 2), this "academic managerial class" is obsessed with aligning "the university with the sociology and norms of the market". Students and staff members have been adversely affected by this management style characterised by soft and hard power. The first form of power revolves around the jargon of mar-

ket colonisation, which is: world-class, key performance area, cost-efficiency, market credibility and benchmarking. And the second utilises coercive governance methods such as unilateral centralised decision-making, suspensions, interdicts, intimidation and university sanctioned violence to achieve the goals spelled out in market colonisation language.

This authoritarianism is primarily inspired by two phenomena related to neo-coloniality: market colonisation and monopoly over violence. The former seeks to entrench market power relations into all spheres and institutions in society. These are drawn from a neo-colonial political economy, which is dominated by multinationals that reproduce class, gender, cultural and race hierarchies associated with the colonial power matrix (Harvey 2004: 75). This power relation sustains the South African racialised capitalist social order that was co-opted into global neo-imperialism through the introduction of neo-*apartheid* economics. My contention is that the authoritarianism practiced in universities mimics and reproduces the power relations of market coloniality in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These require different forms violence: epistemic, cultural, socio-economic and physical. The latter form of violence is utilised against groupings within universities that expose the illegitimacy of African universities sustaining coloniality. These include the two key constituencies in higher education: students and various staff. The following section explores the experiences of workers in order to discuss the fifth feature of a neo-colonial corporate university: a human resource crisis.

## 4.5 Cheap labour

The primary element of the human resource crisis is the reproduction of a cheap labour force comprised of mainly black workers (Sagtar 2016: 214-215). This phenomenon is created by the persistence of racialised capitalism in South Africa, which is grounded on the super-exploitation of precarious African labour (Masondo 2007; Wolpe 1972; 1975). Governance strategies within contemporary universities have adopted labour-cost reduction plans that marginalise black workers. These can be grouped into the following categories: atypical employment agreements and externalisation of costs. The first describes the rapid increase of precarious short-term employment contracts, and the latter refers to universities externalising labour costs to third parties. This explains the rapid outsourcing, which has sustained *apartheid* era wage disparities and working conditions (Sagtar 2016: 224-225). The testimonies of

cleaners, gardeners and other service staff highlight the prevalence of neo-colonial labour relations in universities (Sagtar 2016: 225).

Black academics and administrative staff have also experienced the negative effects of neo-colonial working environments in higher education. Most departments in universities have few members of staff employed on permanent contracts, and this precariousness has produced negative impacts on the pedagogical experience. Academics are coerced into generating extra sources of income, and subsequently spend less time on teaching activities. The constant decrease in working hours also denies students sufficient access to academics. This specifically affects black working class students, because they require additional academic support and guidance.

More worryingly, reports indicate that these experiences are mediated by a new colour bar, which uses market colonisation language to sustain "the crucial differences in the exploitation of black and white workers which are due specifically to racism" (Magubane 1996:4). According to the CHE (2016: 283), black academics made up only a third of the permanent employees and their white counterparts constituted the majority of those on permanent employment contracts (53 per cent). Other organisations in the sector have highlighted that colonial and *apartheid* labour hierarchies are still prevalent in historically white institutions (HETN 2016: 12-16). This is largely attributed to minimal reforms in institutional culture characterised by interrelated class, race and gender inequalities. The latter is discussed in detail below.

## 4.6 Patriarchy

The relations in the neo-colonial university are patriarchal, and reflect the intersecting relationship between race, class and gender power dynamics in broader society. Women are still confronted by both micro and institutionalised male chauvinism (Dlakavu 2017: 111). This particularly applies to black females that experience what Crenshaw (1989: 149) describes as "double discrimination", based on both racial and patriarchal oppression. Feminist scholars, such as Hooks (1993), Crenshaw (1991) and Collins (2000) have highlighted that black women's experiences of patriarchal domination are different from their white counterparts, because of race relations. White women are exempted from the systemic structural racism prevalent in a racialised capitalist social order. Professor Brewer (1999: 34) explains this succinctly when she argues that "gender as a category of analysis cannot be understood decontextualised from race and class in Black feminist theorizing.

Social construction of Black womanhood and manhood are inextricably linked to racial hierarchy, meaning and institutionalization. Indeed, gender takes on meaning and is embedded institutionally in the context of the racial and class order".

Her analysis resonates with the experiences in South African society and universities. According to the CHE (2016: 287), black women constituted only nine per cent of the total number of female professors in 2012. These disparities are not limited to the professoriate only. African females made up 12 per cent of the academic staff while their white counterparts constituted 27 per cent of the academic population in 2012. This evidence illustrates that the generic aggregate data on improvements of gender representation in higher education overlooks race differentials.

The marginalisation of black women in academia is not only illustrated by poor representation in the academic staff strata. It is also evident in the documented experiences of the mostly outsourced support staff (cleaning, catering, grounds maintenance etc). African women make up the majority of employees in precarious work characterised by atypical employment contracts and low wages. Moreover, their working conditions are very poor and dehumanising. Employees have cited the following injustices of the neo-*apartheid* workplace: victimisation, using separate amenities and restriction of movement (Sagtar 2016: 216-218).

The concluding sections discuss how the demands of Fallist political agency challenge the above-mentioned features of a neo-colonial corporate university. I argue that there are credible insights to be drawn from this generation's student politics. These insights need to be explored by various stakeholders, especially academics and higher education policymakers.

## 5. Fallist epistemic disobedience

Previous sections stated that the call for "free decolonised education" subverts the epistemic coloniality described above (Sambo 2017: 57). This demand is not new and has been articulated by various decolonial scholars and intellectuals. The most prominent in the South African context is Steve Biko (1981: 137), who famously argued that:

The black man wishes to explore his surroundings and test his possibilities — in other words to make his freedom real by whatever means he deems fit. At the heart of this kind of thinking is the

realisation by blacks that the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed. If one is free at heart, no man-made chains can bind one to servitude but if one's mind is so manipulated and controlled by the oppressor as to make the oppressed believe that he is a liability to the white man, then there will be nothing the oppressed can do to scare his powerful masters.

This profound statement by Biko illustrates the depth of the colonial power matrix, which according to him, rests primarily on epistemic colonisation. He argues that this phenomenon can only be challenged by developing consciousness that rejects Eurocentric supremacist epistemology that places black people in what Fanon (2008: 2) describes as a "zone of non-being". It is equally important to highlight the geo- and body-politics of Biko's epistemic disobedience, which stem from his experiences as a former student leader, activist and public intellectual of the black consciousness tradition during *apartheid*.

The Fallist demand for decolonial education resonates with Biko's and the 1970s student movements attempts to challenge epistemic coloniality. This disobedience seeks to dismantle the epistemological, cultural and linguistic hierarchies associated with colonial conquest. White supremacist cultural practices in universities have survived the transition from *apartheid* to neo-*apartheid* capitalism. This phenomenon is sustained by concealing the colonial "geo- and body politics" of figures such Cecil John Rhodes and Sir Graham (Magubane 1996; Mignolo 2009, Maldonado-Torres 2011). Most institutions have bestowed these prominent colonialists with various symbolic rewards: monuments, epitaphs and naming scholarships after them.

Decolonial writers such as Ngugi and Fanon have highlighted the pivotal roles of both language and culture in maintaining epistemic coloniality. As Fanon (2008: 9) explains: "every colonized people — in other words, every people whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality — finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country". The Fallist demands of withdrawing Afrikaans as medium of instruction, and removing all symbols of cultural imperialism in historically white universities echoes Fanon's sentiments. Moreover, it illustrates the importance of eradicating the cultural normative power of both settler colonial and *apartheid* capitalism that still persists today. The leadership and academics across various campuses should be embracing this just demand centred on severing the legacy of colonial and *apartheid* conquest in our institutions. It is illogical to speak of transformative reconciliatory justice or co-existence, whilst

defending the cultural and intellectual edifice of white superiority.

Another key element of Fallist epistemic disobedience is the drive to revive African intellectual agency in academia. This call is informed by the prevalence of Eurocentrism in all disciplines. African scholarship is largely placed in the periphery by neo-theorists of the empire. It is treated as an additional element to an established unquestionable universal epistemic tradition, which constitutes the core of academic excellence. This critique must be separated from the assimilationist terminology of Africanisation that does not subvert epistemic superiority politics. Supporters of Africanisation prioritise integration or domestication of existing epistemological frameworks, without examining their fundamental basis. The Fallist decolonial academic project explores deeper questions about the underlying power dynamics driving knowledge, and how these influence the socio-political, economic and cultural development of Africans. This endeavour is laudable, and establishes a key starting point for rapturing the institutionalised fundamentalism in all sciences.

However, an alternative model should not construct another fundamentalist pedagogy; but rather a radical framework, devoid of all the hierarchies associated with the colonial power matrix. The emphasis should be on developing a democratic plural epistemic tradition, which achieves the following:

- Institutionalises the contribution of both subaltern and African intellectual agency in academia/ pedagogy.
- Reforms power relations in knowledge production by placing emphasis on participatory research methods, and eradicating hierarchical methodology that objectifies people.
- Decolonises history and modernisation theory (because these two areas are the basis of contemporary pedagogy).
- Legitimises the diversity of knowledge sources: oral storytelling, arts, indigenous epistemology, and cultural practices.
- Places Africa's development at the centre of knowledge production.

This process also entails liberating the current pedagogy from the dictates of a neo-imperial market economy discussed below.



## **6. Challenging market colonisation in academia**

The Fallist movement has reiterated previous calls for the decommodification of education, and preserving the principle of providing education as a public good. At the heart of this demand is the rejection of market-related governing practices across all campuses. This includes the fundamental questions of introducing free education, and eradicating corporate management philosophy in various institutions. The principles of cost-recovery and market socialisation have produced negative socio-economic effects for both black working class students and staff. The data on African throughput rates, financial exclusion and worker exploitation elucidates the negative outcomes of a higher education system colonised by neo-imperial market ideology. Thus, it is essential to reverse this trend in order to produce a just public post-schooling system. Many researchers and scholars have tabled proposals on how to introduce free education and obliterate corporatisation. Some of the major policy recommendations include: (a) restructuring fiscal policy by increasing wealth and corporate taxes; (b) reviewing the current national skills funding systems; (c) eradicating wasteful expenditure and corruption within the state; (d) establishment of a free education endowment fund; (e) restoring 50 per cent state subsidy for higher education; and (f) creating an independent higher education infrastructure fund (Bond 2016; Sithole 2016).

Corporatisation can be eradicated by reviewing staff performance criteria, decentralising decision-making within universities, enhancing academic and student representation in governing structures, increasing funds for academic research, obliterating outsourcing, and maximising compliance with international labour standards (decent work). The current student movement has advocated for some of these policy proposals across various campuses. This activism is driven by various political strategies, which disrupt the very logic of market despotism and governance. The ethos of unilateral decision-making based on quantitative deliverables is being questioned. And the student movement is leading the discourse by calling for a higher education system governed by the following public goals: redress, equal access and democracy. This notion of equality is based on an intersectional approach that recognises the interconnectedness between the race, class and gender struggles in contemporary South Africa. The following section highlights the Fallist contribution to the gender question within

higher education.

## 7. Intersectionality and Fallism

The Fallist advocacy has been intersectional highlighting the importance of the gender struggle. This strand of Fallism is mainly inspired by the emergence of radical black feminist thought within the current leadership of the student movement, which highlights the prevalence of patriarchy in higher education (Dlakavu 2017; Mabaso 2017; Ndlovu 2017). Women (especially African) experience socio-economic, sexual and gender-based discrimination in institutions of post-schooling. The previous sections highlighted all the negative outcomes of patriarchal relations. Fallist activists have challenged patriarchy by adopting a gendered analysis of the cheap labour phenomenon in higher education. This informs the call for decent work and obliterating outsourcing that specifically exploits African female workers. Moreover, they have also highlighted the sexual exploitation experienced by these workers, and advocated for more stringent regulations to address sexual harassment of workers across all campuses.

Another element of feminist Fallist advocacy has been centred transforming the academic staff. This includes improving black female representation in the academic workforce, and ensuring that these workers are in decent employment. The data highlighted in previous sections illustrates the necessity of introducing measures to absorb larger numbers of black females into the advanced sections of the academy. Moreover, institutional culture must be reformed in order to decrease the dominance of male chauvinism in academia. This includes removing practices within universities, and their associated institutions that maintain patriarchal norms.

## 8. Conclusion

This article explored the context within which Fallist advocacy is taking place. I argued that this phenomenon is driven by two primary causes: persistent racialised capitalist inequality and governance practices of a neo-colonial corporate university. Most African youths still experience the socio-economic challenges, which confronted previous generations. Race, class and gender disparities are still prevalent in the neo-apartheid political economy. And young people constitute the majority of those experiencing socio-economic marginalisation. The patterns of social exclusion in higher education reflect this broader societal inequal-

ity, and are exacerbated by the neo-colonial corporatisation of education.

Institutions of higher learning have been rapidly introducing corporate governance methods, and transforming education into a commodity. Market relations have permeated both the pedagogy and management of universities. This phenomenon has produced a number of negative trends, which are inherently connected with an exploitative racialised capitalist social order that relies on both economic and ideational dominance. The latter has been maintained by preserving the colonial pedagogy that was prevalent during both *apartheid* and colonial capitalist eras.

In other words, white supremacist epistemology has been reproduced in the neo-*apartheid* political economy and higher education system. The only difference is that it is intertwined with a neo-colonial logic of ensuring that South African universities assimilate into West-centric world class accreditation status. This explains the prioritisation of market-related outcomes and colonial world class assimilation over social justice or redress programmes. The logic of racialised capitalist markets, which are driving new imperialism and neo-*apartheid* economics, is dominant in higher education governance and teaching.

The Fallist movement has presented an alternative to the above-mentioned trends by calling for free decolonised education. This demand recognises the connection between both socio-economic and ideological dimensions of a racialised capitalist order, which has failed to address the historical injustice imposed by the three developmental phases in South Africa: colonial, apartheid and neo-*apartheid* capitalism. The eradication of this injustice requires all social institutions to transcend the liberal triumphalism of the "rainbow nation born free" thesis, and acknowledge the systemic class, race, cultural and gender inequalities that still exist in South Africa.

## Endnote

1. I use this term to describe various European enlightenment philosophers who conceptualised racist doctrines and white supremacist theories, such as Immanuel Kant, John Locke, Hegel, Descartes et. al. Some actively participated in the sustenance of colonial states and multinational empires.

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