

https://dspace.org/

Writing from inside the fire: reflections on the fire-centered politics of the 2015/16 South African student movements

Breakey, Jessica Mary

2017

https://hdl.handle.net/10539/24471

Breakey, Jessica Mary (2017) Writing from inside the fire : reflections on the fire-centered politics of the 2015/16 South African student movements, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, <https://hdl.handle.net/10539/24471>

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

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.