2016 Colloquium Announcement

We are pleased to announce the details of this year’s annual Thinking Africa colloquium.
#MustFall: Understanding the Moment
Africanisation, Decolonisation, Transformation?

To be held on 3-6 October 2016 at the University of the Free State, South Africa

The three day colloquium is an inter-institutional conversation collaboratively organized and funded by Thinking Africa (Rhodes University); The University of Pretoria; Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University and Lis Lange, Vice-Rector: Academic, at UFS. The object of colloquium will be to pause and reflect on what, by October 2016, will have been almost 18 months of radical turmoil for higher education institutions in South Africa. To this end, the universities of the Free State and Rhodes are joining efforts to organize a conversation that will gather local and international academics, students and university leadership to collectively think through the meanings of the #Mustfall ‘movement’, both locally and globally; to recognize and articulate the interpretive needs that such a moment poses to universities as institutions but also to existing modes of knowledge production.
Conversation themes:

1. A comparative ‘cartography’ of the material basis of past and present revolutionary discourses in South Africa. What possibilities and limitations do existing material conditions and macro-economic policies and commitments pose for the demands being articulated by #MustFall in South Africa - such as the demand, often, but not always, articulated as a right to free tertiary education? Included here, are discussions on the status of socio-economic rights in light of this forceful acknowledgement of the priority of ‘education’, possibly at the cost of what others may consider more urgent rights such as housing, health, and adequate standard of living.

2. A concomitant analysis of the ideological discourses that have historically regulated the purpose of the university as modern institution with contextualising references to other contemporary student protests elsewhere in the world. What are the various assumptions at work in talk of ‘Africanisation’ and ‘decolonisation’ and what are some of the tensions generated between local demands for decolonization and the realities of globalization and technology mediated integration?

3. What tensions are generated between, on the one hand, rights-based government approaches to transformation and, on the other hand, ethical communities that see the codification of political struggles into rights discourse as a depoliticisation of their demands?

4. The role of social media in constituting and sustaining the #MustFall momentum. Are we witnessing the emergence of a virtual public domain in the 21st century? If so, what are some of the benefits, pitfalls and dangers that virtuality poses to the possibility and efficacy of collective action?

5. Do the conceptual and theoretical frameworks of “comparative revolutions” and/or “social movements” have any currency, relevance or applicability to understanding both the local and global dimensions of the #MustFall phenomenon?

6. The aporiae of race politics: ‘black lives matter/all lives matter’. More critically: What is the relationship between identity politics and epistemological revision? Is it possible that identity politics have both an emancipatory and a conservative effect on such revision?
Reconciliation: A Step forward? A Step back?

“In 2013, only half of white South Africans agreed that apartheid was an unjust, inhumane, criminal system and only a third agreed that it has resulted in the continued poverty of black South Africans today.”

“Looking at results related to the way in which we remember apartheid over the 11-year period, there are some interesting trends emerging. For example, as pointed out in the previous section, perceptions are changing dramatically for coloured South Africans. The percentage of coloured South Africans who agree that apartheid was a crime against humanity and that it committed terrible crimes against those who struggled against it declined by about 20% in each case over time. Key findings on racial memory politics show that, in terms of acknowledging the injustice of the past and supporting redress measures, white South Africans are much less likely to agree with these tenets. In 2013, only half of white South Africans agreed that apartheid was an unjust, inhumane, criminal system and only a third agreed that it has resulted in the continued poverty of black South Africans today. The vast majority of South Africans in other race groups agreed with these statements. As noted earlier, our interpretation, or memory, of the past has a profound impact on how we deal with the present. When we look at questions of redress, it appears that white South Africans are not only less likely to agree about the extent of historic injustices, but are also less likely to agree with the measure of redress, support and compensation that is required by those who suffered from the system’s implementation. In terms of the statements that reconciliation is impossible when those disadvantaged by apartheid are poor, and that government should support victims of apartheid, only about 3 in every 10 white South Africans agree, which is half of every 6 in 10 black South Africans. These findings can be interpreted through an understanding of the relationship between memory politics and white privilege in South Africa. The emerging field of privilege studies demonstrates that a lack of awareness about the nature of privilege is a key characteristic of dominant identity groups (Pratto & Stewart, 2012). Therefore, privileged racial identity often goes hand in hand with low race consciousness (awareness of the way in which race impacts on one’s life). This obliviousness around race and privilege is recognised in this literature as a privilege in and of itself, as it allows an individual to remain oblivious to their own privileged status. In other words, denial of injustice is a characteristic of meaning-making within dominant identity groups. Furthermore, it is painful and potentially risky to acknowledge the historical suffering of the other in relation to the historical privilege of the self. These findings show that, in the area of memory politics and reconciliation, more work is required to challenge, support and encourage white South Africans in a process of acknowledging historical injustice and its relation to racial privilege. In essence, a deeper conversation is required that engages white South Africans on the relationship between memory and identity politics in order to interrogate what it means to be white in the South African past, present and future in relation to the lived experiences of other race groups.”

“Privileged racial identity often goes hand in hand with low race consciousness”
A Genealogy of the Protests so far
(See https://oppidanpress.atavist.com/decolonisation for a detailed breakdown)

9 March 2015:
Statue of Cecil John Rhodes defaced at UCT, sparking the #RhodesMustFall movement.

17 March 2015:
The Black Students Movement (BSM) created in solidarity with #RhodesMustFall. They begin pushing for a name change at Rhodes University.

19 March 2015:
Rhodes SRC calls an emergency student body meeting to discuss transformation at the university.

20 March 2015:
Rhodes Must Fall occupies Bremmer Building, renames it Azania House. RMF Intersectionality Audit Committee is started.

24 March 2015:
BSM attempts to hand over a memorandum of grievances to Rhodes University management, but is barred from the administration building.

27 March 2015:
UCT senate votes in favour of Rhodes statue removal. BSM manages to sort out the issues of the short vacation accommodation at Rhodes university.

9 April 2015:
The statue of Rhodes falls.

15 April 2015:
Open Stellenbosch movement founded. It is aimed at accelerating transformation.

17/18 April 2015:
Colloquium on curriculum transformation held at Rhodes. BSM receives support from students at Wits, UCT and Fort Hare.

May 2015:
The Trans Collective at UCT is launched.

20 August 2015:
The documentary ‘Luister’ is released.

26 August 2015:
The BSM disrupts a meeting in the Council Chambers at Rhodes, and occupies the space.

28 August 2015:
A Rhodes University Senate meeting takes place at the Gavin Reilly Postgraduate Village, off campus. BSM march to the site, and are prevented from entering. Police are dispatched.

30 August 2015:
BSM disrupt Highway Africa conference, and are given a platform to speak.

October 2015:
#StopOutsourcing mass protests take place at universities across the country.

13 October 2015:
ReformPUK launches at North-West University.

14 October 2015:
Wits students shut down campus after a 10.5% fees increase is announced.

16 October 2015:
Rhodes SRC calls an emergency student body meeting to discuss fee hikes. Wits Senate holds a meeting in the middle of continued student occupation and agrees to suspend fee increases pending discussion.

19 October 2015:
National #FeesMustFall protests begin.
21 October 2015:
As protest continue, thousands of students march to the gates of parliament.

22 October 2015:
Another demonstration is focused on the ANC’s headquarters at Luthuli House.

23 October 2015:
The nationwide protests culminate in a march to the union buildings.
Government capitulates and Zuma announces a fee freeze for 2016.

7 February 2016:
DUT students protest against student leadership.

15 February 2016:
Protestors at UCT burn artwork.
Protests at UCT about the lack of affordable housing for students, and erect shacks on campus.

19 February 2016:
Students at the University of Pretoria protest the language policies at the university.

23 February 2016:
Clashes between students manifested themselves at a rugby match at UFS.

24 February 2016:
Rhodes Vice Chancellor addresses students about financial exclusion.
A small group of students set up a barricade onto campus, in solidarity with those who have been financially excluded. This is removed by campus security and the Vice Chancellor.

29 February 2016:
Classes resume at UFS following violent clashes.