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Writing From Inside the Fire: Reflections on the fire-centered politics of the 2015/16 South African student movements.

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Abstract

Fire lives briefly, breathes sharply and spreads with urgency across the surface of the earth. *Writing from Inside the Fire* offers a series of reflections on the fire-centered politics that have been ignited within the RhodesMustFall and FeesMustFall movements. In this paper I trace the political roots of fire and explore the ways in which it was employed as a tool of resistance and empowerment during the anti-apartheid struggle. Fire's ability to transcend time and space in literal and conceptual ways has allowed it to redefine itself in the post-apartheid protest among both civil society and student groups. In the second part of the paper I argue that 'anger' and 'rage' are "burning emotions" and are consequently the most apt response to continued instances of racial injustice in South Africa. Connecting anger to the emergence of Afropessimist thought among students, I attempt to look at fire through the lens of a 'plantation politics' and argue that fire is used to achieve 'moments' of liberation. Finally, I move to identify the university as a space plagued by "colonial iciness" and go on to suggest that this has resulted in both a frozen temporality and aesthetic. Fire is used as a response to the frozen university because it not only burns through memory and collapsed temporalities but also grants students the power to redefine colonial aesthetics.

DECLARATION

I declare that *Writing From Inside the Fire: Reflections on the fire-centered politics of the 2015/16 South African student movement* is my own work and has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university, that all ideas are my own other when referenced otherwise and that all the sources I have used have been indicated and acknowledged as complete references.

Full name: Jessica Breakey Date: 14 July 2017

Signed……

Acknowledgements

I began thinking through fire a year ago. Other than this paper, very little connects the person I am now with the person that started writing it. In a way it seems somehow apt the process of writing this and all the coinciding personal consequences were a kind of fire that I needed to go through myself. I owe a great deal of gratitude to all those who have continuously pulled me away from the flames and who have fanned the smoke around me.

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Dad, more than anything I am so grateful that you will be able to read this.

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Introduction : The Fire This Time

In 1963 James Baldwin published *The Fire Next Time (1963),* the collation of two essays written in the form of letters to his nephew. The letters addressed the racial politics in segregated America and the book was positioned as a response to the "racial nightmare" and injustice of that time. Baldwin drew his inspiration for the title from a biblical prophecy that had been recreated and composed into the Negro Spiritual *Mary, Don't You Weep*;

"*God gave Noah the rainbow sign, no more water, the fire next time".*

The line is a reference to the biblical tale of Noah's Ark; the story of a man who had been chosen and instructed by God to build an ark in order to survive the coming floods. In the same way the floods represented the cleansing of evil and the complete end of the world, the arrival of the rainbow symbolised an era of renewed grace, celestial pardon and new beginnings. The rainbow was the ultimate marker of God's creation; a new world free from sin. However, "The fire next time" was a divine warning; those who strayed off the path of righteousness will perish in the fire come judgment day. The lyric has particularly interesting inferences in South Africa as it evokes images of the rainbow and of fire.

After South Africa held its first democratic election in 1994, Archbishop Desmond Tutu famously described South Africa's new democracy as "the rainbow nation". The phrase was intended to embody South Africa's newfound embrace of multiculturalism and represent the ultimate "coming together" of all races and cultures like the colours in a rainbow. Just as God had said "set the rainbow in the cloud" so many South Africans saw the image of the rainbow as one that protected us from our bloody and brutal history. The era that the rainbow had guided us into brought little difference from the apartheid and colonial eras that preceded it. In *The Rainbow is Dead,* Richard Pithouse (2016) remarks that the grace from the rainbow was only bestowed onto the oppressors and not the oppressed. Violence, injustice, inequality and racism continue to

plague the lives of those left disenfranchised by the legacies of apartheid laws and ignite and anger and rage that has gnawed at Tutu's beloved rainbow.

If you try and trace the South African rainbow in attempt to find its beginning and end, it will quickly become clear that the 'rainbow nation' had been nothing more than a hallucination; an empty promise of new beginnings and a new South Africa. Despite Johannesburg's lucrative mining industry there was no pot of gold waiting for us on the other side of the rainbow, only the forgotten fires of apartheid. Left unattended for almost twenty years, the fires had grown in strength and ferocity and the eruption of the RhodesMustFall student movement at UCT in 2015 only fanned this flame.

"On earth something is always burning"

I recently learned the National Aeronautical and Space Administration (NASA) has developed a software that, through the collation of a series of satellite images in quick time animation, allows us to view some of the Earth's most significant fires over the last 15 years. The software provides a spectrum that moves from red (one fire a day) to white (up to a thousand fires a day). When I heard about this my mind instantly jumped to the fires that had been set on South African university campuses during RhodesMustFall and FeesMustFall. I began to wonder what these fires would look like from space and whether they would show on the software. Would they be considered "significant" and what would make them so?

The development of this type of software clearly indicates the importance of fire as it carries us "beyond the human, beyond life and even beyond the earth" (Clark, Yusoff: 2014) but it offers no essential detail of the fire. The software may show where the fire started, where it spread and how long it lasted but a bird's-eye view grants us no insight into the soul of the fire, the meaning behind it or the massive existential consequences. These are important considerations that must be made when trying to understand the life of a fire.

This is ultimately what this paper is attempting to do; look at fire though a theoretical lens so that those observing and those standing amidst the flame can start to think through the deeper literal and allegorical meanings and uses of fire in a way that moves beyond the simple moral condemnation.

Shackville as The Event

Imagine you are standing up on a hill, looking down across an empty field; the darkness seems still in the way that makes your breath catch in your chest. Across the landscape you can see flickering; a seemingly fractured chain of burning links. A series of what seems like randomly erupted fires spread across the land. Though they may seem separated by vast amount of field they are connected - fire is always connected - to the earth, to each other, to you. You know- and it is as though you have always known- that fire spreads, from one event to the next, and as it does this is able to generate more than heat or the promises of destruction. Fire is able to generate theory.

But now, you are no longer standing on the hill and the field is not empty. You are in South Africa- and it is on fire.

South Africa is burning!

The flames seemed to soar, reaching in height and stretching to their fullest. Even from a distance one can feel the heat, see it- invisibly visible like the heat leaping off a tar road on a scorching summers day. I have been here before, I have stood in these crowds; stamping my feet in the awkward-off beat way that white protestors always seem to do. I was there when the statue fell, I had slept on the floor at Azania House and rolled over in that sassy, unconcerned way we all thought was appropriate when Max Price tried to get into his office.

I have learned that a crowd has no limits; that a crowd can storm administration buildings and national key points. I have learned to always expect the unexpected and to justify our actions after.

But this time I was merely an observer, no longer a student here - a visitor- an intruder.

The flames held their ground and seemed to demand a respect rare even for fire; the most feared of the elements. The flames were pulling their energy from the chanting students in the same way a couple in a toxic relationship draws their anger from each other- matching each other's fury blow by blow. The billowing black smoke could be seen from the bottom of the mountain. It was a warning for all onlookers- the decolonial politics of the Fallist student movement had finally turned to burning and there would be no going back.

The burning was not a spontaneous combustion but rather the inevitable flare up of the ongoing simmering following the student movement RhodesMustFall at the University of Cape Town in March 2015 and the consequential nationwide FeesMustFall protests in October that same year. It should have been no surprise when students arrived on the Jammie Steps in the hot February afternoon carrying sheets of corrugated iron and slabs of wood- ready to construct a Shack, the lesser-known landmark of the Western Cape.

The university has remained a site of political and social importance in South Africa's transition to democracy. Focuses on student and staff demographics

have continued to dominate headlines with a popular consensus that in order to racially transform the economy, one must first transform the graduate pool produced by the university. Consequently, it became the responsibility of the university to ensure that a broad range of black and female students were not only entering the institutions but also graduating from them.

Many saw the RhodesMustFall movement as focused only on the removal of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes but the movement also focused on the "invisible statues" and brought to light a much deeper crisis of the university in 2015. By not only focusing on the 'numbers debate' that had long held the center of focus but shifting the lens to more symbolic and aesthetic injustices the movement was able to garner great attention. Paul Gilroy (2016) has criticised 'the university' for its insistent focus on "diversity management"- where the university's main focus is on attracting and securing a 'diverse' student body and places no emphasis on curriculum, teaching or aesthetic. Consequently, intellectual issues are viewed as secondary. The RhodesMustFall movement sparked a conversation on curriculum, art, process and the consequential experiences of being black or female or trans or disabled at the university.

These themes were still present in the political discourse of the FeesMustFall movement but focus shifted to a much more material consequence of being a poor black student in the South Africa university and the impossibility of paying such high fees. Here, the motivation was less about the *experiences* of being a student and more about the barriers that prevent *access* to these institutions. These ideas seemed to spread with greater ease than those of RhodesMustFall and FeesMustFall quickly became the banner under which student's nation wide were able to unite.

Shackville- complete with a 'pota pota' (the portable toilet most common in Western Cape townships) was carefully and strategically constructed where the statue of Rhodes once stood. The iconic view of Jameson Hall crouching beneath Table Mountain was now polluted by a green and silver shack with the words "UCT HOUSING CRISIS" painted across the back wall. Many viewed it as "jarring

and incongruous amidst the pristine and manicured elitism of UCT" (Msimang, 2016). According to student protestors the shack had been constructed in protest of the university's housing policies that were not favourable towards poor black students and consequently left many homeless in the beginning of the academic year. The shack was intended to "drop black poverty at the doorstep of the university" so that it could no longer be ignored (Maxwele, 2016).

The shack had been standing for three days before the fire finally came. In the previous days students had climbed onto the roofs of the on looking residences where the busts of Jan Smuts and Marie Emmeline Barnard Fuller stood gazing at each other across the manicured lawns. They smeared the busts in a blood red paint. For the students the colonial figures memorialised through the portraits, plaque and statues represented a legacy so overwhelming, so suffocating and so dangerously powerful that it seemed to "extinguish the possibilities of their own futures" (Ndebele, 2016).

Management had sent repetitive requests to students to move the structure as it blocked traffic along Ring Road- one of UCTs main traffic routes. In an official email from the university, senior management said the shack "interfered with the freedom of movement of other staff and students" (2016). The final deadline for the students to remove the structure was on the 16th of February at 5pm. The students rejected this demand and proceeded to set rubbish bins alight. Fury grew alongside the flames and soon students had stormed the closest residences; pulling plaques and colonial paintings from the walls and throwing them into the center of the makeshift bonfire. One of the most widely used images in the media reports depicts the bronze plaque that had marked the entrance to Smuts Hall; UCTs first-all male- residence. The plaque was engulfed in a bright orange flame;

"SMUTS

1870-1950

His life was gentle, and the Elements/So mixt in him that Nature might stand up,/And say to all the world: This was a man."

For black South Africans, the life of Settler Jan Smuts, born in the Cape Colony in 1870, was not a gentle one. 66 years after his death protesting students were now demanding an end to his memorialisation. As the Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa from 1919 to 1924 Smuts had supported racial segregation and opposed the enfranchisement of black South Africans.

In her article published the following day, writer Sisonke Msimang (2016) referred to the burning off the portraits as the students' way of offering a "send off to all the dead white men whom history has covered in glory instead of blood", in this way the students were far beyond acknowledging history, they were straight out rejecting it, refusing to accept it as worthy as commemoration. The flames were doing more than licking at history- they were spitting on it.

In an address given at the University of Johannesburg in 2016, Professor Njabulo Ndebele gave a necessary and precise context to the burning;

"In the unfolding events it became clearer that the incineration of collected "white " "colonial" objects as embodiments of "whiteness", was the onset of a declared process to "decolonise" the University of Cape Town, and rid it of aspects of its legacy that made for a campus environment in which those for whom such a legacy was not built, and which they felt, consigned them "to silence", found it impossible "to breathe". Thus the pictorial memory of "whiteness", an attribute of imperialism and colonialism in this part of the world, would symbolically and practically be devoured by fire and be reduced to ashes, its visual presence erased, and its historicity rendered invisible."

Soon darkness fell and the fires continued to burn with students splintering off into smaller groups. A Jammie Shuttle, a private vehicle and the Vice Chancellors office went up in flames. Nonetheless it will surely be the image of the protesting students dancing and chanting around the angry red flame devouring the artwork that will be remembered as one of the most important 'Events' in recent years.

Though mostly attributed to Badiou, ideas surrounding The Event are located throughout philosophical thought with Heidegger viewing it as the emergence of a "new configuration of being" and Deleuze (1987) seeing it as the "folding in of a system" and an important turning point in history (Baki, 2014). Common in many philosophical writings on The Event is the unexpected and spontaneous nature of the 'split' between how things had been and how they will continue to be. Badiou lists the end of the cold war, the emergence of the Internet and the election of Barack Obama as important historical incidents that can be considered an Event. These all fit into his description of an "ontological rupture" or a "transformative break" between the past and present (Baki, 2014). The burning of the paintings at the steps of Jameson Hall can be considered a 'rupture' of suppressed anger, the 'folding in' of a colonial system that prioritises memorialisation over black students and a 'turning point' between the student movement and public opinion. Equally important, the burning marked the resurrection of the politics of fire.

Once the fires had calmed, the police had left and the sun began to rise on the 17th February all that was left was a pile of ash. Students continued to gaze at the deceased fire. They seemed to be waiting for something, perhaps the mythical phoenix to rise from the ashes and lead them to a fairer world. For many of the students, the remaining pile of ash marked a powerful turning of events, a new way of remembering the past and processing legacies. All that had been left behind would be used to start something new, something better. For many observers the pile of ash deserved great mourning- the remains of a night of great destruction where the precious, priceless and irreplaceable were met with hostile flame.

Siyabonga Njica, a protest poet and a student at UCT, had grown to hold great favour and respect among students during the first RhodesMustFall occupation at Azania house. Between 2015 and 2016 Njica continued to speak meaning into the events that many could not explain. Almost a year before the burning at Shackville while students sat scattered on the floor in the Archie Mafeje room, Njica recited a poem;

"*there will come a time when the history pages will burn*
and the ashes
will be used
to build bridges"

Here was our warning.

Chapter 1: An introduction to political violence and fire as revolutionary praxis in South Africa

Just five days before Chumani Maxwele threw poo at the statue of Cecil John Rhodes and South African universities were catapulted into what often seems like an inescapable furnace, another wildfire was announcing itself across the Cape Town landscape. Nestled in the Muizenberg shoulder of Table Mountain a fire more angry than the Western Cape had seen in years announced itself to the Cape Town Summer. Carried by the strong Southeastern winds, the fire blazed from its birthplace in the Farmer Peck Valley towards Hout Bay (Poulsen, 2015).

We could hear the helicopters from our seminar room, hovering above the university as they went to fill their buckets from the reservoir next to UCTs Molecular Biology Building. The helicopters dumped the buckets of water onto the fire but it made little difference. The fire continued to dance its way around each curve of the mountain.

The fynbos vegetation that fashions the mountains of the Cape Peninsula all the way through to the Cape Floral region is highly flammable and dependent on fire (Poulsen, 2015). Long before the blue banners of the Democratic Alliance became a provincial symbol of the Cape, fire was considered one of the most natural and important components in the regeneration and reproduction of the Fynbos Biome. Consequently, Cape Town residents have come to expect fire every 10 years or so.

After the mighty fires die down, they leave behind sprawling, blackened and barren-looking land. But beneath the ash, life is revealing itself. After the fire has passed the seeds adapt to survive the fire. More so, they adapt to require it. The chemical compounds from the smoke are used by the fynbos to sprout. The Protease opens their cones to drop their seed. The lilies are stimulated by the smoke and flower almost two weeks after the flames have left (Poulsen, 2015).

The process of flame, destruction and regeneration in the Cape has been part of the Fynbos ecology for millennia. Fire has a deeply connected relationship to the soil of South Africa, emerging every few years and generating new life (Poulsen, 2015). Though each ignition comes with its own set of casualities as homes, business and even life are at risk. The relationship with fire is a complex one in the South African ecosystem and it is equally complex, contrived and historical as it spreads into the political sphere, another space where fire has found a home. Here it emerges, as it does on the mountains, every few years and spreads with great haste.

Fire-Centered Politics in South Africa

"Together, hand in hand, with our boxes of matches… we shall liberate this country".
Winnie Mandela
1986

In October 2016, a collection of student activists, unionists, concerned parents and citizens met at Constitutional Hill, Johannesburg. The meeting was initially aimed at discussing the possibility of showing FeesMustFall student activists meaningful acts of solidarity and support. The meeting soon dissolved and grew into a space where people could vent their frustrations and concerns about the most recent acts of protest on university campuses. I sat in the corner, quiet and unsure of my role as a new student to Wits. Despite the meeting seeming like a useful space for catharsis, it was certainly unsuccessful in achieving its aims. I decided to leave. Whilst gathering my things, an elderly woman stood up and commanded the microphone. She introduced herself as an "interested citizen" but it became clear as she continued to speak that she was an anti-apartheid activist who had lived in exile for many years as a musician and performer. The woman was particularly concerned with the burning that had occurred on university campuses as just a week before the law library at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal had been set alight. She was careful not to condemn the burning, but stressed the importance of society asking 'why' so much burning had taken place. The woman looked down and took a deep breath before she exclaimed "I

just don't remember there ever being so much fire while we fought for our liberation".

The statement above evokes a number of points for discussion. First is the recognition that we are, *currently*, in a moment of immense fire that goes beyond the tangibility of rage and anger. University campuses have been the home to a smoldering flame for many years, yet the fires of the recent RhodesMustFall and FeesMustFall movements have captured national attention. Many refuse to engage the fire, deeming it a form of 'non-politics'.

Any attempt to try and understand the burning must be located within much broader context of fire and protest, for the assumption that South Africa has never squared up to fire before lacks an important historical perspective. Where there is politics, especially racial politics, one is sure to find a heaving fire. It is certainly not a difficult task to find moments of unrest characterised by burning. While it is important to take note of the approaching flame, the heat should not be viewed as South Africa's introduction to fire. By locating fire throughout various moments of South Africa's history and present, this chapter will trace moments when fire was used in protest as a means of further exploring some of its causes and implications. Much of the current discourse approaches fire as though the turn to burning is a new phenomenon. I hope to establish fire as a constant and evolving tool of protest throughout South African history.

Instances of collective (and political) violence in South Africa are no longer viewed as a spectacle that should be further explored. Instead such violence has become a "taken-for-granted-social fact" (Holdt, 2011:31). Beyond the immediate moral condemnation of the use of fire there has been little attempt to understand it further. Fire in protest is a piercing rejection of the respectability politics of the elite and the existing symbolic and social order. The flames seen in protest are representative of a new moral code being created by the dissident. Like the other elements, water and air, fire has the power to shift rapidly, change shape, occupy multiple spaces and push past existing boundaries. Both Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* (1993) as well as Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother: a*

Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Trade (2008) employ water as a tool to explore the multiple lives of racism and resistance throughout history. Embracing waters capacity to *flow.* Gilroy and Hartman explain the present by shifting between the past and the 'now'. Shifting been times allows them to travel through the historical waters to further understand the "history of the present" (Hartman, 2003: 191).

Similarly, for French Philosopher Foucault, a core feature of social theory is the interrogation of "what we have become" and the "nature of our present" (Rose, 1998: 197). In *What is Enlightenment?* (1986) Foucault suggests that to better understand our present we need to launch a historical investigation into the events that have come to shape it. It is custom when exploring the history of a concept or pattern of behaviour to follow a strict chronological order; not to time travel, to write fully about a certain moment, to maintain "the order of things" (Foucault: 1966). Yet, there is no order in the life of fire, it lives briefly, breaths sharply, spreads quickly. Fire has occupied many moments over time, never the same yet always similar. It connects history to the present and ties us to both. The Chapter that follows will shift between historical events of fire and present moments in the hope that a clearer understanding of the past may help to assign a deeper meaning to the present.

Throughout history, activists from across the globe have raged fire in an attempt to spark action and communicate a state of civil unrest. On a hot summer afternoon in August 1965, following the gunning down of a black man by a white police officer, residents of Watts district in Los Angeles embarked on a weeklong protest, which included "looting" and "arson" (Cohen, 1966). The protest, against racial injustice and police brutality, soon became so defined by fire that the 1966 book by Jerry Cohen on the race riots was titled *Burn, Baby, Burn!* Fire is common internationally in moments of unrest but South Africa in particular has formed an intimate bond with the element. A weapon of protest in some of the most violent and destructive uprisings in street politics before and after 1994, fire is also used in informal settlements across the country as a source of light, heat and warmth and community (Chance, 2015: 407).

Fire as response to Apartheid

Fire has long been coupled with protest and dissent within political spaces in South Africa. The image of the threatening red flame has been burnt into the discourse of political violence and resistance. School and training colleges in South Africa have a long history of racial resistance and one of the first recorded riots in South Africa occurred in February 1920, when students at the Kilnerton Training Center in Pretoria engaged in a hunger strike protesting the small quantity of food they were being given. A few months' later protesting students at the same institution set fire to their buildings (Hirson, 1979: 19). Fire continued to characterise resistance throughout the 1950s, 60s and 70s.

The 1950s and 1960s

In *Where there is Fire there is Politics,* Anthropologist Kerry Chance (2015) briefly explores how contemporary Political Theory has used fire as a "metaphor for political power" (2015). The "scorched earth" military strategy can be seen taking up a more literal meaning for the consuming rule of fire (Machiavelli, 1958). Foucault (1991) speaks to the "burning barricade" as powerful symbol of the revolution and Schmidt (1996) explores ways in which fire is used to disrupt institutions of liberal governance through the distributing and reclaiming of autonomy. These indicate the ways in which fire burns its way through the discourse on political violence.

Fire has become closely associated with South Africa's history of violent confrontation, specifically in historical battles between black demonstrators and state forces. Undoubtedly one of the most notorious living memories of fire in pre-1994 South Africa include the 1952 National Defiance Campaign and the ANCs call for black South Africans to burn their passbooks in the 1960s (Chance, 2015: 401). Here, fire as a mode of resistance sits in the center of the protest because burning one's passbook symbolised a radical act of emancipation and a

sharp rejection of apartheid laws that restricted both freedom and movement. The protestors threw their passbooks into bins engulfed by fire and then watched as the flames consumed a symbol of their collective oppression. Years of ongoing protest against the pass laws reached a burning point on 21 March 1960 when thousands gathered at the gate of the local police station in the township of Sharpeville to protest the pass laws. The police opened fire and 69 people, including 8 women and 10 children were massacred outside the police station, many of those shot in the back (Hirson: 1979: 49). On 28 March 1960 Nelson Mandela famously burnt his passbook in protest of the atrocities of the Sharpeville massacre (Chance, 2015: 401). This public torching of a tangible symbol of apartheid, showed the racist policies of the state to be illegitimate. By reducing a powerful and violent law to a mere heap of ash, Mandela was able to demonstrate fire's potential role in the destruction and recreation of society.

The 1970s

16 years later the eyes of the world were once again drawn to heat of South African resistance as the Soweto uprisings of 1976 began to unfold. Baruch Hirson (1979) explores the roots of the revolt in *Year of Fire Year of Ash.* The title, a clear reference to burning, is borrowed from a poem by Oupa Thando Mthimkulu titled *Ninety Seventy-Six.* I have included the last five lines of the poem for reference;

You lost the battle
You were not revolutionary
Enough
We do not boast about you
Year of fire, year of ash.

The poem is an ode to the revolutionary riots of 1976, a sober reflection on the proposed 'successes' of the riots. For many involved on the ground and those who lost loved ones, the year is defined by the wild, vicious and unpredictable

nature of fire and then the still blanket of ash. Ash being the ultimate representation of the aftermath of the protest, the silence after the destruction, the moment before it is time to mourn and rebuild. The aftermath of any protest is just as important as the protest itself because it allows one to reflect on the forces that aided in the ignition and spreading of rebellion.

In 1972, following the banning of the South African Student Organisation-SASO (the student movement promoting Black Consciousness that was closely associated with Steve Biko) students responded by creating bonfires and setting alight university documents and official diaries. In the years that followed 1972 and preceded 1976 schools, public libraries and municipal buildings were burnt down by angry black students demanding better quality education and fair treatment by the state (Hirson: 1979: 86).

Thinking back to 1976, many will recall the heart-wrenching image of Hector Peterson's body being carried by a fellow student through the streets of Soweto while Peterson's sister ran next to them. Peterson, a 13-year-old boy, was brutally murdered by the apartheid police during a protest on 16 June 1976. On that day, over 20 000 Soweto school children marched against Afrikaans being a medium of instruction in primary and secondary schools (Manganyi, 1990). The death of Peterson and the 13 other murdered school children triggered urgent political action, though the happenings of 1976 are symptomatic of a high level of political activity that had been occurring since the early 1970s (Hirson, 1979) For months prior to June 16, black school children united workers and parents under the banner of revolution in order to put serious pressure on South Africa's economy. Dissent simmered for weeks and in May 1976 students held open talks regarding the issue of Afrikaans in the classroom. Hirson has described the events of 1976 as being characterized by a "voluble fury" which he attributes to the lives that a black people lived in South Africa under apartheid, specifically in Soweto; "the faces and bodies of many Soweto people are scared; the gun is quick and the knife is silent" (1979:4).

The riots of the 70s are located within a broader political context of the rise of Black Consciousness with Steve Biko and Winnie Mandela acting as prominent proponents. After the burning that took place on 16th June 1976 Winnie Mandela agreed to an interview with filmmaker Eric Abraham. Abraham question Mandela on what many in power and mainstream media houses termed 'mere vandalism' by the students. Winnie Mandela responded that "the burning of the offices belonging to the government administration- beerhalls, post offices, administration run busses- should be enough for people to realise that it has nothing to do with vandalism, it is black anger against white domination" (Hirson, 1979: 3).

The Symbolic Code of Fire

The 1980s

"No Education before Liberation"

While both the Sharpeville massacre and the Soweto Uprisings continue to hold huge importance within South Africa's political history, it was the 1980s that were branded by ongoing and extreme levels of political violence within the townships. Between 1984 and 1987 South Africa entered a volatile period that theorists have described as 'unprecedented' level of political violence with a total of 2987 deaths related to political struggle being recorded (Manganyi, 1990). To mark the remarkable involvement of black youth, Chabani Manganyi renowned black psychologist, labeled this period "the time of the comrades" (1990:5). Since the student uprisings of 1976, black youth took huge initiative in the struggle against apartheid and acted in many instances as the vanguard of the protest action (Manganyi, 1990). In his foreword in *Political Violence and the Struggle in South Africa* edited by both him and Andre Du Toit (1990) Manganyi reflects that, "more often than not it was youths who manned the street barricades and swelled the protest marches, monitored stayaways and boycotts and who were the primary targets of police bullets, teargas and detentions".

“The time of the comrades” (1990) became more than just youth involvement; it was also the time of mass resistance in the townships. The resistance was carried out with a newfound tenacity and ferocity as citizens throughout the country undertook school and rent boycotts under the slogan; “no education before liberation”. Predictably, the apartheid government responded forcibly to this threat of disorder and sent in the national army and police forces. Between 1985 and 1986 South Africa declared its second ever State of Emergency. During this period the “symbolic code” associating fire with political violence began to plant its roots in the media (Posel, 1990: 150). Prior to the 1980s, South African media and reporting was a sphere cowering beneath a cloak of censorship, news reports often lacked images and were limited to short captions at the bottom of the television screen. However, state strategy began to change dramatically in the 1980s, and ironically the period of resistance in the townships between January 1985 and June 1986 saw explicit media coverage of the continuous battles occurring between the state and those waging a war against it (Posel, 1990: 153). This does not imply that all images conveyed to the public were free from censorship. Most of the aired footage failed to show the assaults carried out by state sanctioned forces.

The vicious and bloody altercations drew local and international attention. Sociologist Deborah Posel argues that during this time the state used visual materials as a tool with which to establish a “symbolic code” as a way of promoting certain state ideologues. Posel defines this symbolic code as a “restricted series of images and concepts which became visual and verbal shorthand for township violence” (1990: 152). Here she identified “the crowd”, “stone throwing” and “fire” as three symbols used by both media and the state to represent the “essence” of township violence (1990:153). As these three symbols splattered the front pages of newspapers and found their home in the evening newsreel, they became perceived as complete and self-evident explanations of what had happened. By using this imagery, media was able to promote a particular narrative without the need for context or detail (Posel, 1990).

The “Symbolic code”- a “brief symbolic allusion that was able to take over as a vehicle of ideological legitimation” was perceived by its audiences in such a way that it legitimised violent state intervention and force in the townships (Posel, 1990: 154). The “symbolic code” of political protest was created through a carefully curated reel of documentary footage that used repetition to depict township violence as more than a sequence of individual incidents. This code acted as a reference for the very ‘nature’ of the violence. Posels research indicates that of the 86 news items on township violence between 1985 and 1986, 70 contained images of crowds, stone throwing or flames that were aired irrespective of the particularities of the reported event or incident. She suggests that the power of these images rests in their ability to symbolise political violence as a whole (1990: 155).

“the process of symbolic contestation is best illustrated by particular examples from newsclips. The 8pm News on 9 May 1985 told of several “incidents of unrest”. The newsreader read that in Tskane on the East Rand, 11 people died, 8 allegedly due to ‘faction violence’ between migrant hostel dwellers and township residents. Visually however, the viewed saw only an eerie night time shot of gathering black youths dancing around backdrop of flames. In TV news the visual footage is presented and interpreted as a confirmation or amplification of the verbal text. In this case the viewer was not told if the violence had occurred at night or whether that particular crowd depicted had been directly involved. Rather, by implication, the association between the verbal and visual text was symbolic” (Posel, 1990: 156).

The extract above is a small indication of how, collectively, the three prominent symbols forming the states ideological code were used to attach ideas of destruction, disorder and the absence of reason or intelligence to the black protestors. Especially powerful, and intimately connected are the symbols of both “the crowd” and fire. Like a flame, raging crowds carry spontaneity, have the ability to shapeshift, carry the expectancy of danger, change direction and grow in hostility. At any given protest, one can expect to find a crowd within a crowd as the protest spreads from mass meetings, to running street battles and then smaller groups burning selected targets (Posel, 1990: 157). Different

crowds have different functions, have different leaders and can be spontaneously sparked by different things at different times.

The Crowd

German writer Elias Canetti's work on "The Crowd" identifies fire as a "crowd-symbol"- a name given to a collective unit that whilst not containing the bodies of humans still felt to be a 'crowd' (1962). For Canetti, to study fire is the best way to understand the life and functions of a crowd. Canetti explains how the element of fire connects what has been kept separate, similar to the crowd uniting activists under the same ideological or political cause (1962).

Posel argues that in the 1980s "the crowd" was always portrayed as a huge sea of faceless bodies with marching feet (1990: 157). Crowds were pictured as disordered and lacking any purposeful and responsible leadership. This made them devoid of any sort of political position. In the same way as fire, the crowd is constantly seeking expansion. Within the anonymity of the crowds, the visibility of fire is astounding, once lit fire has the capacity to spread violently in both time and distance, its flame recognisable by both its brilliant colour and the smoke hovering above. Yet, those who light the match are often kept invisible and protected, easily lost in a crowd (1990: 157). As though the crowd threatens combustion, large groups of protestors were often described by the media as "erupting", "spreading" or "breaking out" (Posel, 1990: 158). Through these explosive metaphors we can start to see the close bonds between the ideas of fire and that of "the crowd".

On the 23rd of March 1985, the 6pm news broadcast PW Botha affirming the (white) citizens of South Africa that he would "keep order in South Africa". He assured the (white) public that no one would be able to stop him (Posel, 1990: 160). His address was followed by a shot of a crowd marching their way through billowing clouds of smoke. The commanding image of the uncontrollable red flame and its accompanying smoke, beyond representing a destructive and

uninhibited energy, is used along side the crowd as a tool of de–politicisation and ultimately de-legitimation (1990, 160). Linking the symbol of the crowd so closely with fire paints a picture of the protestors as driven by a spontaneous and unpredictable 'inner force' and therefore lacking in political purpose, strategy and ultimately self-control.

In the 1980s the media houses grew habitual in their pairing of the angry mob with the even angrier red flame, creating a representative moment of visual 'unrest'. Adjusting temporal locations to the 10th of October 2016, when photographer Ihsaan Hafejee uploaded a series of photographs from a FeesMustFall protest onto the GroundUp website. The photographs follow the intensity of student protests at Wits University where, after being refused entrance to Solomon Mahlangu House (the space students had claimed as 'theirs' during the 2015 protests), students and police began to engage in cat and mouse running games until a majority of the student activists were chased off campus and into the streets of Johannesburg. The once united group of protestors became fractured with many dispersing in clusters along Jorrison and Stiemens Street. Others sought safety in the Holy Trinity Catholic Church behind the Wits Art Museum.

The events that unfolded on that smoldering hot afternoon would be best described as 'chaotic'. A Police Nyala raced around in circles, firing rubber bullets at students, shopkeepers, priests, journalists and medics. As predicted, students retaliated by throwing stones at the armed vehicle. The heat of the moment seemed contagious and soon passers by, workers and street vendors joined in. The protest was now directed towards the police and the tensions began to flare up. By late afternoon, reports that students had attacked and set fire to a public bus driving through Braamfontein had started to circulate. One of the photographs that Hafejee uploaded caught the media attention. The image depicts a young black man wearing boots and denim shorts, standing in front of a burning bus with his arms raised in a triumphant pose. The image received massive hype and was recirculated in the Daily Maverick and the Sunday Times as the defining image of violence from that day. This was despite the fact that no

one knew who this man was, whether or not he was a student, and ultimately whether he had been involved in setting fire to the bus. Throughout the FeesMustFall protests of 2015 and 2016 fire was signaled out by the media as the symbol of student dissatisfaction.

It would be careless to suggest that fire only played a role in moments of rupture between white state functions and black protestors. In the 1980s the apartheid state, the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and the ANC all engaged in acts of 'necklacing' (Manganyi, 2016). Those identified as an "impimpi", traitor or spy would be set alight by having a burning tire placed over their neck and arms. Suspected 'Impimpi's' would often have their homes set alight. Fire in this instance was punishment, a death sentence and a necessary purification from ones sins. Through the media, the state made sure to capitalise on the crude associations of fire. The continuous use of images that showed crowds of black protestors dancing around fires combined with the inclusion of the explicit shots of 'necklacing' granted the media the power to "expose" the "sacrificial" nature of fire and the "primitive" nature of the protestors (Posel, 1990: 156). In October 2016, media groups such as Eyewitness News and ENCA circulated images of black youth dancing around small fires that had been set in Braamfontein. The dissemination of this sort of footage articulates a sense of primitivism that was then imputed onto the broader behaviour and beliefs of the students.

In her research, Posel isolates a report from the 8pm news on the 10 July 1985 where a TV reporter referred to 'necklacing' as a "barbaric method of intimidation and unspeakable savagery"- the night time news acted as a portal for the white viewer to "see" into the more "primitive side" of society (1990:161). Posel writes that the TV reports made use of extremely visceral images, pointing to a specific incident where the TV1 news aired the necklacing of a black woman at a funeral in Duduza. The camera focused on the naked body of the woman while she screamed in pain as the flames attacked her skin. News reports never named the victims of necklacing or assigned them an individual identity. Similarly the attacker was never singled out rather the act of necklacing

itself was always tied to the image of a dangerous and threatening crowd (1990:161).

Upon recognising that a symbolic code exists in media broadcasting, it becomes necessary to further explore political violence in South Africa in an attempt to locate fire within this discourse. This location must examine fire as both an expression of a broader symptom and as a predominant characteristic of the voice of dissent. In many instances fire has become the language of the oppressed. There is a vast amount of literature on political violence within debates about morality, cause, destruction and implication. The contested nature of political violence continues to swirl around public and political discourse in post- 1994 South Africa as theorists and activists delve into the complexity of the concept.

Violence and Fire

For many 'violence' carries no further meaning beyond that of destruction. In *Discourses of Violence*, South African philosopher Johan Degenaar (1990) traces the etymology of the term 'violence' to originate from *vis* (force) and *latus,* the past participle of the word *ferro* (carry). Taken in arrangement, Degenaar lays out the meaning of violence as; *to carry force (towards something).* He clarifies that to carry force towards an object does not in itself constitute violence, rather the effect of the force carried out needs to result in damage or destruction (1990:6) Degenaar keeps his definition of violence intentionally vague so as to include the violence of a storm, the physical violence inflicted by one individual on another and the violence of a burning fire (1990:6). One can already start to see the links forming between fire and violence, for on its most basic level one expects fire to be threatening and apt in its promise of destruction. Degenaar emphasises this connection through his reference to "modes of violence" (1990:75). The 'mode', he describes is an important part of understanding the deeper meaning of a particular concept, for the true meaning of this concept is not limited to a single word but is shared broadly within words that have a

"family resemblance" (Degenaar: 1990:74). Perhaps one could view fire and violence as a pair of shrewd siblings. An example would be Stanage's description of the word "burn" as a particular verb that has many violent connotations (Degenaar, 1990: 74).

'Fighting Fire with Fire'- Police Violence

"The post-apartheid protest" is a radical reclaiming of the rights promised in the transition to democracy (Holdt: 2011). The protest often shifts from anti state to anti-police as police violence is enforced to quell protest. References to fire in discourse on political violence seem especially limited to fire used by the protestors in an illegal act of popular warfare. It seems necessary to force this discourse wide open in order to include fire as a tool that is also used by the state sanctioned police force. Media reports subconsciously support my claim through the continuous use of the term "fired" to describe the action of a police person using their gun against protesters. The reports that police have 'fired' or are 'firing' live ammunition is linked to the mechanical workings of the gun. Simply put, when you cock a gun, it pulls back a spring loaded hammer, as you pull the trigger the hammer is propelled forward and strikes the back of the bullet. The bullet contains an element that sparks when the hammer and the bullet connect. The spark ignites the gunpowder and creates an explosion that propels the tip of the bullet out the gun and forward at a high speed. The bullet is reliant on the spark. Effectively the action of shooting a gun containing live ammunition or even rubber bullets is an action that is deeply engaged with the element of fire.

In October 2015, following the student storming of parliament during FeesMustFall in the Western Cape, a Daily Maverick article by Andrew Faull and Mark Shaw called the Stun Grenade the South African police forces "new weapon on choice". The weaponry is expressed as a "non-lethal" explosive device typically used to disorient the targets senses through the blast it makes as it hits the ground and creates a 'flash', a 'bang' and a lasting puff of smoke (2015). Anything that "ignites" or "explodes" is reliant on a detonator, which is highly

sensitive to heat or friction (Faull & Shaw, 2015). The detonator used in a stun grenade is almost identical to that used in bombs and various military artillery. It is common by those who work with weaponry to refer to a detonator as a "fire-centered" weapon (Faull &Shaw, 2015).

I want to then suggest that protests in South Africa are engaging in a spiral of violence within which both the state and the protesters are using fire in the cycle of attack and counter attack and are ultimately 'fighting fire with fire'. The 2011 report released by the Society, Work and Development Institute (SWOP) on collective violence in various South African communities identifies the police as the primary protagonists in escalating violence (2011:8). The police see their principal role as the shutting down of protest and not the protection of citizens (2011:9). Consequently, the presence of the police heightens the levels of violence by intensifying confrontation and exacerbating tensions which often result in running street battles and stone throwing (Holdt: 2011: 14).

Legitimating Fire in Protest

Both popular and theoretical discourses on political violence tend to be 'legitimist' in nature; this requires the incorporation of specific criteria for the legitimate or illegitimate use of force (Degenaar: 1990:68). Certainly the most common legitimist discourse on political violence is the liberal discourse. The approval of the use of 'fire' by police to quell acts of protest can be further explained within this discourse. In 1947, the British-Austrian philosopher Sir Karl Popper gave an address titled *Utopia and Violence* in which he presented violence to be positioned as a direct opposite to reason and therefore a completely illegitimate means (1990:107). For Popper, it is impossible to conceive of any 'reasonableness' in an act of violence. Popper's notions surrounding violence are grounded in the ideals of a liberal democracy to be founded on reason and negotiated compromise, whilst violence is attached to an authoritarian and revolutionary politic (du Toit, 1990:107). In his address Popper famously said " the rationalist who chooses for reason rather than

violence, would rather be unsuccessful in convincing another man by argument than successful in crushing him by force, intimidation and threat" (du Toit, 1990: 109).

The liberal discourse on violence of course is uncritical when it comes to acts of violence exerted on the citizen by the state. Popper introduces the confusing idea of "counter violence" (du Toit, 1990: 108), a use of violence in defense of violence and a protection of reason as a means that is necessary and therefore permissible. However, the need to justify "counter violence" still assumes that some party will face the possibility of injury or harm (du Toit, 1990: 108). Therefore "counter violence" is still a form of violence. The liberal discourse has, in fact, created an area of reason where violence is seen as a necessary rational means. When used as an act of protest directed at the state or a specific institution, society at large strongly condemns. However, when the stat uses fire as a way of maintaining the order of the democratic state, it is seen as legitimate because it is an official and authorised action.

This places an interesting lens on any analysis of violence -and more specifically of fire. Necklacing is of course a use of fire that is attached specifically to the body, however most times when fire is used in protest it is directed at strategic targets that have symbolic representations such as libraries. The setting of fire to busses brings to the fore the lack of of accessibility many have to certain modes of transportation. Fire is also used to put a halt to "business as usual" such as administration buildings (Holdt, 2011). Student protestors in South Africa have understood and accepted this strategy, targeting campus busses, university libraries, lecture halls and even- as seen at UCT- the Vice Chancellors office.

Yet, when the state or the police engage in fire politics, the target seems to be the body of the protestor. During the FeesMustFall protests at Wits University in 2017 a young female student was burnt across her face by the explosion of a stun grenade that went off too close to her. Another Wits student was shot in the back with thirteen-rubber bullets at close range (2016). During the storming of parliament in 2015 a protestor had his shoe blown off and the skin on his leg

burnt off after a stun grenade landed on his foot before detonating. Yet, "the politics of the spectacle" as Wits Vice Chancellor Adam Habib writes is a politics always focused on the damage done to property (2016). The view that property, whether private or public, is more important that the body reflects the neo-liberal nature of society, and more specifically the university.

Fire as the final Equaliser

Abahlali's 'Living Politics' of Fire

Since the early 2000s, South Africa has seen a rise in community violence. The tangled nature of fire, life and politics was hugely reignited in 2005 by the birth of Abahlali baseMjondolo; a shack dwellers movement that uses popular politics to campaign against evictions and to promote public housing, better living conditions and a bottom up approach to democracy (Chance, 2015: 396). The movement found its origins during a blockade on the Kennedy Road Shack Settlement in Slovo Durban and has since spread it ideas and presence to various settlements across South Africa (2015: 403). From the beginning Abahlali identified fire as an important part of their struggle. The movement's relationship with fire is a particularly interesting one as many of their protests against the state are related to the states inability to provide settlements with electricity and the devastating shack fires that occurred as a result (2016: 406). Yet, Abahlali is unapologetic about using fire in the street during their various acts of protest. More than just random acts of sabotage, their actions are devoted to a burning ideological passion.

Life in the post-1994 township is a life under constant attack by fire. Shack fires- especially during the cold winter months when fire is used by residents to keep warm-leave thousands destitute and many dead. On 3 July 2016 alone, five people died in a shack fire in the Plastic View settlement in Pretoria. Over 76 families were left without homes, school uniforms, documents, clothes and food after the fire in the Kenville Settlement in Pretoria (Haffejee, 2016). Thus, Abahlali has identified shack fires to be a result of the failure of the state to

provide people in settlements with the most basic services such as water and electricity (Chance, 2015:408). Abahlali view this neglect as a stripping of their humanity and dignity by the state and believe that township residents are simply "left to burn because they do not count to this government and to this society" (Chance, 2015: 412). The movement views their bodies being left to burn as the ultimate act of state sanctioned oppression.

Chance explains how fire is used by Abahlali as an act of "ungovernable street politics in state-citizen struggles" (2015: 406). She suggests that township residents make use of the material properties of fire to fight for political inclusion and meaningful economic redistribution. Noting all that I have outlined earlier in this chapter, Chance explains how the *fire politics* of Abahlali have been 'borrowed' from the liberation politics that characterised the 1970s and 1980s and which remain criminalised in South Africa's democracy (2015: 401). She goes on to makes the observation that 'the political' in the post-apartheid moment has often been interpreted as "anti democratic" and when fire is used as an instrument for public engagement it is then viewed as a criminal act (2015:402).

Then and now-fire used in moments of insurgence, is a fight for recognition for those living on the outskirts of urban society. The power that lies in the ability to "transform a burning match into a conflagration" (Chance, 2015: 399) forces the state to acknowledge the protestor, not as the governed but as the "ungovernable". Here, fire holds the transformative power of "ungovernability". Being ungovernable is part of Abahlali's strategy of "living politics". Fire is a way of pushing those in power to acknowledge those whom have been ignored, those who feel that they have not been treated with dignity and those who feel unable to participate in society as full citizens- those that have been frozen out. While conducting interviews in various precarious communities plagued by violence, a researcher from SWOP questioned a young protestor on the means of their violence achieving their objectives, the protestor responded simply, referring to the mayor, he stated "he will see by the smoke we are calling him"(Holdt, 2011: 41).

Members of the movement hold broad characterisations of "living politics" ranging from "public dramas" such as the burning at road blockades, to using fire to cook or a candle to read (Chance, 2015: 400). For Abahlali, the politics of dying, living and resisting is a fire-centered politics that breaks down the boundaries between the home and the streets. Fire makes the poor visible and gives them a voice through any means necessary. Fire politics draws a line of separation between those in "civil society" and mobilisations that have been dubbed "uncivil" (2015:406). Over the years there has often been tension between the Shack Dwellers movement and associated NGOs in the Western Cape over Abahlali's continuous turn to burning. The NGOs, who theoretically hold a similar vision to Abahlali in terms of land reform and the distribution of basic services are quick to contribute to the sermon condemning the criminality of the burning. Yet, Abahlali is consistent in their response - fire is a crucial part of their daily life and other means of engagement continue to remain unavailable to the poor (Chance, 2015: 406). More than anything, the burning match in the hands of the Abahlali activist demonstrates that fire belongs to no one and everyone.

In South Africa, then and now- fire is perhaps the most accessible form of politics as it is within reach of the most 'ordinary' person. That is why it has often been the weapon of choice for those oppressed and disenfranchised. Working class urban activists continue to hold the view that it is fire that separates the rich from the poor and the white from the black. Who burns? And who dies in the fire? These remain important questions to ask in South Africa as fires final line of difference is between life and death. Fire is the final equaliser; it holds no prejudice to race, gender or class. It cannot be intimidated and has no qualms when entering the union buildings, just as it shows no guilt for destroying a shack. Fire does not ask how much money you have in the bank or hiding under your bed. It only devours

Chapter 2: "Our rage is the fire"

"FUCK WHITE PEOPLE" shouted Wits Student and member of the EFF Student Command, Mbe Mbhele, at the 2015 Ruth First Lecture. The unapologetic pronouncement seemed to shake the white intellectual community at Wits with many deeming the comment inappropriate. The 'fuckness' continued into the New Year and when first year students arrived at Wits in the beginning of 2016 they were met with countless scenes of "Fuck white people" graffiti sprawled across the university walls. The 'fuckness' was heightened by the arrival of another student, Zama Mthunzi, on campus. Mthunzi wore a t-shirt that had the slogan painted on the back. Student activists Simakele Dlakavu says " Fuck Whiteness, but fuck white people also. Why am I not allowed to say 'fuck you' when you fuck me over everyday? So Fuck you" (Fikeni: 2016).

A year later at the 2016 Ruth First Lecture during Lwandile Fikeni's presentation on *Protest, Art and the Aesthetics of Rage,* Fikeni also contributed towards the "Fuck White People" debate. For Fikeni "Fuck White People" locates itself in the center of Rage, Anger, Art and Performance as it presents itself as a "highly aestheticised" critique of social experience, oppression and racism (2016). Going back to its original source Fikeni questions Mbhele on why he views the declaration to be so important- "Fuck white people' is the perfect articulation of how we feel. Frank Wilderson says there's no vocabulary, no language to articulate black suffering" (Fikeni, 2016). The mention of Wilderson by a leader of the student protests is one of the many indicators of the growing relevance of "plantation politics"- or "Afropessimism" within the movement. This Chapter seeks to place anger, rage and frustration in the center of the flame, arguing that each emotion is burning in both nature and consequence. The chapter will go further and attempt to offer explanations as to why students are so angry that they appear to have caught fire. More so, the second part of the chapter will introduce Afropessimism, a theoretical lens of critique that is tied closely to anger and rage. I will argue that Afropessimism is a framework that has informed much of student activism in recent years and that the growing

relevance of Afropessimist thought among students and young intellectuals has assisted in the upsurge of fires across South African campuses.

A preface

February 2015.
During the UCT Rhodes Must Fall Movement
As you begin the long journey up the mountain, with a flat top, towards a university that was both founded by and moulded on colonial power, you will hear the singing of black students, of angry students. You will hear their pain catch in their throats and the determination in the way they stamp their feet into the hard cement ground. If you are a white person walking up the mountain, with a flat top, it is unlikely that you will understand what the singing means, you may not even care- but the singing will go on. As you get closer to the university, you will arrive at a large green field. On the right of the field, just below where the statue of Cecil John Rhodes stands, you will see a phrase from one of the songs painted onto the wall; "Sixole Kanjani". The phrase finds its origin in a well-known Xhosa song about the murder of struggle icon, Chris Hani. The song speaks to the battle to forgive those that have murdered Chris Hani but the phrase 'Sixole Kanjani' has been appropriated to speak to a much deeper struggle about forgiveness, vengeance and consuming anger.

For many, the term "Sixole Kanjani" is simply an attempt to stoke the fire of hatred in South Africa-a way to seek vengeance where it is no longer necessary. This way of thinking about the past is most aptly described by writer TO Molefe as "white obliviousness"; a response to "black anger" that is unwilling, due to never being touched by the flames of poverty, unemployment and racism, to *truly* comprehend the past and thus consequently have an inability to understand the present (2012).

During the FeesMustFall movement in 2015 a black student was pictured standing on UCTs Jameson Plaza with a placard that read "Our parents were sold

dreams in 1994…we just want a refund!" In 1994 South Africa was internationally lauded for its 'peaceful' transition to democracy and glorified for the success of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and amnesty process (1994-2001). The TRC focused on the coming forward of those whom had committed racially fueled crimes during apartheid in the hope that they would take responsibility for their actions. Perpetrators were promised amnesty from prosecution and victims received small amounts of monetary compensation. The TRC was premised on the healing promise of forgiveness and many religious and political leaders called on black South Africans to forgive so that South Africa could end its cycle of offence and violence (Swartz, 2016).

The importance of forgiveness was anchored in the need for South Africa to successfully transition to a democratic state and rebuild all that had been broken over the 300 years of colonial rule and apartheid laws. Underlying this was the assumption that to 'rebuild' or 'fix' required no backward looking or finger pointing and a stark focus on the future (Minow, 1999). The short poem, titled *The Fix*, written by African American poet Nayyirah Waheed (2013), appears in her first anthology of poetry — *Salt*.

"Getting yourself together,
what about undoing yourself?"

The poem is soft reminder of how in an attempt to 'fix' what has been broken, hurt or injured, it has become habit to focus only on 'getting things together'. There is rarely a focus on the process of 'undoing' despite there being much to unravel and systematically tear apart in an attempt to live in a society that resembles anything 'good'. Though theoretically the act of forgiveness may seem a powerful symbol of restoration, in practice it has often taken the place of important acts of restitution and even retribution. In *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness* (1999) Martha Minow recounts her observations from the TRC in the 90s and recalls from memory the victims recoiling as the perpetrators reached out to hug or shake hands. For her this emphasised the importance of forgiveness being something that is granted and not merely assumed (Minow,

1999: 17). It is a consequence of this assumed forgiveness that there is now so much confusion as we stand amidst the angry red flame.

Part 1: The University is burning

"Universities across the country are on fire. Our rage is the fire."

This is the title of an article that appeared in the Daily Vox, a citizen driven news publication, in late October 2016. The article, written by Oliver Meth, a postgraduate student at Wits University, is an honest, furious and blazing response to the burning of the UKZN law library during the FeesMustFall protests earlier that month. Meth articulates that:

"fire is raging across South Africa. Fire over the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Fire in the streets. Fire of protection in defense of capitalist territories. Fire in protection of ANC headquarters Luthuli House. Burning state property, lecture halls and libraries".

Meth's own rage is palpable through his writing as he condemns the ANC-led government for misleading poor black people and feeding their bellies with misplaced hope rather than opportunity and freedom. He slams the state for the continued exclusion and disadvantage of the black majority, arguing that black South Africans continue to be excluded from "primary school to high school to the university to the workplace to the spatial geography of our [black] communities" (Meth, 2016).

Meth emphasises the fundamental idea that has woven its way through recent student protests in South Africa and the BlackLivesMatter protests in the US-

"We have had *enough*".

What is interesting about Meth's account of the 2016 moment of protest is his comparison of (black) rage to a burning fire. Beyond the use of fire as a material tool of destruction in acts of protest, the intrinsic energy of resistance has often been compared to burning. Fire is the most emotive of the elements; it is able to evoke a broad and complex set of emotions; from empowerment to agony. Even the literal and aesthetic images of fire are associated with intense emotions of love and loss. The American Rock group The Doors sing, "come on baby, light my fire" (1966)- speaking to the intimate fire burning between sexual partners. Love ends when the "spark is gone". Yet, fires strongest association is with anger or in Meth's account- Rage.

Anger in the formation of social movements

Oral historian Carrie Hamilton argues that throughout history, different emotions have come to be associated with particular social and political movements (2010). By connecting fire, anger and rage to the protest action of FeesMustFall in 2016, Meth is inserting these emotions into what Barbara Rosenwein terms a "system of feeling" (2010), a system created by communities- in this case the protesting students- based on what they deem to be valuable and necessary emotions. Both Hamilton and Rosenwein emphasise the important role of emotion in the creation and the understanding of various social and political movements (Hamilton, 2010: 86).

A common critique of the RhodesMustFall and FeesMustFall movements is that they have been founded and consequently grounded on emotional appeal and appears to reject any plea of rationality. We see students continuously uniting under placards that speak of "rage" and "pain". It is necessary to be honest about the role that emotion plays within moments of activism. It has become convention for activists to deny the role various emotions play in motivating protest. This is an attempt to construct their actions as motivated by rationality and therefore more worthy of consideration and understanding by those outside of the movement (Hamilton, 2010: 87). The feminist critique recognises emotion as a type of knowledge. This challenges the notion that emotions and feelings

have no place in politics and do not form a crucial part of the "political character" of activism or social movements (Hamilton, 2010: 89).

The authority of Anger

Can you feel your anger burn?

I argue that anger in both feeling and expression is intimately associated with burning. Psychologists have described anger as a complex emotion that operates closely within a larger matrix of hostility and aggression. That is, anger is an emotional state that grows into hostility and often results in an aggressive behaviour or action (Taylor & Risman, 2006:61). Conventional wisdom within counseling and psychological spaces is that those who experience anger seek expressions of catharsis, which in the post-colonial tradition often morphs into violence, or burning.

Gestalt Therapy by theorists Perls, Hefferline and Goodman (1951) developed a colour characterisation of the various levels of intensity in which one experiences emotions. Anger is marked as a red emotion, a colour synonymous with fire and an expression of the internal burning sensation one experiences when enraged. In the same way that a burning fire is difficult to control and even harder to contain so too is anger. Anger is a searing and often painful emotion that unnerves the senses and creates a physical sensation. It is an emotion that physically agitates the body; those whom are quick to anger are often referred to as 'hot heads' in reference to the physical hotness that travels up the body when angry. Anger is often ignited by a particular incident or event, igniting a fire in the belly and rising until it can no longer be held. The expectation of an angry person eventually "exploding" offers the possibility that anger has the potential to harm, both oneself and others.

Catching Fire

On reflection of the US based uprisings of 2014, prominent African American intellectual and political commentator Cornel West defined the resistance in Ferguson an "indistinguishable fire"; a fire that retains its energy from the force of a previously suppressed anger rising to the surface (2014). In the introduction to Wests *Black Prophetic Fire* he identifies the *fire* of the new generation as the "hypersensitivity to the suffering of others that generates a righteous indignation that results in the willingness to live and die for freedom" (2014: 1). Ultimately in the anti-racist movements in the US and on South African university campuses, the youth are *catching fire* in response the various forms in which the abhorrent history of white supremacy has revealed itself.

Following the release of his book *Black Prophetic Fire (2014)*, which explores the lives and legacies of notable and forgotten African American leaders, West has often been questioned on his choice of fire as a metaphor. The associations with destruction and pain appear to stand in contrast with Wests strong religious teachings. West maintains however, that there is an inherent beauty about being "on fire for justice and freedom", and a power that lies in feeling the burning of ones soul. He continues that to be on fire for justice is to be an advocate for truth, understanding that the condition of truth is to allow suffering to speak, accepting that fire is often the language of the oppressed (2014).

Recent popular culture has seen rise of the term "to spit fire" – this is regularly used to refer to an angry person, often wronged, who is speaking truth to power. The authority of anger lies in the assumption of truth telling. When one is angry and feels free to "speak from the heart" it is said to carry a level of sincerity, authenticity and honesty.

Meth spit fire;

We have been here before.

Universities across the country are on fire

And we don't need to water, let it burn.

Types of Violence that lead to anger:

This section will seek to move through violence and use anger and rage as a tool to better understand what kindles the fire of protest and dissent. Chapter one focused predominately on physical forms of violence used in political acts towards the state and its functions. However, one should be critical of isolating political violence in societies that are characterised by what many theorists refer to as a "culture of violence" on various levels. Before exploring theoretical ideas on anger it is necessary to understand *why* black South African students are angry. Philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2016) outlines anger as:

1. a belief that I or someone close to me has been wronged or harmed
2. a painful feeling associated with this belief

So then, what are the triggers for anger in present day South Africa and why do protesting students believe they have been "harmed"? South Africa in particular is a society plagued by structural, institutional, psychological and symbolic forms of violence in addition to political violence. Degenaar (1990) introduces various metaphorical examples of violence that he suggests should be considered as seriously as physical forms of violence. To only consider 'the physical' limits our true understanding of violence as both a concept and an experience. Degenaar outline the etymological associations between 'violence' and 'violation'; to

violate the integrity of a person restricts them from truly exercising their freedom of will (1990: 71).

Johan Galtung has been credited with the formulation of ideas around "structural violence" (1969). Galtung understands 'structure' as a "set of relationships" and suggests that these relationships can be looked at on various levels including political, economic and social (Degenaar, 1990: 65). When looking at structural forms of violence, it must be understood that, unlike physical violence, the force is not exerted from an individual but by customs, institutions or laws that restrict the freedom of an individual or discriminate unfairly. Even peaceful laws that help "maintain order" can be seen as "instruments of violence" if the order they are maintaining is an unjust system. Similarly Paul Farmer (1996) describes structural violence as the "institutionalisation of social processes that differentially cause suffering though unequal access to social resources" (Degenaar: 1990: 65).

Historically South Africa has seen systematic exclusion of black people from employment, health care, land and education. This has resulted in the impoverishment of the majority of the population. Still, South Africa is a society where black people continue to experience the effects of racist policies and practice. South Africa continues to struggle with increasing levels of structural violence, where citizens are not given "equal power or equal life chances" (Degenaar: 1990, 70). Newton Garver's identifies high levels of structural violence in the American "ghetto" and the South African 'township' and explains how "any institution which systematically robs certain people of rightful options generally available to others does violence to those people" (1968, 420).

Like physical forms of violence, structural violence can lead to symbolic and psychological forms of violence. Bourdieu and Wacquant (2004) explain symbolic violence as the "violence exercised upon a social agent with their complicity" that is the violence involved in the process of internalised identity based oppressions. Symbolic forms of violence often result in large groups of oppressed populations accepting the world as is. For Degenaar, "Psychological

Violence" is also an example of a metaphorical violence; "transferred from its usual logical space to a new one where it can not just be literally applied" (1990: 75). In contrast to physical violence, psychological violence does not require bodily harm as proof of the injury done to a person, as the trauma of experiencing psychological violence is not always physically observable; the 'quiet' nature of psychological violence reinforces its metaphorical nature (1990: 75).

Hence, when the students called for the removal of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes and claimed that the presence of the statue was 'violent' they were not suggesting that the statue causes them physical or bodily harm. Rather, they were arguing that the glorification (in memorialisation) of a man who undeniably represents the oppression and discrimination of black people in Southern Africa was a psychological form of violence. More so, when students demanded fees to fall in institutions of higher education claimed that the education system is 'violent' they were not suggesting that their bodies were physically harmed on campuses or in libraries- though later that would happen due to the heavy response to protest action by private security and police- but that the system they needed to maneuver in order to graduate was not designed with the intention of a black student flourishing or reaching their full potential.

Anger (and then fire) is often the response of those who experience levels of structural, psychological and metaphorical violence. Political violence, often manifesting physically, is more likely when people feel high levels of discontentment. In the book *Why Men Rebel,* Ted Gurr (1970) states that a "discontented person" is someone who, because of restrictions placed on them by an unjust society, sees a discrepancy between what they want and what they believe they are capable of achieving (Degenaar: 1990: 76). Gurr identifies anger as an outcome of being discontented when people feel trapped by their social means, the anger one experiences edges one towards a self-satisfying aggression or a self-satisfying fire. According to Gurr a discontented person is "inclined to do violence against the sources of their discontent" (1970). Societies that have high levels of violence, especially structural such as "violent poverty" or extreme

levels of inequality are likely to develop a type of revolutionary leader and "discontented dissident" whose would pursue violence in satisfaction of their anger (Degenaar: 1990: 80).

The politics of 'Getting Angry'

Both psychological and sociological research on anger has often conflated the experience of anger with the expression of anger. In *Deconstructing the idea of Anger,* US based sociologists Taylor and Risman (2006) discuss the necessity of distinguishing between the experience of anger as a feeling and the physical expression of the emotion suggesting that the practical, visual and physical components differ. To *"get angry"* is rooted in feeling whilst *"expressing anger"* moves beyond feeling. They make the crucial argument that this distinction is necessary when analysing how individuals who experience oppression based on gender, race and class both experience and express anger differently from those that hold certain privileges (2006: 73). This is important because of the racialised nature of the fire in the protests; it is *predominately* black students lighting fires and *predominately* white people denouncing this. I am not suggesting that only white people have condemned the turn to burning, many people of colour have come out against student burning- Sisonke Msimang being one of the most vocal (2016). However, I do argue that there is a considerable lack of understanding or empathy among whites when it comes to the politics of burning.

Drawing on Hochschild's work in emotions (1983) and the impact of the situation on how one experiences emotions their research indicates that those whose lives are affected most by injustice experience anger more deeply but do not feel as though they are able to express it (Taylor & Risman, 2006: 63). In the feminist writings of Lorde (1984) she explains the initial suppression by the oppressed of their anger will eventually result in a more powerful and consuming expression of anger, which is what often bares radical social change.

Consequently, the final release of anger from the oppressed has the potential to be more volatile and more destructive than those who face few or no oppressions.

Nussbaum's recent book *Anger and Forgiveness: Resentment, Generosity, Justice* (2016) offers a critique of the role that anger has played in American politics. Nussbaum argues that despite angers popularity, it is an unreasonable response to prejudice and discrimination and calls for a more palatable and 'civil' form of political discourse. She goes on to argue that even "a great injustice is no excuse for childish and undisciplined behaviour" (2016). For her anger is not only unproductive in the political environment because of its potential for violence but it is also an "immoral and incoherent" way of responding to the world. Anger is a mere thirst for revenge that serves no purpose, as those suffering can never undo the damage or hurt. Nussbaum argues that the resistance of anger is not merely a mark of "humanity, but of sanity" as anger is nothing more than a politically reckless emotion (2016).

This type of response to anger is not unfamiliar; there have been many responses to FeesMustFall in South Africa's political discourse that echo the view of Nussbaum. In an analysis of student anger on South African campuses, anger is often viewed mainly in terms of its effects and not in terms of its most basic and essential features. Students are told not to get angry but seldom asked why they are angry. I hope to give another brief example of how manifestations of anger are condemned without consideration of aptness.

Anger from Cape to ~~Cairo~~ Palestine

The last few years have seen interesting points of connections forming between Palestinian activists, BlackLivesMatter activists in the United States and the Fallist movement in South Africa. In her special lecture given at the University of South Africa in 2016, Angela Davis recounts how Palestinian and BlackLivesMatter activists have shared not just sentiments of solidarity but also

advice on responding to a militarised security presence as well as protest strategy. The activists have begun to forge relationships through social media and have been able to connect their sites of struggle. Davis argued that this was most evident during the Ferguson uprisings in Missouri. Following the fatal police shooting of Michael Brown in August 2014, Palestinian activists tweeted advice on how the US based activists could protect themselves from the *G4S* weapons. G4S weaponry is used in the Israeli Defense Force, the US Police force and is also the security company at various universities in South Africa including UCT and Stellenbosch University.

Activists in all three political spaces have been accused of operating from a space of uncompromising anger. Following the 2014 Israeli operation of Protective Edge, New York Times writer Nicholas Kristof accused the Palestinians of being an angry people, whose anger has "accomplished nothing but increasing the misery of the Palestinian people" (Srinivasan, 2015: 4). This fits into the long tradition within the political and philosophical schools of thought that critique anger as a response to injustices as one that is "counterproductive" and "unnecessary" (Srinivasan, 2015: 1).

Anger, together with outrage, is viewed always as a step away from the 'rational', positioned as though in direct opposition to constructive engagement. This strategy emphasises the anger of the oppressed and not the injustice that they are angry about. Many political and bureaucratic leaders continue to condemn the role of anger in social and political organising, believing that it lacks the necessary creativity needed to bring about social change (Srinivasan, 2015). However, many student activists continue to view anger not merely as justifiable but as essential in the fight for true emancipation and continue to stand for a politics of angry defiance.

A history of angry activists

American civil rights leader Martin Luther King famously stated in reference to Malcolm X, the leader of the Black Nationalist Party, that X's anger was

"counterproductive, a great disservice to his people and the cause of black liberation". However, despite King disagreeing with the role of anger in the movement, he never dismissed X's anger, empathetic to his reasons. Philosopher Srinivasan (2015) argues that the role that anger has played historically in moments of social unrest has aided in the formation in the spectre of the "Angry Black"; hot blooded, irrational and unwilling to see reason (2015: 3).

Srinivasan suggests that the continuous deployment of the image of the "angry black man" or the "angry woman" is a weapon of control used to deligitimatise activism and suggest that the actions of the oppressed are unworthy of consideration (2015: 3). In her earlier article *In Defence of Anger (2014),* Srinivasan explores how Black American writer, activists and playwright, James Baldwin, believed in the possibility and power that lay in Malcolm X's fury. Baldwin suggested that X's anger gave appropriate expression the reality of the oppressed black population and therefore "corroborated their reality", re-assigning their agency and making them feel as though they were fully human, as though they "really existed" (Srinivasan, 2014:3). The experiences of those who face injustice daily have much to be angry about and "anger is often the reasonable response to an unreasonable world" (Srinivasan, 2014: 3).

Earlier I outlined two of Nussbaum's identifiers for anger; her final identification is that those who have been wronged seek a type of "payback" (2016). Conversely, Srinivasan argues that anger is employed within political discourses as a way for the oppressor to recognise and understand the fullness of the injustice and not to simply cause them suffering or seek vengeance (2015). Though suffering is a possible consequence once the perpetrator fully recognises their part in injustice, it is not the sole intention of anger. Again, Nussbaum's argument shifts the focus from the anger of the oppressed to the fragility of the oppressor. In South Africa this argument hangs the rage of the black student beneath the feelings of the white student.

In *Sister Outsider*, a collection of her essays and speeches; renowned black feminist, activist and poet Audre Lorde writes on how feeling anger are

psychically good for the victims of injustice (1984). In reflection of the uses of anger, she states how women, as a result of institutional and personal oppressions have a "well stocked arsenal of anger" (1984:127). For Lorde this anger is used against the oppressors and if focused and used strategically can offer social and personal change. Lorde considers the emancipatory features of anger as a "liberating and strengthening act of clarification" that should not be underestimated as Nussbaum does as a simple attempt by those affected by injustice to rekindle their self worth but should be recognised as a radical way of reclaiming the agency that injustice had stripped away (Lorde, 1984: 127).

Through their work on feminism and oppression, Marilyn Frye (1983) and Uma Narayan (1988) argue that beyond the productive consequences in the political space, anger can also be epistemically productive. The arguments around the productivity of anger suggest that anger holds certain knowledges around the possibilities of liberation. This argument is grounded in the assumption that anger can lead to both the creations and understanding of (emotional) knowledge's as well as a push towards recognising previously unacknowledged injustices. Often, the angry are criticised for allowing their emotion to 'blind' them to a more reasoned alternative. Audre Lorde (1984) speaks back to this critique and suggests that anger is one of the only emotions that offers the oppressed a deep emotional awareness so that they may *see clearly,* suggesting that when those who face injustice turn away from anger, they are "turning away from insight" (Lorde, 1984: 131).

I want to briefly go back to the earlier distinction between feeling anger and expressing anger and suggest that theorists, like Nussbaum, purporting the "counterproductive" critique on anger do not so much have a problem with *being angry* as much as they do with *acting angry.* Lorde argues that if anger is coupled with action, radical in its approach, then it is an emotion that has the potential to offer clarity in the pursuit of liberation (1984: 127). In political discourse and in response to specific forms of activism around race, gender and sexuality- anger is often condemned because of its consequences that are deemed destructive and dangerous. Fire is certainly one of the consequences of a suppressed anger.

Black activists have argued that in many spaces the angry are denounced for simply allowing themselves to *feel* the emotion of anger. Lorde gives the example of an academic conference she attended where she was speaking from a point of "direct and particular" anger as a woman of colour and a white woman responded that she should speak but not "say it too harshly" or she wouldn't be able to hear her (1984: 125).

Similar to the encounter between Lorde and the white woman at the conference, there are many instances where anger, specifically public displays of anger by black activists and intellectuals have been simply dismissed and easily condemned. Srinivasan raises a particularly interesting display on anger in *The Aptness of Anger (2015)*. In 1965, the debating Union at Cambridge University organised the now widely referred to debate between James Baldwin and William F. Buckley, Jr. on the motion " The American Dream has been achieved at the expense of the American negro". The debate was filmed has since been broadcasted, with almost a million views on YouTube. At the time both men were well- known and respected individuals. Baldwin had already begun to achieve a level of status in the US and abroad and his success had resulted in his growing popularity as a novelist, activist and playwright. Buckley was also far from anonymity; he had a large fan base, and his editorship of the Conservative publication the *National Review* granted him great significance as an American intellectual and writer. It was clear coming into the debate that Baldwin was on the left and Buckley would be on the far right.

Baldwin began:

"I am stating very seriously, and this is not an overstatement: that I picked the cotton and I carried to the market, and I built the railroads under someone else's whip, for *nothing… for nothing.* The Southern Oligarchy which has until today so much power in Washington… was created by my labour and my swear, and the violation of my women and the murder of my children. This in the land of the

free and the home of the brave. And no one can challenge that statement. It is a matter of historical record."

Buckley's response is not surprising. It is often heard within a South African context.

" What in fact shall we do about it?"

For Buckley, Baldwin's speech was nothing more than an expression of his anger. He gave no suggestion, recommendation or proposal. He just let the Union know that he was *angry*. Srinivasan identifies Baldwin's type of argument as an embrace of the politics "as the crow flies" (2015: 3). This is a type of politics that focuses relentlessly on what *should* have been rather than what *is* and refuses to look past historical atrocities and injustices. Conversely, Buckley's politics focus on practicality, desperate to avoid anger and condemnation (especially when that anger is directed towards oneself) (Srinivasan, 2015: 2).

Buckley continues his response with a warning against "bitter insistence on past injustice" as "Negro anger will be met with white violence". Responses such as Buckley's are common and they give the oppressed two options; the oppressed can voice their anger but face a possible worsening of their situation or they can suppress it. The two options have a similar outcome; the oppression will remain (Srinivasan, 2015: 4).

The 'right' way to be angry

15 October 2016

I write of the fires that I have seen, those that have touched me, hurt me and frightened me. Those that I have observed, while crouching in the corner of Bertha Street or standing next to Fuller Residence Hall at UCT. Though, like the swift spreading of the flame from the point of ignition to the point of full fury, so the rumor of fire spreads too- quickly and wildly. The fire regenerates into comment,

critique and ultimately- news. The burning in Braamfontein was one of the first times the real threat of fire seemed to spill out from the contained university campus. The fire wasn't just shared between students this time; it was igniting the city. I wasn't on campus, the Wits curfew set by management and enforced by public order police prevented anyone who did not live on campus in a university owned residence from entering campus between 10pm-5am. The curfew was prefaced on the safety of students, closer monitoring and ultimately a response to the constant threat of fire on university buildings. Students were enraged at the use of ' apartheid style' curfew, and rejected it fiercely. Storming into confrontations with police and eventually ending up on the streets of Braamfontein. I followed the events on twitter.

Refresh

A police vehicle is on fire

Refresh

A news van is on fire

Refresh

Orbit Jazz club is on fire

"Braamfontein is literally lit".

As mentioned above, there is often an acceptance, though fickle and shallow, of the oppressed *feeling* angry about injustice but very little acceptance of the way they choose to *express* this anger. The liberal conception of politics is one that assumes that everyone's voices are equally heard. South African universities have adopted a certain way of thinking that endorses a very specific way for students to show their anger or as Jonis Alasow puts it in his article on *Policing Student Protest*- "the right way to be angry" (2015). Following a disruption of a Senate meeting in August 2015, Vice Chancellor of the University currently known as Rhodes- Sizwe Mabizela- insisted that "there is no need to disrupt

anything if you want to be heard" and suggested that there is an 'appropriate' way to express oneself (Alasow: 2015).

Universities across South Africa have adopted the term "co-operative governance" as a way of explaining the structures put in place to ensure everyone's voices and grievances are heard equally. The term, popular among the management at UCT, is in reference to the student governance system that is expected to filter up from committees in residence halls, societies, the elected student representative council and finally to management and university committees. The idea behind the structure is that ultimately, after following due process, student voices will be heard and considered by management. Following the clear strategy of disruption of RhodesMustFall in early 2015, Vice Chancellor Max Price expressed a level of surprise, unsure of where this had all come from, suggesting that had students had such grievances prior they should have followed "correct channels in place for them to air these criticisms" (2015). What is lacking from this argument however, is the degree to which student grievances are really *heard* in the co-operative governance structure or heard at all?

In 2014, the University of Cape Town announced its plan to change the current race-based undergraduate admissions policy. The policy put in place in 2006 sought to address South Africa's past of racial exclusion by creating an admissions process that pointedly favoured those who were able to check the category "black" in their admissions form. The policy was based on the understanding that regardless of ones class, a black applicant was likely to have had more obstacles in their academic, socio-economic, family and psychological lives than that of a white applicant. The policy brought controversy and criticisms and was hailed as "regressive" and "reverse racist" (Benatar: 2012). Yet the policy continued to ensure that each year the first year pool at UCT was diverse. In late 2013, UCT management announced that they were reviewing the policy and would undertake consultation of the various stakeholders. Faculty and alumni were consulted and a new model that proposed to measure disadvantage differently; introducing a new set of markers was put forward. I have no intention of arguing for or against the revised admissions policy, what I

do want to highlight though was the inadequacy in which student opinion was taken into consideration when put forward in Price's proposed "correct channels". After various student presentations and consultations the student representative council rejected the new admissions policy, followed by SASCO (the largest student run organisation in the country) and the Student Parliament. The Student Parliament should have been considered as the most accurate representation of student opinion as it consisted of student representatives from every level of the "co operative governance structure". Finally, in the Senate meeting held on 30 May 2014, 107 academic members of staff voted in favour of the new admissions policy with only 6 voting against. All 6 were students.

In another article in the DailyVox – *We need to be asking why people burn shit down,* Sacks explores why there has been such a swift turn to burning on university campuses. He gives reasons ranging from strategies for disruption and reclaiming of ownership to civil disobedience. For Sacks the most important reason why students "up the ante" is that they are tired of fundamentally being ignored (2016). The South African Union of Students (SAUS) consists of various democratically elected student stakeholders and SRC representatives across universities. SAUS has been calling for free education and better access to education since the early 2000s. Long before FeesMustFall, SAUS had approached Vice Chancellors and Ministers of Finance and Higher Education to 'negotiate' around ideas on free education. The turn to burning is symptomatic of student anger around not being heard.

The Anger that was crushed

Let us spare a thought for the fires that did not happen; the acts of student rage and the burning anger that were suppressed, quelled and prevented before they were able to exist fully and fiercely in the world. These moments have in many cases acted as precursors to more fire, moments of student failure and managements success. Below are four Eyewitness News reports from the remnants of fire at Wits University in 2016.

4 April 2016. “4 seats were set alight in the Umthombo Building, Wits University. Fire was quickly extinguished”.

24 September 2016. “Three petrol bombs found at Wits University”.

12 October 2016. “Six petrol bombs found. Basement of architectural building, fire extinguished by sprinkler system”.

20 October 2016. “A fire was started in the last aisle of the second floor of the Wartenweller Library. The fire was extinguished quickly and a high level investigation is underway”.

Part 2: An Anger ignites Afropessimism

“ Black Rage proliferates and it proliferates exponentially”
Cornel West
1993

I have been in many environments with student leaders actively involved in the ‘Must Fall’ protests where frustration and anger have guided conversation into a space where fire is an option. Below I outline three anecdotes;

1. *The 2015 Ruth First Lecture with Panashe Chigumadzi and Sisonke Msimang was, what popular culture and students term “so lit” that there was a great air of expectation when walking into the Wits Great Hall on 17th August 2016. After the epic “Fuck White People” disruption from Mbe Mbhele the previous year there was certainly a sense of impending reckoning. Following the presentation from Lwandile Fikeni on “The Aesthetics of Rage” in the student movement the floor was opened for questions and comments. An elderly man stepped up to the microphone and began soberly reflecting on his disagreement with the tactics of rage employed by the students. He referred specifically to burning and destructions of buildings on university campuses and appealed to the*

students to stop burning the facilities that offer them more opportunities and a better life. There were murmurs and mumbles of disagreement throughout his commentary and eventually a young black woman seated a few rows behind me stood up and shouted "if one cant have it- no one can! Burn it all".

2. *The beginning stages of RhodesMustFall, while the embers were still flickering, before the flames had reached their full potential, were defined not by the constant disruption that the media images show but by strategic planning meetings that went on for hours. We would sit, huddled in small rooms in Azania House or in empty tutorial rooms on upper campus and argue for what seemed like forever about what the next step would be. Should we attend the university assembly? Should we negotiate with Max Price? Should we end the occupation? The questions seemed endless and the possibilities were few, it constantly seemed like the world was against us. We felt constantly lied to and mistreated by management, the conservative cohort of students seemed to be growing in numbers and the eviction notices were piling up. There was one student in particular, self identified radical black feminist who spoke only when she felt it was time to reference Fanon or Biko. She would suggest in every meeting that we "burn it"- burn the buildings, burn the books-" burn everything" she would say. No one will listen to us anyway.*

3. I was in attendance at one of the many student led meetings during the FeesMustFall protests in 2016. This meeting specifically was intended to discuss possible responses to the Curfew imposed by Wits management that prohibited students in residence to leave their rooms between 10pm-5am every night. The meeting flowed between strategies to break the curfew and eventually reached a stalement as the Fallist approach of spontaneous and immediate action clashed with the older activists and members of staff (who opted for a more-well planned and long-term means of disobedience). The meeting grew increasingly frustrating and was on the border of collapsing when a young man raised his hand. It was evident the man was a student

and the weeks of protest prior had made him tired and angry, "Lets just burn it all- nothing is African about this university- lets just burn everything and start again".

Afropessimism destroys the world

Rhodes University Lecturer Richard Pithouse gives the students little to no credit in his article "The Turn to Burning in South Africa" published in the blog *Africa is a Country* (2016). Pithouse expresses that the Afropessimist reading expressed by students is "often articulated to an understanding of Fanon largely based on a few statements in the opening chapters of The Wretched of the Earth". Here, he implies that students have misread Fanon in their interpretation of a new world being able to rise out of the ashes of the old. He goes on to infer that students embracing the theoretical tradition of Afro-pessimist thought are reading the work of Fanon in a way that is different to his reading. Afropessimist thought, linked closely to the emotions of anger, rage and frustration is building on the work of scholars such as Saadiya Hartman, Hortense Spillers and Jared Sexton. This new wave of scholars attribute their contributions to this growing archive to their readings of writers such as Fanon, Joy James and Orlando Patterson (Wilderson, 2016).

For Pithouse, the proclamation that violence (or fire) holds any element of redemption is distinctly "millennial" and emphasises the weakness of the student movement (2016). He argues that fires have replaced the capacity of students to mobilise masses and "riot". I would argue that opinions such as Pithouse are formed when one is protected or separated from the fire and when the flames do not reach you. The implication that fire has replaced mass forms of mobilisation deeply undermines fires ability to transfer energy and to inject student movements with vigor and courage. Undeniably (and understandably) many fear fire and the turn to burning has seen some student's drop off from the student movement, but to state that fire has replaced 'the riot' ignores the way in which fire has grown beside the movement.

Fire has historically assumed the capacity to inspire, mobilise and unite people, which is why it has been at the center of ritual, initiation and ceremony for centuries. The annual harvest, seeding and sun festivals all revolve around fire (Bachelard, 1964: 22). On 10th October 2016, the situation at Wits University reached a climax when tensions between riot police and protesting students reached breaking point. Students were demanding entrance into Solomon Mahlangu House; a space they believed 'theirs' and had been barred from entrance from private security hired by the university management team. A count down ensued and when the private security didn't move, students began charging; throwing stones and broken pieces of cement dustbins, police responded with water cannons, rubber bullets and stun grenades. Flying spheres of smoke flew across the sky as students threw the stun grenades that had yet to detonate back at the police. The confrontations between the police and the students spilled off campus and into the streets of Braamfontein. Students ran scattered and scared, screaming. The police seemed successful in their clear strategy to disrupt the crowd, fragment the masses and create smaller groups, weaker in isolation.

Then, at the corner of Jorrison and Bertha Street someone started a fire. I was there, crouching in a corner between the Wits Art Museum and the Holy Trinity Church. I don't know who started the fire; it appeared rapidly, the flames emerging effortlessly. The fire developed almost as quickly as the crowd growing around it. Students hiding in side shops and street corners emerged and joined the circle of people moving around the flames. It seemed as though the fire was carrying the students, pushing and pulling them. The ball of flame connected and recharged them with a collective fury. Sociologist Johan Goudsblom suggests that the ability to keep a fire alive is one of the earliest forms of social organising arguing "it was (and is) impossible to keep a fire burning without at least some social cooperation to guard and fuel it" (1992: 40).

The students were united in their anger, angry enough to destroy the world.

A fire ready to destroy the world

In an interview on Anti-Blackness and Police Violence conducted in 2014, in the midst of the BlackLivesMatter protests in Ferguson, Frank Wilderson raised huge controversy by critiquing those in the humanist and liberal projects; "What are they trying to do?" he said "they are trying to build a better world. What are we trying to do? We are trying to destroy the world. Two irreconcilable projects". Wilderson's comment hints towards the more Afropessimist components of the South African student movement. It is here- in these pockets of FeesMustFall that many scholars from the older generation, like Pithouse, lay the blame for the resurgence of fire on campuses.

Once the statue of Cecil John Rhodes fell in 2015, many expected an immediate end of the student-led occupation of Azania House (previously the Bremner Administration Building). When the statue fell and the students remained management tried tirelessly to negotiate an end to the occupation and a resumption of 'business as usual' on campus. Student leaders refused to move. Truthfully, we didn't fully have clear reasons for why we wanted to stay, yes the building gave us a space to plan, strategise, read, learn, and teach. More than that there was a sense that once we left there would be the expectation that "it" was over; that the ultimate goal had been achieved and everyone could go back to normality but it was the very idea of normality that we wanted to challenge. Nothing was "normal". The Fallist movements were never simply about just the statue or just the fees. They were about a radical recentering of the questions of suffering, oppression and blackness.

Wilderson's Afropessimism- what he describes as an "non perspective analytic lens" and not a authoritarian politics- has found huge traction is South Africa in recent years, with the break away from the African National Congress and the consequent birth of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) as well as among student Fallists (Walsh & Soske, 2016: 72). In an interview conducted for the recent book *Ties that Bind,* Wilderson reflects on his time in South Africa where he taught at Wits University as well as the community based Khanya College. He

is currently hyper critical of the current role of the ANC in protecting (and even promoting) white supremacy but in the 1990s Wilderson was a card carrying member of the ANC and even went on to join Umkhonto we Sizwe (the armed wing of the ANC) (Walsh & Soske, 2016: 76). His time in South Africa informed much of his thinking around race and oppression that would later lead to his collaboration with literary scholar and historian Saidiya Hartman, the collaboration that initiated his Afropessimist thinking.

Afropessimism is a clear move to rethink Blackness and push it away from "the subjective"-where the more liberal and humanists projects have placed it-and relocate it in the realm of "fungibility" and "accumulation" (Wilderson, 2016: 70). It understands blackness to be fundamentally relational in that it is a necessary counter-relation to the very construction and continued actuality of the (white) human. The human only exists because the slave exists (Wilderson, 2014). In a radical move, when so much of contemporary literature is attempting to define blackness outside of slavery, Wilderson and Hartman argue that blackness and slavery are inseparable (Hartman, 2003: 191). Afropessimism therefore moves to define blackness according to Hartmans "three components of slavery- that being natal alienation, general dishonour and social death" (2003: 192).

Ideas on Social Death have spread rapidly, like a blazing fire, through the student movement in South Africa. One of the most vocal student leaders at UCT is Masixole Mlandu, prior to the mass student mobilisations in 2015, Mlandu had been a forerunner of black consciousness among students and his radical and disruptive ideas saw him being targeted, arrested and jailed in Polsmoor Prison during the 2016 protests. Mlandu was a founding member of the UCT branch of the Pan African Student Movement of Azania (the student branch of the PAC) in 2015 but he is now an active participant in the Way of Life Kilombo Village led by Pastor Xola Skosana in Khayelitsha. The inner factions of RhodesMustFall became publicly visible in early 2016 and ultimately led to the scattering of students who had initially been most involved in the movement. Many found refuge in Kilombo. The self defined "church"-is more of a socio-politico-spiritual

space where engagement is around "decolonising' scripture, the social death of blackness and the surrounding "black concentration camp" of Khayelitsha.

Slavery in the United States lies central to many of the ideas on Afropessimism, which raises concern on the aptness of such a theoretical lens in South Africa, where the slave trade in the Cape Colony (1652-1807) did not necessarily share all the same characteristics as that occurring in the U.S. Part of Afropessimist thought is that blackness is the same everywhere and that blackness represents a universal social death (Wilderson, 2016: 91). For Pastor Xola and the students that attend his church, black people are dead because they are forced to live out a hell in the township. Xola (2016) preaches that the South African township reeks of the "stench of death" and that this death spreads throughout the black community. If one black is forced to live a life of waste in this concentration camp then it is as though all blacks are living in hell.

In April 2017, Mlandu appeared in the Wynberg Magistrates Court, still facing the charges of public violence and trespassing laid against him in late 2016. Mlandu writes from the courtroom:

"the black body has been reduced to an index of death" he goes on that "the courtroom is jam packed with blacks, like a train that leaves Khayelitsha at 4:30am in a rush to wake up the white master. Yes, the white master is the reason why we are in jail and in the concentration camps we call the township. The white world is the beginning of our problems".

Mlandu's statement is a powerful echo of Wilderson's claims that Blackness is a condition of violence and captivity (Wilderson, 2016: 79).

Moving away from Khayelitsha and looking closer to campus, ideas around social death came to life after a photograph titled "Death of a Dream" from UCT graduate, Imran Christian, grabbed huge amounts of attention on the internet in February 2016. The photograph; raw, chilling, visceral and disturbing pictures three black women positioned in a triangular formation on the steps of Jameson

Hall. All three women are dressed in black; the two at the back are standing with their heads bowed and faces out of focus. The woman in the front is staring straight at the camera; she is on her knees-execution style-with a bullet hole in her forehead. Standing behind her is a masked man holding a gun. The photograph is a means to highlight the impossibility of black success in the university. To dream - to achieve - one must be able to truly live but the photograph asserts that blackness is social death. Everywhere.

Earlier, I remarked that Pithouse (2016) accused students of misreading Fanon in their Afropessimist interpretations because the student's interpretation of Fanon does not fit into his. Pithouse is not the exception here- fistfights have very literally broken out in student spaces because of different readings of Fanon and many intellectuals have fiercely condemned students for misinterpreting the Caribbean scholar. I find Wilderson's observation that there are three *different* Fanons to be a hugely helpful contribution to the ongoing 'who knows Fanon best' debate. Wilderson believes that there is "the Fanon of dialientation" (that which inspired much of Steve Biko's writings in *I write what I like*), "the Fanon of postcolonial resistance" and the "Fanon of Social Death" (2016: 87). Wilderson's work has mainly drawn on this Fanon, the Fanon of the Slave – the Fanon of the end of the world- the Fanon that students are engaging with. Throughout the interview with Canadian- based filmmaker Shannon Walsh, Wilderson insists that Afropessimism is not a 'type' of politics, but a call for a completely new type of politics that goes beyond what he terms "Fanons end of the world" (2016: 71). Everything that currently exists needs to be overthrown- a total and true revolution.

Wilderson builds on the role of suffering in the ontology of blackness and suggests that the relationally between the (black) slave and the (white) human requires the public mutilation and 'death' of the black body to maintain the mental health of the world (2014). To view the black, as 'the slave' and worthy of nothing but death is what sits in the subconscious of the police officer that allows him drop the stun grenade right on the cross-legged female student. 'She is a slave' and therefore her pain is necessary. This forms part of the Afropessimist

view that violence is interwoven throughout the lives of black people. A life full of suffering- an "unbearable" life (Sexton: 2015: 159). Wilderson suggests that violence is necessary in the call to destroy the world, as it currently exists. Violence is "a modality constitutive to liberation" (2016: 79).

Do students burn so that they can feel free or so they can be free?

Moments of liberation

Wilderson argues that Afropessimism is not prescriptive. Conjointly, he also states that much of Afropessimist thought positions itself as critique- only. One major critique is the liberal assumptions of individual agency among black people. I hinted towards this earlier in reference to Lorde, who suggests that anger is a necessary for the oppressed in the attempt to reclaim their agency (1984). Wilderson remains resolute that there is no agency in blackness, for the slave could never achieve freedom and thus there is no possibility for it now (2016). The idea of the 'slave' starting a fire, creating something powerful and destructive- even deadly- becomes an obsession of white society, an act that spreads immense fear throughout the white community because it represents the possibility of the promised "swart gevaar" and ultimately the threat of black agency. Fire needs to be condemned at all possible levels by whites because it threatens the "black captivity" that Wilderson argues is necessary for the white psyche (2016).

Though true liberation is unattainable in the current system, Wilderson does suggest the possibility of mere "moments of liberation" (2016: 94). In his interview he reflects on the life of George Jackson; a member of the Black Panther Party, co founder of the Black Guerilla Family and a true revolutionary during the 1960s. Jackson had faced imprisonment many times and in August 1970, while appearing in court, his younger brother Jonathan Jackson stormed the courtroom with an automatic gun and demanded the immediate release of his incarcerated brothers. Jackson was shot dead by the police. In reflection of the murder of his younger brother, George Jackson commented that his brother's

dangerous, terrifying and violent actions against white supremacy allowed him to feel, even if just for a moment, that he was free (Wilderson, 2016: 95).

Much of Afropessimism remains unspoken; Wilderson makes the tongue in cheek comment that this is the result of most scholars wanting to keep their jobs but it is also because this particular theoretical framework suggests that there is no discursive contribution that blackness can make to the world. This ignites the possibility of fire being a communicative tool of Afropessimist theory. As mentioned earlier, the fire ignited in October outside the Wits Art Museum seemed to infuse the students dancing around it with a palpable and intense energy, which makes sense since the act of combustion is an 'energy centered act' (Clark & Yusoff, 2014: 204). In many ways the students dancing around the flames were serious in their preparation for battle, bonding of forces and presentation of a united front. However, they were also singing and dancing, exuberated and seemingly empowered by the ultimate supremacy of the flame that they had started.

The Afropessimist student will propagate the immense importance of that moment. Understanding that the power assigned to them through the violent and destructive flame is not a promise of true liberation but a suggestion towards the possibility of a mere moment of freedom. Because Afropessimism takes "The Plantation" out of the temporal location in which it has been fixed it requires blackness to adopt a view of the world that matches the ancestors; a view that proposes society to be nothing more than one big plantation (Wilderson, 2016). The flames that have already been ignited hint that the time has come to set the whole plantation alight.

For more than just being the end of the world, Hartman argues that Afropessimism is also the end of the ability to think the way we think and a call forward of the "unthought" (Hartman, 2003). This project is exhilarating or horrifying- depending on who you are and where you stand in relation to the fire.

Chapter 3: Burning as a response to the frozen University

"When they dismiss the student movement's claim on the future, its experiment with time, when they belittle it, shoot it down, well, then pain becomes anger, anger becomes rage, even fire."
Leigh-Ann Naidoo
2016

Another Preface: a brief look outside the university – it's cold there too

As explored in Chapter 1, fire is not merely a condition of the apartheid era, it remains a phenomenon held by no bounds of time and has continued to find life in South Africa. In the 2000s fire became particularly associated with the collective violence in poorer communities that stemmed from xenophobic attacks and what Karl Von Holdlt terms "insurgent citizenship" (2011). In 2011 the Society, Work and Development Institute, in conjunction with the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation released a report on "*collective violence, insurgent citizenship and a struggle for a place in the new South Africa*". The report explores eight case studies of post-1994 civil unrest and uses a mostly qualitative form of research collection. The report lists service delivery, xenophobic attacks, and grievance about state action or inaction as the main causes of collective violence in South Africa.

The report indicates that out of the eight communities that were identified as case studies; three areas of protest had witnessed the burning down of public libraries. The researchers found this puzzling and began to ask the question "why libraries?" (2011).

When one starts to think through fire being used in protest, it's not a huge leap before one starts thinking about the burning of books. This ultimate act of destruction against literature has long-standing connections to Nazi Germany and fascist ideals of censorship and propaganda and is met with sharp condemnation, horror and even fear. In 2015, the Wits bookstore was set alight, presumably by students and wide spread denunciation and disapproval swept through campus and the media. The SWOP report reminds us that people do not

only burn libraries in universities. Community protestors in townships and more rural areas engage in forms of collective violence that often results in libraries being burnt (Holdt, 2011). For community members, the burning of the library is not regarded as any more radical or destructive than the burning down of any other municipal building. One respondent affirmed that he did not care about the burning of the library since the library wasn't even a "proper library" and was merely an example of lazy service delivery. The respondent affirmed that nothing in the library had changed since the 'end' of apartheid; the books, resources and infrastructure (or lack thereof) remained the same (Holdt, 2011).

Burning Memory

On the 14th of September 2016, as the warm spring evening proudly announced itself, another announcement was about to me made; Njabulo S.N Ndebele stood to begin his keynote address at the 10th Annual Helen Joseph Lecture. His keynote address was preceded by the master of ceremonies declaring the title of his address- 'They are burning memory'- almost as soon as the words left his mouth, the atmosphere in the University of Johannesburg lecture became jittery. Many of the FeesMustFall activists had made an appearance at the lecture- appearing eager to hear the words of the renowned African writer, former VC of the University of Cape Town and black consciousness stalwart. The eagerness dissolved into anxiety with the casual referencing to burning (always a tense topic during the months of protest). The tension stood its ground and everyone seemed strangely surprised by the lack of staged disruption or walkout. The address began with a quote from Archbishop Desmond Tutu- "Without memory it would be virtually impossible to learn".

Ndebele went on to reflect on his initial reactions upon seeing the television coverage of students gathered around Shackville- burning the portraits of proposed "historical figures" and other "commemorative objects". He argued that through their use of fire, students were destroying moments from the past that should in fact give them a better understanding of their present (2016).

Ndebele's line of thought- that the students are burning memory when they burn artifacts associated with the past is an idea that implies that there is in fact a 'past' that is distinct from the present. Ideas around memory are ones that are intimately linked to notions of 'time'. To remember, to form memory- implies separateness between the moment of the memory and the current moment you are occupying. The time of the memory, the time after the memory and the time now- are three distinct moments separated by a linear conception of time.

In a conversation regarding the use of fire in the BlackLivesMatter protests in the US, writer and intellectual Cornel West argued that the heat of fire has been employed as a response to the iciness of neoliberalism. West refers to the "neoliberal epoch" as a time where it is beautiful to have status and money but it is not "beautiful" to be on fire for social justice. (2014). West's use of such aestheticised language is particularly interesting. By using "beautiful" as oppose to "popular" or "common" West is locating social justice as something that can be explored in the realm of aesthetics. In this chapter I would like to argue that in a similar way during the South African student protests fire has been used as a response to iciness- but that the iciness is a reflection of the frozen nature of the colonial university- a university where time has stood still.

A 'frozen' university is not simply a university where time has frozen; but a university where students live 'frozen lives'. As discussed in relation to Abahlali in Chapter 1, oppression and injustice have many effects on personhood; a fundamental consequence being the isolated lives the oppressed are forced to live (Chance, 2015). In South Africa, black students remain isolated from the decision-making processes in the university and continue to be 'frozen out' from spaces that would grant them greater influence and an ability to reclaim a sense of authority and purpose on campus. This chapter, however, will focus on fire as a response to the frozen temporality of the university.

In *Sexual Politics, Torture and Secular* Time (2008) Judith Butler suggests that there is no "one time" and that one cannot simply reference "this time" without knowing " which time, where the time takes hold, and for whom a certain

consensus emerges on the issue of what time this is" (2008: 1). The colonial encounter involved a total conquest of space, territory and of time. The 'arrival' of colonialism created a linear typology with the West in the center of a pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial timeline (Fabian, 1983 & Chakrabarty, 2000 & Sakar, 2014). Time was pushed away from being understood in local, pagan, sacred and cyclical ways and underwent a process of secularisation where time is removed from the power and influence of anything that cannot be explained by Western science and its corresponding ideas on rationality.

Certain pre-colonial conceptions of time have roots that can be traced to 'the sacred'. German Anthropologist Johannes Fabian (1983) argues that in the Judeo-Christian tradition- time was conceived "as a medium of a sacred history". Fabian describes sacred time as being a series of events ensuing on a 'chosen' people. Before the colonial encounter, many 'pre-colonial' and local temporalities in Southern Africa had cyclical interpretations of time and space that were grounded in the continuous presence and role of the Ancestors. The ancestors were able to exist in 'another time' – in another world, whilst still holding influence and exerting certain dominances in the lived time of their families, clans and communities (Shepard, 2015).

Fabian argues that with the secularisation of time has lead to the universalisation of time. He goes on to contend that 'universal time' was established politically during the Renaissance period during the age of colonial "discoveries" (Fabian, 1983: 3). As evident throughout Prof Ndebele's lecture on memory, referred above, there are many conflations between ideas of time and memory. Ideas on linear temporarily allow for the past to become a separate and objectified 'thing', the past occupies not only its own time, but its own space, therefore notions of memory emphasise the distance between how things 'used to be' and how 'things are now'.

In his essay on *Archaeology and the Conquest of Time* Nick Shepard (2015) claims that the arrival of the colonisers created a division between "knowledge" and "non-knowledge" with "non knowledge" consisting of local temporalities, customs and beliefs. Chakrabarty (2000) and Fabian (1983) speak to how the disciplines of History and Anthropology are used within the university to create an assumed "cultural distance" between the Colonised and the Colonisers- the West and the non-West. Time is assumed to have started only from the colonial encounter with 'non-time' preceding the arrival of the colonisers, thus creating the assumption that the West has left the "non-West" behind. This cultural distance was used to draw distinctions between "the civilised" and the "uncivilised". Time used as a tool to employ a cultural distance has been a clear strategy of those *opposing* student tactics during protests. The descriptions of those who start the fire as a 'savage', and 'barbaric' are an attempt to place fire in another time. Such condemnations are based on the assumption the time of fire is in the past- it is not for *this* time- it belongs to a more uncivilized time.

However, like all the elements, fire holds a rare ability to travel though time and cut through space. In *Psychoanalysis of Fire*, Gaston Bachelard (1964) explores the various roles of fire in the historical, mythical, pagan, scientific and sacred temporal worlds. Local communities in a pre-colonial Southern Africa employed fire as a tool in acts of war and witchcraft. Dante's *Inferno* (1474) connects fire to the sacred by its conception of a concealed world of fire. Ideas on purgatory in scripture refer to the fiery world reserved for those journeying between heaven and earth. In the Mythical realm, Promheuteus stole fire from Olympus and gave it to the world, thus giving life to mankind (Bachelard, 1963: 12). Fire, in all these instances has remained the same- as Clark and Yussuf put it in *Combustion and Society:* " the fire that burns beneath the cooking pot is much the same fire that rages through a forest and has raised through foliage for hundreds of millions of years (2014: 2016).

Much of social theory and intellectual enquiry sits on the assumption that the past, present and future are connected through a secular and linear continuity of human experience. Shepard (2015) argues that modern conceptions of time offer

"ruptures between the past from the present, and the present from the future", implying that Western or 'modern' time is a linear time marked by a series of breaks that intend to show difference between 'then' and 'now'.

It is this type of thinking around time that has been so heavily emphasised in South Africa, more than the colonial and the postcolonial, South African time has moved directly from 'apartheid' to 'post apartheid', 'pre-1994' to 'post-1994'. This discourse has been strategically used to imply that on the 28th of April 1994- the day after South Africa's first democratic election-South Africans of all races woke up to a new era and a completely different South Africa and that the past could no longer exist in the present. The conquest of time cancelled out other conceptions of time including local temporalities and understandings of time, whilst simultaneously obstructing new formations of thinking about time. Linear notions of time made it "unthinkable" to form new, more imaginative notions of temporality and inconceivable to suggest that time has been suspended (Trouillot, 1995).

I want to focus on two aspects that seem to suggest that the present is indeed frozen. First is the continued presence of apartheid trauma, more so the presence of intergenerational trauma in the lives of black students on campus. Second is the frozen aesthetic of the university. More than the curriculum or the lecturer and student demographics, the aesthetic that crafts the public memory of the university continues to lie suspended over time and space.

Temporal Implications of trauma

In 1981, Audre Lorde gave a keynote address at the National Women's Studies Conference in Connecticut. Her presentation focused predominately on the black woman's response to injustice. On the question of "white guilt" Lorde responded that guilt becomes "a device to protect ignorance and the continuous of things the way they are, the ultimate protection for changelessness". Despite ideas on white guilt being hugely controversial and current in South Africa, Lorde's

portrayal of a society plagued by "changelessness" -as a society where things continue the way they are -to be particularly interesting. South Africa is in many ways a society grappling with its own " changelessness", where the racial and spatial inequalities inscribed into the foundation of the country persist even after the official repeal of the laws that enforced such inequality. These are evident in student demographics at institutions like UCT and Stellenbosch, neighbourhood compositions in suburban and middle class areas and the growing number of informal settlements sprouting up throughout the country.

In *The Climate of History,* Chakrabarty (2008) writes that an understanding of the present gives rise to concerns of the future. What happens to our future if our present is frozen? South Africa is a country where the frozen state of the present has made it impossible for us to imagine a future history different to our present history- thus we are resistant to change because we cannot fathom what a changed society would bring.

"Time Travelers"

During her 2016 keynote at the Ruth First Lecture, activist Leigh-Ann Naidoo referred to 'Fallists'-the name now most associated with students involved in the various 'must fall' movements- as those who have the ability to travel through time. She goes on to claim that the students she worked with during the protests "are not so much mad as they are time travelers" (2016). She makes the point that South Africans, specifically those within the university are living in *different times*- "or at least that time is disjointed, out of sync and plagued by a generational fault line that scrambles historicity" (Naidoo, 2016). For Naidoo, the obsession with revolution and change that occupies the minds of many young people cannot be found in the minds of the anti-apartheid generation. Throughout her address Naidoo reinforces the point made by Chakrabarty- that the past can indeed exist in the present and whilst some may claim we have entered a 'postapartheid era' there are many ways in which the violence, segregation, inequality and racism of apartheid continue to make a home in

South Africa's democracy. In 2013 Vice Chancellor of Wits University, Adam Habib, wrote of South Africa's "suspended revolution"- suggesting that the resistance felt under the apartheid regime had not deceased but had been temporarily plugged. The use of the word 'suspension' as appose to "deferred" or "delayed" is critical- it implies that when the revolution ignites once more, it will be as though no time has passed.

Since the inception of RhodesMustFall in 2015, but especially during the second round of FeesMustFall protest in 2016- the politics, consequences and benefits of 'occupation' or 'shutdown' as a strategy have dominated conversation between students, staff and university management. UCT student activists Thuli and Asher Gamedze write in an article in the DailyVox that for the "dispossessed, indebted and righteously enraged black student, shut down is a key tactic" as it focuses on the university as a central site of struggle (2016). More so, shutdown as a strategy forces time to stop-when students demand a shut down they demand an immediate stop to all services, including teaching and learning. They demand time in the university to stop, to stand still like this. They demand the university to 'freeze' and in the same way the movie cop raises his gun as a warning while shouting "freeze, don't move" the students also have a metaphorical gun pointing at the head of management- a promise of destruction and the ever lurking promise of fire. This suggests that students are the ones that understand that time has been absent and attempt to publicly acknowledge this absence by enforcing a shutdown-by collapsing time. Naidoo seems to also suggest this. When asking, "what time is it?" it is her impression that it is only the students that have the correct reading of time (2016).

More than the correct reading of the time 'now', Naidoo (2016) argues that when the present is shutdown, when it is suspended - the greatest moments of the student movement have been to open the door to the future and call it to the present. This has been done not only through the shut down but through the occupation. Most notably, the UCT occupation of the administration building, renamed Azania House, and the Wits occupation of Senate Hall, renamed Solomon Mahlangu House allowed students to pull the future through that

frozen door and recreate the present- “to reimagine the university”. During the course of the occupation many students and lecturers engaged in teach-ins, performance pieces and reading as well as adorning the walls of the occupied space with their own aesthetic contributions.

A Memory of Time

I would like to talk about how formations of memory are closely linked to ideas on temporality and how trauma in the shared memory can contribute towards a suspension of time. Memory is not a stagnant ‘thing’; it is malleable in its travels through space and time. The memory of trauma in South Africa has contributed towards the blurring of time and space between the past and the present. In the Introduction to *Negotiating the Past,* Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee (1998) speak to a South Africa in the late 1990s; a time where there was a deep emphasis on ‘forgetting the past and looking to a new future’. The collection of essays that follow explore ways in which memory is created and inscribed in South Africa, which memories hold favour and which are assigned to public memory and spaces of memorialisation. Though each essay focused on different ways of remembering, there is a specific memory that found its home in the words of many authors- the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Ndebele, Brink, Minkley & Rasool).

I would argue that TRC was constructed in opposition to the fiery rage of apartheid injustices; it was an attempt at cooling’ the rage. Recent years have seen a rise in conversations between students and young intellectuals that call on the ‘failings of the TRC’-critiques of amnesty processes and calls for deeper justice (Madlingozi, 2015). Both Ndebele (2007) and Mamdani (2010) have argued that the TRCs focus on only the most horrendous acts of apartheid granted a sense of safety and superiority to the most passive offenders of apartheid. This also dismissed the institutional effects of apartheid and created a narrow definition of “victim” as well as “perpetrator” (Swartz, 2016). It is clear

that the TRC was intended to be a temporal 'rupture' that offered 'clean break' for South Africans of all races and ages.

In *Cracked heirlooms: memory on exhibition,* Ingrid De Kok describes the TRC as an "institutional container" (1998: 57). She explains how the "institutional container" of the TRC was created with the intention of holding tightly the process of reconstruction. In hindsight many South Africans would argue that it was not successful in facilitating this transition and that instead of giving a voice to the oppressed, it continued to engage methods that silenced them.

Anthony Holiday (1998) writes specifically of the TRC that not only did it intend to enable a process of forgiveness but that many had wanted the TRC to aid in the course of *forgetting*. In Marc Auge's *Oblivion,* a reflection on Holocaust related memories; Auge argues that when one has experienced such a deep level of trauma (as in the Holocaust and Apartheid) it is important that one knows how to *forget.* Auge reasons that the process of forgiving is important, not just for ones own ability to live fully in the present but also important for a healthy comprehension of the past (2004).

The will to forget is not a hard thing to imagine. There are many reasons why black and white people would want to forget the injustices of the past; to forget the pain inflicted upon you and your family as well as to forget the pain you inflicted on others, in passive and overt ways. I would argue that, especially through the act of "confessional" story telling, the TRC assisted the curation of a public memory of trauma. It is this trauma that overshadows museums and university halls and injects itself into the intergenerational memory of black students. The memory of trauma continues to hold the past hostage in the present. The displays of artwork and memorialisation in universities may position themselves as "working through" public memory but they are also simultaneously engaged in processes of mourning that is grounded on the constant revisiting of pain. Freud's reference to "the work of memory" is linked closely to the "work of mourning" (Roy, 2009).

The story telling component of the TRC fits into the "narrative cure" of testimony that Srila Roy (2009) explores in *Narratives of State Terror: Trauma and Healing in Naxalbari*. Roy argues that the transferal of trauma to testimony, especially in public spaces such as truth commissions, is more than the recovery of the self but an attempt at a larger recovery of a people thus the "duty of memory is a duty of justice" (Roy, 2009: 146). Alongside expectations of forgetting, the TRC came with an expectation that telling stories of the past would offer healing, granting both the perpetrator and the victim the capacity to survive the present. However, in seeking to survive the present victims are forced to speak and then to relive the unspeakable violence of the past.

What the TRC did do however was air, on national TV as well as through transcription, articles and oral history, the level of political violence experienced by black people in South Africa (Minkley & Rasool, 1998: 89). The most gruesome and horrific acts, the extent of human suffering and an awareness of present and lurking evils found a home in the bodies and memories of many South Africans as stories of murder, abduction, torture and unlawful detention were brought to life. This enabled some white South Africans who had previously thought themselves innocent to feel pangs of guilt and black South Africans who had perhaps never experienced such heightened levels of political violence or overt racism to feel pain. In this way, trauma was transferred, shared and engrained. In Chapter 2 I explored ideas surrounding anger and emotion. In her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotions.* Sara Ahmed makes the brief, yet important argument that emotions move "not only between political causes and body parts, but also through time" (2013, 11).

Trauma has often been described as a wound that never heals, an incision on the soul that leaks into the blood and moves from one generation to the next. In 2015, Psychologist Cathryn Leff published a report through the Center for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR) on *Intergenerational Trauma due to political violence in post-apartheid South Africa.* The report noted that the first observation of the possibility of trauma being carried across generations was in 1966 when huge cohorts of grandchildren to Holocaust survivors began arriving

for treatment in Canada. Danieli described the children as having "a greater incidence of depression, anxiety and maladaptive behaviour" (1998:639). Coetzer (2012) argues that the grandchildren of Holocaust survivors were more prone to substantial bodily ailments and were susceptible to high levels of stress. In reference of the transmission of Holocaust trauma, Prager (2003) observes that in moving between generations, trauma allows the "present to be lived as if it were the past and the result is that the next generation is deprived of its sense of social location and capacity to creatively define itself autonomously from the former"- in other words, trauma is powerful, and often successful, in its fight to collapse time.

The impact of trauma is not just felt by those who experienced tortured and abuse but also the 'witnesses' to such terror. The CSVR report (2015) argues that trauma is not only transferred from parent to child but that due to the South African migrant labour system and the absence of mothers and fathers from the nuclear house, trauma often moved from grandparent to grandchild. More so, because most of the witnesses and victims of political violence during apartheid were young black men, there were many instances where trauma moved in an upward direction from younger, mostly male, activists to parents and grandparents. The CSRV report argues that even silence- in families that have experienced or witnessed political violence or burdening levels of racism- can transfer trauma from parent to child. Therapists working with the CSVR have argued that in many instances the child is hyper aware of the silence and the meanings behind it. The role of intergenerational transfer is prominent in South Africa- most students attending university in 2015 will have grandparents, parents and even older siblings who lived through apartheid. In this occasion, all family members will have different experiences of time and how it has moved or not moved since they voted for the first time.

Thinking back, there are two very specific moments in October 2015 that helped me gain a deeper understanding of black students negotiating complex ideas on time with their parents. The broad banner of FeesMustFall started at Wits University on Wednesday, 14 October 2015. I was still an honours student at

UCT during this time; the protest reached UCT 5 days after Wits and began to kindle and spark at the foot of the mountain in the evening of the 19th. Students gathered outside Azania House, it had mutated back into the Bremner Administration Building after students ended the occupation in April that year. Management had filed an interdict that afternoon that prevented students from entering the building, we remained outside, cautious of our next step. Finally, it was time to make a decision and a group of us blustered our way through the gates and into the building, calling for a second occupation. Of course we knew that breaking the interdict would lead to an inevitable arrest but we were pulled in by the overwhelming sense of necessity and revolution. Once we were all inside we blockaded the doors and waited for the police to storm in, from the balcony we could see the Casper van waiting behind the street corner. One of the black feminists that had played a pivotal part of RhodesMustFall since inception stood beside me weeping. She was worried that, should we be arrested, her mom would find out. Her mother had been active in the anti-apartheid struggle and after RhodesMustFall had made her promise not to get involved in student politics again. She told me that she felt her mothers fear so deeply. Her mother wanted her to have a different life to the one she had led and couldn't believe that her daughter's activism was still necessary in the South Africa she had sacrificed so much for. The fear, vulnerability and anger of my friends mother wasn't just recognised by her daughter, but felt. Deeply.

FeesMustFall continued to roll out at UCT and reached a climax of sorts on Wednesday the 21st of October when students from universities across the Western Cape marched to the gates of parliament, demanding to be addressed by Blade Nzimande, the minister of Higher Education. I was there with my colleague and friend Kgotsi Chikane when the students broke through the gates of Parliament and charged towards the entrance leading to the Parliamentary Chambers. The events that followed have been documented in various different ways and there are many different accounts of what happened that afternoon. Chikane ended up being arrested at the steps to Parliament, taken to the Hawks main office in Bellville, Cape Town and charged with Treason against the state. When the news hit social media it spread like wild fire- Kgotsi Chikane was being

charged with Treason exactly 30 years after his father- Reverend Frank Chikane was arrested and charged with Treason for involvement in the United Democratic Front. Of course the police commissioner denied these claims, insisting that the "Belville6" as they had been dubbed online, were being charged with Public Violence and Trespassing. Though- all 6 students kept their initial charge sheets that had been marked "treason".

The transfer of emotions from one generation to the next is not exclusive to trauma. There has been a seamless transfer of privilege and feelings of superiority among white people. Here- time has not simply frozen for black students and their families but also for their white counterparts. In her recent book on moral restitution Sharlene Swartz (2016) conducts a series of qualitative interviews with South African students from a wide variety of backgrounds and races. Swartz notes throughout the book the ambivalence many of the white students carry, an ambivalence she argues that has been created by a comfortable life that is frighteningly similar to the lives of their parents. Many of the white students interviewed went to good schools, lived in mostly white neighborhoods and had few black people in their inner circle excluding their domestic worker and gardener. For these white families time had offered no threat to their privileged status.

Time also continues to fight an icy battle against the past outside of the confines of university. At the time of writing this chapter, the South African government held the annual local government summit. The President as well as various ministers and members of parliament attended the Summit. The Summit focused on the effect of apartheid spatial planning. In his address, President Jacob Zuma remarked, "apartheid geography and centralised spatial planning ensured that the majority of black people were housed and located in marginal areas from the city center, far away from the economic hub and opportunities, as well as from services" (2016). Minister Jeff Radebe offered his support to the Presidents statement by stating, "black South Africans are still waiting to be fully liberated from apartheid spatial injustices" (2016). Here we see consequences of the icy

city, where not just time but space has been taken over by the creeping past, solidifying its cold and cruel presence.

The ice-cold aesthetic of the university

Alongside memory and trauma how the university holds space is an important consideration. I want to move slightly from temporal to spatial in order to focus on how universities preserve, present and embody physical space and how this presents a frozen university aesthetic. There is an intimate relationship between time, memory and space. The marker of time is often that of human experience, it is also explored through memorialisation. Using an archaeological framework, Shepard (2015) focuses in on "The Museum" as a modern institution that both holds and frames the past. A fundamental aspect of the conquest of time is the re-making of the past. Shepard views the Museum as a space that is attempting to "provide object lessons that deal with a distanced and immobilised past, sequestered from the present" (2015: 1).

University campuses have in many ways acted as museums and monuments- commemorating the past with artwork, symbols and forms of memorialisation. Like a museum, the university holds "public memory", what Patricia Davidson refers to as an "authorised version of the past" (1998: 143). I argue that the university does this through the memorialisation of colonial figures and names but also through the curation of artwork- I will make specific reference to the burning of artwork at Shackville.

The decolonial protests sparked by the act of Chumani Maxwele throwing poo on the statue of Cecil John Rhodes in March 2015 have embraced what Matthias Pauwels terms a "'radical cultural politics" where monuments, art, architecture and various symbols have been focal points of protest and student activism (2017). Thus the cultural component of current activism is not merely a sideshow of the raging decolonial politics but the beating heart of passions calling for emancipation and circling around burning student issues. The type of

cultural activism opted for by students has brought with it great destruction and an even greater discomfort due to its "often extremist, violent, raw, implacable and uncompromising forms and strategies" towards cultural objects placed in the university in the colonial and apartheid eras (Pauwels, 2017).

On an October morning in 2016 I was barred from entering the William Cullen Library, situated on East Campus at the University of the Witwatersrand. The library, named after Scottish chemist, doctor and agriculturalist, had indefinitely closed its doors to students during the busy term time. Persistent in my requests to know why, I grew increasingly curious after observing concerned looking members of staff entering through the side door. Finally, I was told- though discreetly and with little detail- that the library had been intimidated by a group of students who threatened to burn it down should the library not remove all the colonial artwork by 5pm that day. Ironically, yet rarely spoken, this was not the library's first dalliance with fire - in fact the entire architectural history of the library was founded upon an instance of burning. A fire, started in the morning of the 24th December 1931 in Central Block, destroyed the library's original home including the entire archival content. The library was quickly rebuilt and on 10th April 1933 Royal Highness Prince George opened its doors (Fitchett, 2016).

The central area of the William Cullen library was designated a reading room and is perhaps the library's most noteworthy space. The room is double volume and lit with large looming windows. At the top of each side of the reading room lie two walls occupied by immense paintings marking South Africa's colonial history. One of the artworks displayed in the library is a depiction of the arrival of the 1820s settlers. In *Notes on the Site and Buildings of the University of the Witwatersrand* one of the architects that worked on the project, G.E. Pearse, recounts that he had selected this piece with the hope that "others would follow showing the *discovery* of the Cape and the landing of Jan Van Riebeek and the Voortrekkers" (1933). Across from this painting stands another mural by Colin Gill titled "The Colonists" (1934). These paintings have hung on the library walls of a colonial university, an apartheid university and now a democratic university. They have not been removed, moved, nor adjusted. They have hung proudly and

continued to hold space above the heads of the black students whom have been promised “a world class experience at a transformed African University”.

The debate on artwork at universities is not a new one. It has a charged (long and short) history and despite popular echoes, was not merely a conversation that rode on the coat tails of Cecil John Rhodes statue and its consequent removal. In 2014, Ramabina Mahapa a philosophy student and a member of the Student Representative Council at UCT sparked an art centered conversation on campus. Initially in university committee meetings, then with students from a wide variety of organisation and constitutions and finally through articles written in the media. Mahapa began to ask the question “what is African about UCT?”. Focusing particularly on artworks represented throughout campus, Mahapa writes in the Cape Times that there was nothing on the walls at UCT that says, “Black Child be Proud”;

“One level up [of the UCT Main Library], you see a metal sculpture of the naked Sarah Baartman with no plaque of explanation offered. As you turn to your right, you will be met with another portrait depicting a black woman sitting on what I assume to be a rock with her three children in their underwear in a plastic basin bathing – the surrounding is of a poor dwelling.

As you continue with your tour around UCT walking into the Otto Beit building, coming from the food court on your left, you will be met with a portrait of a bull. Inside it is a black man with his genitals exposed, besides the bull is a little white girl and an Afrikaner man.

If you go to middle campus, you will see several black painted sculptures also with their genitals out. You will also find a similar sculpture in the Hoerikwaggo building.

At the entrance of the new Chemical Engineering Building there is a portrait depicting the poor settlements of what seems to be Khayelitsha or Langa. A similar portrait depicting the dwelling of poor black people can be found in the Mafeje room, where the university council meets” (Mahapa, 2014).

In the widely shared article, Mahapa (2014) goes on to draw two broad observations; firstly, he observes that almost all depictions of the black body are either located in poverty or are depicted naked (he made specific reference to the genitalia of the black man being exposed) and secondly that he could find only one artwork on campus portraying a naked white body. Mahapa suggests that the representations of blackness the university chooses to exhibit are one dimensional and located in a highly sexualised, primitive manner, thus the artworks on display at UCT are such that they pull the black body back into a past world, a world curated by colonists and consequently that the art continues to offer these representations in the present. Art chosen for display at universities shows little imagination, a unilateral depiction of history and a lack of conception around the questions of identity and belonging asked by both black and white students.

In Defense of Shackville

Finally- the time has come to talk about Shackville- not merely an empty threat but a great display of flame and destruction that has received united condemnation from a broad range of public and political commentators. I outlined the happenings of Shackville earlier on in the introduction in an attempt to locate it as an ontological rupture of our moment. Though what I did not mention was that along with the plaque of Jan Smuts and the various portraits of colonial figures, a painting by a Black South African artist (Keresemose Richard Baholo- who was also the first black student to receive a Masters in Fine Art at UCT) was discarded into the same flame as those condemned as representations and reminders of colonial oppression. Unsurprisingly this was used as a tool to further vilify the actions of the students- to turn them into an unknowing, unintelligible group of “hooligans”. However, in an interesting turn of events, Baholo quickly came out to support the students and left many critics scrambling for an extra leg to stand on. Something which has not been so openly discussed though, is that amidst the chaos and the fury of students storming residence halls

and grabbing reams of artwork from the walls- does it not seem strange that only one piece of artwork by a black artist was burnt? Does this not in fact strengthen the argument that black artists are widely under represented in the hallow halls of UCT?

Cautious not to be overly redemptive in my approach, I want to build on my argument concerning the university's 'frozen aesthetic' and offer a decolonial defense to the burning at Shackville. Pauwels, a researcher at the University of Johannesburg is one of the few to go beyond the overwhelming knee jerk condemnation towards the burning of artwork and offer an imaginative and necessary re-reading of Adorno's Aesthetic Theory that steps towards a more legitimating perspective of fire (2017). Pauwels calls this re reading '"the philistine tendency of contemporary decolonial politics in South Africa", here the use of the term 'philistine' is not intended in its usual derogatory sense but is reappropriated to include a more positive and critical reading of the term that suggests hatred to stem from deep understanding. Pauwels argues that the trend of conservative and 'progressive' cultural theorists to plead for a more mediated, nuanced and desirable "cultural-political strategy" is in fact driven by a project of paternalistic "aesthetic education" of student protests.

Decolonial scholars argue that the purpose of decolonial cultural work has largely been viewed as the creation of a site of contestation where colonial work could be reappropriated, reworked, reread, reconstructed and resignified (Mignolo, 2013). Cape Town (termed the Cape Colony by many student activists) has seen many attempts of this subversive type of reappropriating. Most significant is the Tokolos Stencil Collective (TSC) who are most known for their aptly placed "Remember Marikana" stencils placed around the city; on highways, university campuses, next to monuments and on the side of buildings. The TSC are known for their explicit and confrontational stencils that juxtapose conventional aesthetics. The TSC is more than merely an "anti-state" collective, much of their activism targeting areas they believe to be suffering from the legacy of colonial rule, such as land, mining and the memorialisation of colonial figures.

I recall attending a debate organised through the UCT Debating Union in 2013 with the motion "UCT should remove the statue of Cecil John Rhodes". One of the speakers arguing against the motion that the statue should be removed suggested the insertion of another statue next to that of Rhodes- the speaker went on to suggest that a statue of Nelson Mandela should be erected alongside Rhodes to highlight the ever changing meaning of statues and moments. However, art historian Anita Nettleton argues "all the inventive and subversive reappropriations of problematic monuments past and present have not been able to prevent the erection of the very same types of problematic monuments over and over again" (2016). Nettleton's comment highlights the repetitive, frozen and unimaginative approaches to curating spaces, specifically spaces in the university and how previous more palatable cultural activism has managed to secure very few meaningful changes.

Pauwels (2017) identifies a double critique in the students turn to burning at Shackville both of which became evident through the following statement given by Dudu Ndlovu one of the student leaders of RhodesMustFall and active student in the Shackville protest: " you go into that residence, and you see the audacity of the university to not only give you res, but to have millions of rands worth of artwork and commemoration of white people who have put you in this position". Here, Ndlovu puts forwards a critique of the vulgarity of colonial (white) artwork being present and acclaimed in a space that declares itself committed to democratic freedoms. Ndlovu goes on to express her disgust at artworks with high monetary value hanging in halls, above the heads of students who cannot afford to eat.

Pauwels makes the observation that the turn to burning does not stem from a "deep hatred of art" (the more conventional reading of Adorno's 'philistinism') as suggested by media outlets and cultural commentators but rather that students choose to burn art because they have a truly deep *understanding* of the meaning of the artwork. In the following paragraphs I will focus on Frederic Jameson's reading of Adorno in *Late Marxism* (1990). Jameson argues that

Adorno identifies three different types of art "others". The first description of the other is the "non-art"- referring to those who lack any sort of artistic sensibility and who are "alien to art" (Pauwels, 2017). Jameson suggests that those whom are alien to art are so because of the differentiations of class in society. This "art other" is closely linked to another of Adorno's theories on "the guilt of art"- asserting that there is a divide between enjoyment of art and manual labour, suggesting that those in the lower or working class are unable to derive pleasure or happiness from art. 'The guilt of art' asserts the role that art plays in the construction of social roles. The second 'art other' is "anti-art". Surprisingly, the term does not imply an aggression towards art but rather refers simply to those that are mistaken in their assumption of artistic sensibilities (Pauwels, 2017).

The third other is that of the "philistine". Jameson's reading of Adorno articulates this as a "negation of art, anti-art and non-art". The Philistine is not deprived of art, nor do they consume or enjoy art, instead they "carry in their hearts a deep hatred of art itself" (Pauwels, 2017). This hatred is not created from a lack of understanding of art- as many public commentators implied of the students at Shackville- but rather because the student activist sees clearly the unresolvable contradiction of art; that it cannot resolve the social divisions of which it is so intimately implicated. The students call for a destruction of colonial art because they view it as incapable of granting happiness or meaning in the lives of the black student. It exists as pleasure for a select few when the majority of the black population cannot afford tuition, food or rent.

"Decolonial Aesthetics" is a term used most often by a group of scholars at Duke University. Most cited of the group is semiotics scholar and decolonial thinker Walter Mignolo. The term is born from the conviction that conceptualisations of political, scholarly and artistic beliefs are bound up within the cutting off of "non-western culture" by Western Aesthetics (Mignolo, 2013). The age of Enlightenment saw the birth of art as a fundamental medium in shaping the senses and sensibilities of European subjects and since European was positioned as the center of the world, European art and aesthetics imprinted itself into non-European institutions and knowledges (Mignolo, 2013). For Mignolo, the

'decolonial project' is centered on the reclamation of politics and sensibilities-but also the reclamation of an art and culture that isn't founded on erasure and assimilation (2013).

Much of the decolonial thought produced by South American and Latin American scholars speaks to the act of a "delinking" from the "imperial globalisation" that is a direct legacy of colonialism (Mignolo, 2012). Mignolo views art as a space where de-linking is radically required in order properly contest colonial legacies. Mignolo has written extensively on his decision to replace "colonial aestheTics" with that of "decolonial aestheSis" – which refocuses art to a place with an exceeding awareness and emphasis on 'stimulation'. Here the journey towards a "decolonial aesthesis" includes visual sensations, touch, smell and audio (2013).

If we start thinking through the sensibilities of a decolonial aesthesis rather than a Western aesthetic we begin to see the possibility of Shackville being viewed as an artistic intervention and a decolonial performance. I want to suggest that in many ways the presence of fire did not only point towards a moment of destruction but also of creation. Fire holds a performative value founded in both ritual and phenomenon. The students were not merely destroying artwork but were also creating their own performative piece, a performance of reclamation and rejuvenation and in doing so were appealing to the sensations of decolonial aesthesis. The scent of smoke, ash and the pressing heat of the flame complimented the singing and dancing of the students around the fire at UCT. In this moment they were more than performers, more than artists, they were time travelers pulling us all into the future with them.

The question remains - why is fire the chosen element to respond to a frozen university? More than the seemingly obvious relationship between fire and the melting of ice, fire is a respected and fierce competitor with time. It is ever present in all existing temporalities. It holds a power that doesn't only move through space but - and this is important - it has the capacity to destroy and even recreate space.

Conclusion

It seems nearly impossible to offer any form of conclusion to an exploration of the present. Especially a burning present, trapped in cyclical moments of combustion and disruption. The FeesMustFall protests in 2016 came to an awkward and stilted end after achieving almost none of their aims. Despite threats by the South African Union of Students for a year long shut down students entered November fatigued, sore, ideologically and politically divided and facing familial pressures of writing exams and finishing off the school year. Through a rushed and shallow series of mediations and private negotiations between student leaders and the Wits Senior Management team, a curtain was

merely drawn to cover the smoldering flame and no effort was made to put the fire out.

At the timing of writing, UCT has attempted to cool tensions and deal with the pent up anger, frustration and alienation felt by black students at the institution by agreeing to the 'ShackvilleTRC'. The Institutional Reconciliation and Transformation Commission (IRTC) is a restorative justice process attempting to rebuild a deeply fractured relationship between staff and students. However, this relationship seems irreparable and there appears to be no meaningful or long-term contingency plan for the impending explosion.

The smoke is already beginning to creep its way out from beneath the curtain and it seems just a matter of time before the curtain is engulfed by fire and another round of FeesMustFall protests begin. There is no quick or easy fix, no political fire extinguisher that can be pulled from the nearest wall and used to smother the flame. It seems that South Africa will continue in this relationship with fire for the long haul and it is hard to imagine a future time that is not like the present time.

Ideas on time have woven their way through theory throughout this paper, with fire defining various historical moments. In South Africa's transition to its proposed democratic order fire has been able to adjust to the 'political time' and redefine itself as it moved from the hands of the 1980s township activist to the "living politics" of the Abahlali activist and finally reaching the decolonial performance of the RhodesMustFall activist (Chance, 2014).

The "Black Prophetic Tradition" of fire has been able to connect black activists, scholars and writers who occupied and challenged different times and connect them through their expressions of rage and anger. Building on this anger, fire has guided students who remain motivated by Afropessimist thought to disavow time and space in their view of the concurrent relationship between blackness and the slave. Here students see no difference between the rage expressed when

burning lecture halls and starting a fire on a street corner and the liberating act of the slave setting the plantation on fire (Wilderson, 2016).

Finally when time stops, when it has collapsed as a result of a public memory stunted by trauma and a colonial aesthetic that remains frozen into the very foundation of the public university, fire is viewed as the most apt response. Used as a tool by student activists who understand that the colonial artwork tormenting the walls and halls of the university will not bring them happiness or success. Fire brings with it the call for the ultimate reimagining of the university.

Afterword

Personal Reflections on fire

The first time I realised that I was standing amidst a fire was in October 2015 after my friend Nathan Taylor was released from jail. Nathan was one of the "Belville6"; the name given to those who had been arrested and subsequently charged with treason during the FeesMustFall protest outside parliament. This was one of the first high profile arrests of the movement and I think it was the first time I was able to truly grasp the volatility of the moment and vulnerability of the students.

A group of us went to Nathan's house after his release, his family lived in Martizburg and we were worried about his mental health after his 24-hour stint in the Hawks main office - potentially one of the most creepy looking buildings in South Africa. We sat in his kitchen in Woodstock, drinking tea and sharing our stories of trauma from the days that had preceded. Finally Nathan spoke, I remember he kept his head down, speaking slowly, it seemed to take him a great deal of effort to release each word from its place of captivity in his mouth.

Nathan told us that he couldn't get the image of fire out of his head. He felt as though he was watching a fire spread. That a dangerous blaze was moving across South Africa and that he remained completely powerless in its quest for destruction.

I had been involved in the student movement since its inception in March 2015. Following Maxwele's poo-throwing, in true millennial style, all engagements seemed trapped in the virtual world of Facebook and twitter. Fellow UCT student, Kgotsi Chikane suggested that we organise a mass meeting on Jammie Plaza. We wanted to appeal to more students than just the select few who were always politically active. So, the morning of the planned meeting a handful of us met at the lower campus Jammie Shuttle stop for a silent protest. We stood in the chilly morning air with our signs. I remember painting my sign the night before, sitting on the floor in my flat. I had spilled the black paint everywhere. There is still a mark on the floor.

The signs spoke to institutional racism, white privilege and the call to remove the statue. UCT student Ru Slayen arrived with an old piece of cardboard that read, "the statue must fall".

This is how it began.

The months that followed were unpredictable, wild, painful, heated and synonymous with flame. My role within the movement needed to evolve quickly

with the growing focus on Black Consciousness. The day after the first mass meeting a student that would come to hold huge influence in RhodesMustFall told me to organise a space that was only for whites. She said this space needed to focus on how whites could show solidarity and allyship towards black student activists. The thoughts that blazed through my mind after this meeting are worthy of their own dissertation.

I went on to start the White Privilege Project, which evolved into Disrupting Whiteness. Spending time in 'white spaces' taught me that it was not just black students who were on fire. White students, especially those who felt personally confronted by the politics of RhodesMustFall became so consumed with guilt and despair that it often seemed as though their skin was burning and they were trying desperately to peel it off. In the same way that you can smell a tyre burning, it seemed possible to smell the desperation of white students in their search to burn off their privilege

Everyone was angry. The fire emoji became the most used emoji on my whatsapp and Twitter feeds and I felt constantly overwhelmed.

Then, Shackville happened.

At the end of February I moved from UCT to Wits and began thinking through ideas for my thesis proposal. I had planned on writing about feminism and intersectionality but I couldn't get what I had seen at Shackville out of my head.

The raging fire.

The searing and uncontrollable anger burning in the eyes of the students.

Where would the fire go next?

I did up submitting a proposal on Intersectionality but preceded the proposal with a short piece I had written on fire;

our skin is burning and yet our mouths hang open in disbelief,
we stand among the large crimson flames as they violently lash up.
we are witnesses to this destruction; many will remain still and silent,
occasionally fanning the flames,
sporadically crying out in pain
we are more than witnesses;
we are also the ones that lit the fire
and let it burn

I knew then that I could no longer ignore the encroaching flame. Fire was not just consuming, it had become defining and it desperately needed more thought. There is a strong emotive thread that runs throughout this dissertation but how could there not be when I wrote most of what is presented while very literally standing inside the flame. I have joked often that I wrote my dissertation on fire from inside a library that was under constant threat of being reduced to a pile of ash. Fire is no longer confined to the realm of science and biology, it is emotive and personal in the way it touches lives. I hope that those that read this paper will do so with an open mind and a burning passion for knowledge and justice.

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