Education and contemporary issues in South Africa: a look from the high education crisis

Educação e questões contemporâneas na África do Sul: um olhar a partir da crise no ensino superior

Educación y cuestiones contemporáneas en África del Sur: una mirada a partir de la crisis en la enseñanza superior

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Abstract: This article has as objective to present historical aspects, as much as a brief conceptualization of the contemporary socio-economic situation of South Africa. The theoretical reflection of this article articulates the participation of both authors in the youth movement "Fees Must Fall". Based on that, it aims to debate about the contemporary issues on the field of High Education in South Africa. Like in Brazilian reality, since 2015 there has been a rise of a students' movement demanding free education and a decolonial reform of the higher education curriculum, as much as gender and racial justice. The "Fees Must Fall" movement lead to, but also protested against, the militarization of the campi, imprisonment of students, depredation, arson and violence from the different sides. The so called High Education crisis in South Africa has made propitious a wide debate in society, as much as it has served as model for many student's struggles in other contexts. This article will speak from the reality of the engagement with these students to debate about the political and economic situation in South Africa and its impact in the field of high education. Methodologically, the article sets up a bibliographical debate concerning the social and economic reasons for the contemporary crisis. The conclusion of it points to a list of some of the reasons for the crisis in high education in South Africa.

Keywords: South Africa. Education. High education. Social movements.

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Resumo: *Este artigo tem como objetivo apresentar aspectos históricos, tanto quanto uma breve conceptualização da situação socioeconômica contemporânea da África do Sul. A reflexão teórica deste artigo articula a participação de ambos os autores no movimento da juventude, "Taxas Deverão Cair" (Fees Must Fall). Com base nisso, pretende debater sobre as questões contemporâneas no campo da Educação Superior na África do Sul. Semelhante à realidade brasileira, desde 2015 houve um aumento de um movimento de estudantes exigindo educação gratuita e uma reforma decolonial do currículo do ensino superior, tanto quanto a justiça de gênero e racial. O movimento "Fees Must Fall" conduziu à, mas também protestou contra a militarização do campi, a prisão de estudantes, a depredação, o incêndio criminoso e a violência dos diferentes lados. A chamada crise da Educação Superior na África do Sul tornou propício um amplo debate na sociedade, tanto quanto serviu de modelo para muitas lutas de estudantes em outros contextos. Este artigo falará da realidade do envolvimento com estudantes para debater sobre a situação política e econômica na África do Sul e seu impacto no campo da educação superior. Metodologicamente, o artigo estabelece um debate bibliográfico sobre as razões sociais e econômicas da crise contemporânea. A conclusão dele aponta para uma lista de alguns dos motivos da crise da educação superior na África do Sul.*

Palavras-chave: *África do Sul. Educação. Educação Superior. Movimentos Sociais.*

Resumen: *Este artículo tiene como objetivo presentar aspectos históricos, tanto como una breve conceptualización de la situación socioeconómica contemporánea de África del Sur. La reflexión teórica de este artículo articula la participación de ambos autores en el movimiento de la juventud, "Tasas Deberán Caer" (Fees Must Fall). Con base en ello, pretende debatir sobre las cuestiones contemporáneas en el campo de la Educación Superior en Sudáfrica. Similar a la realidad brasileña, desde 2015 hubo un aumento de un movimiento de estudiantes exigiendo educación gratuita y una reforma decolonial del currículo de la enseñanza superior, tanto como la justicia de género y racial. El movimiento "Fees Must Fall" condujo a la, pero también protestó contra la militarización del campus, la detención de estudiantes, la depredación, el incendio criminal y la violencia de los diferentes lados. La llamada crisis de la Educación Superior en Sudáfrica ha propiciado un amplio debate en la sociedad, tanto como sirvió de modelo para muchas luchas de estudiantes en otros contextos. Este artículo hablará de la realidad de la implicación con estudiantes para debatir sobre la situación política y económica en Sudáfrica y su impacto en el campo de la educación superior. Metodológicamente, el artículo establece un debate bibliográfico sobre las razones sociales y económicas de la crisis contemporánea. La conclusión de él apunta a una lista de algunos de los motivos de la crisis de la educación superior en Sudáfrica.*

Palabras clave: *África del Sur. Educación. Educación Superior. Movimientos Socialies.*

1 **INTRODUCTION**

When reflecting about the value of the academy, figuratively writing "a letter to academy", Julie Nxadi, a South African student and participant in the social movement called Fees Must Fall, states: "Similarly, I need not articulate what you, the academy, consider to be valuable because it is made clear by the limitations of your imagination. I believe a more valuable point of departure, would be a question "What is your value?" (NXADI, 2017, p. 4). This expresses a critical approach from participants of the movement that poses some crucial questions to contemporary academy today in South Africa. This article is a second act. Methodologically, it is a reflection based on praxis. Namely, the engagement of both authors with the so called "Fees Must Fall" movement, a student's movement which demands free, decolonized and decommodified higher education as much as racial justice, against gender-based violence and the patriarchal culture in academy and society (BUTTELLI; LE BRUYNS, 2017; NAIDOO, 2016). This article will focus in presenting shortly some main aspects of South Africa history, presenting the overview of the so called "rainbow nation". South Africa has experienced a history of apartheid and racism and that still marks its view from other countries. "South Africa's miracle", to use Ramphele's words, and Mandela's legacy to humanity is, at one hand, a significative heritage of South Africans, but at other, it became a sort of "Ghost" that haunts South African democracy (RAMPHELE, 2010).

The actual picture of South African society should be redesigned. Economic crisis, political instability, corruption and most importantly the continuity of the reality of poverty and immense social inequality are aspects of South African contemporary situation that describe the country better than the idealized myth of the "rainbow nation".

To better present the contemporary South Africa, this article will sum up the most important lines of South African history aiming to create ways to understand the contemporary social, economic and political situation of the country, to understand the challenges that affect the field of higher education. It will be presented here the understanding that the process of transition of South Africa into democracy, as much as in Brazil, was a process of transition into a neoliberal global capitalism (BOND, 2010; CABAÇO, 2010).

This neoliberal economic agenda of transformation made it difficult for the political leaders to implement real changes for those who suffered under apartheid. As Sampie Terreblanche formulates it, referring to the neoliberal policies adopted by the South African government, in "[...] the post-apartheid period, neither its economic nor it social policy programmes has delivered the promised outcomes." (TERREBLANCHE, 2002, p. 424). We are, therefore, today observing the rise of a third generation after apartheid, the so called "born frees", as these young people were born already in democracy as free children to live a life

of limitless opportunities. However, these children are now experiencing reality without seeing these signs of transformation.

On that sense, it will be presented the argument that neoliberal agenda in South Africa affects these "born free" in two ways: first as something that perpetuated the reality of poverty and social stagnation especially for the black people. Secondly, the neoliberal agenda dominated the management of higher education, commodifying education and applying the neoliberal agenda in the academic reality.

2 METHODOLOGY

Methodologically, this article presents the results of a bibliographic research, that tried to offer some theoretical interpretations from the perspective of academic participants in the social movement Fees Must Fall. In the first step, a historic overview is offered as a literature review of South African main political landmarks. The second step, as a theoretical procedure, establishes some frameworks to understand the different periods and the social challenges they represented, as much as the type of responses from students. It allows us to have a pattern to understand the historical changes in South Africa in concerning changes in the political activity of students. The last analytical step, also through a bibliographical procedure, identifies the discourses of young intellectuals in South Africa, perceiving the ways they understand reality and how it affects and informs their political activity to change academic setting.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review starts with a brief description of South African contextual background. It is not the focus of the article, but important for Brazilian readers to understand some of the main features of South African historical background. Initially, it is good to emphasize the very reality that South Africa, as much as Brazil, is a diverse and plural culture. Besides the fact that it has a colonial history, it has a history of migrant movements that creates much of its identity. A short presentation of such a diversity of narratives that have clashed and that in this encounter created a specific cultural and social dynamic in that specific context is needed to break the colonial enterprise as the "beginning" of history.

The oldest ethnic group that is still found in South Africa is the so-called Khoi-San people. This population is considered today to be the indigenous population of South Africa (BUTLER, 2009). This ethnic group, that mixes the Khoi-Khoi and the San peoples, traces back to 1000 b.C. living in the Cape region (Western Cape today). Their major activity was to be shepherds and hunters. This population is attributed to be the origin of the so called "coloured people", later classified as one of the non-white racial groups in apartheid South Africa. The Khoi-San people was reduced as slave labour in the initial encounter with the Dutch colonizers. From this encounter between Dutch European settlers and the Khoi-San people resulted the Afrikaner culture and Afrikaans as a language.

The second group of populations that migrated to South Africa is today considered as the African groups. It includes many black ethnic groups and cultures that came to other areas of South Africa (to the east and north of the Cape). These groups entail cultures as Xhosa, Zulus, Ndbele, Tswana, Venda, Tsonga, Swazi, Pedi, Shoto. These peoples came from northern regions from different places, possibly already in the 500's a.C. (SPARKS, 2003). The major economic activity of these groups was to be shepherds. These cultures, since the beginning of European colonial period, were strongly organized in order to maintain their political independency, even 200 years after the Dutch started their colonial enterprise. Some of these groups are still proud of their history of resistance, beautifully described by Krog (2009), and still maintain the strong "warrior" identity, as the Zulus for instance. It is important to avoid the historical and anthropological descriptions usually made on the XIX and XX centuries that see these people as politically naïve and culturally uncivilized.

> The Western concept of tribalism, which is usually taken to refer to closed populations reproducing fixed cultural characteristics, is not applicable to [these] African farmers'. Rather than closed entities with unique unchanging cultures [...] such societies were fluid and politically affiliative in composition. People interacted, co-operating as well as competing and combating, exchanging ideas and practices as well as rejecting them. (BUTLER, 2009, p. 7).

Besides that, some may understand as a reality that these people, to certain extent, had in their way many cultural and social inhabits that in terms of complexity and methodology would exceed from far the "middle age" cultural praxis of the European population. This becomes blatant when we look at these cultures with decolonial lenses and see the possible contribution of some of these cultural, social and educational praxes still today. So describes Sparks (2003, p. 3):

> Socially and politically, however, Africa lagged not at all. Traditional African societies were sophisticated organisms, finely tuned to the exigencies of climate and environment in a harsh continent. In their communal relationships

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and elaborate links of mutual responsibility, with their generic love of children and respect for the aged, they cultivated a respect for human values and human worth far in advance of the materialistic West. [...] In fact, the chiefs' powers were heavily circumscribed and systems they presided over incorporated a considerable degree of grass-roots democracy. At the time that the first Portuguese navigators made their voyages of discovery around the Cape of Good Hope, it is arguable that Darkest Africa was a more democratic place than the medieval Europe from which they had sailed.

The third narrative that forms the diverse matrix of South African culture arrived in 1652 through the colonial enterprise of the Dutch West India Company (7 years after the expulsion of the Dutch from Brazilian Northeast in 1645). The Dutch encountered the Khoi-San people and started to develop their economic activities in the Cape. Mostly oriented for supplying the travelers coming from Europe, they started to develop a strong agricultural culture, together with the commercial activity related with the Dutch colonizers traveling around the globe in the XVIIth century. The Dutch had a slave culture and formed the South African Afrikaaner culture in the encounter with the Khoi-San people. Butler describes the cultural, economic and political differences of these "Boers" (farmers):

The experience of these Boer societies was in many respects similar to that of their African contemporaries. Their expansion north and east into the areas occupied by African polities began in the late eighteenth century. Boer settlers achieved advances through a combination of factors: exploitation of division in African societies, (uneven) co-operation between Whites, the technological superiority of firearms, and the ability to store wealth in a more sophisticated economic system. (BUTLER, 2009, p. 7).

The fourth narrative was established during the imperialism of Britain. In 1806 the British arrived in the Cape and had since the beginning a problematic relation with the *Boers*, with the Khoi-San and African populations. The presence in the cape was justified by the strategic position of Cape Town for navigation purposes. The problematic presence of the British in South Africa had two different periods during the colonial time. The first one of animosity with the *Boer* but of relative peaceful relations. However, from 1835-1840, the *Boers* migrated out of the Cape, especially because of the growing capitalist economy lead by the English at a time in which it was not important or needed anymore to have slaves as the foundation of the economic system. Therefore, the *Boers* decided to migrate out of the Cape (the Great *Trek*). At that time, the British did not have specific interest to settle in the region. However, from 1867-1890 the *Boers* started to discover first diamonds and then gold in the territories they occupied after the Great *Trek*. This lead the British to change their colonial project, moving to dominate other areas of South Africa, fact that created the context for the South African Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902).

> The roots of this upheaval lay in discoveries of diamonds and gold, and in the responses of the British colonial power to these discoveries. Four massive processes marked the transformation of South Africa over this period: war, unification, economic development, and the forging of a migrant working class. (BUTLER, 2009, p. 12).

As Butler referred, the period after the war was a time of rearranging the South African social, political and economic foundation. The white groups unified and created in 1910 the South African Union, which is the contemporary State of South Africa. This white dominated state started a period of severe mineral exploitation of the land, including the black groups as migrant workers around the diamond and gold mines. This political unification of the white settlers gave birth to the first racialized policies, which can be described as a pre-apartheid era. Many regulations were approved at that time, as the 1913's Native Lands Act, that did a true agrarian reform in the country, giving 87% of South African land to 5% of a white minority. Butler described as follows the formation of the South African state as a colonial and capitalist entrepreneurship that started to build the foundations of apartheid.

> The state carefully managed the influx of African labour, using already embedded practices and ideologies. Britain's High Commissioner Milner viewed native reserves, urban 'influx' control, and the manipulation of chiefs as necessary instruments to keep Africans in check in the colonial economy. Social Darwinism helped justify segregationist policies, and further ideological support was provided by new racial doctrines from the United States. (BUTLER, 2009, p. 13).

That means that apartheid as an institutional regime started in 1948, but racist and segregationist policies started much earlier with the creation of the South African Union. The National Party was officially elected in 1948 with the political project of a "separate development" for the country: in Afrikaans, *apartheid*. The struggle against apartheid has, therefore, four main periods: from 1910-1948 (pre-apartheid); 1948-1960 (with the construction of the institutional apartheid); 1960-1976 (initial clashes) and 1976-1990 (final struggle).

The period that comprises the first twelve years of apartheid (1948-1960) was defined by the establishment of the legal structure of it: Population Registration Act; Mixed Racial Marriages prohibition; Immorality Act are some of the laws passed in order to separate territorially, avoiding mixed racial relations in the country. In 1960 the first massive protest happened in Sharpeville and ended up with police killing several people. Nelson Mandela, Robert Sobukwe, Oliver Thambo, Albert Luthuli were some of the leaders that started to

question the evil measures and their impact for black people.[3] Butler emphasizes how terrific was this period of South African history and how deep was the impact of these laws passed as the Group Areas Act for the tessiture of South African society:

> The doctrine of separate development implied that every South African must be assigned to an ethnic group, nation, or tribe, and that each of these must have its own site of self-government. Ethnic categories were enforced on a largely unwilling Black populace by means of comprehensive social engineering. [...] Consequent population removals, simplified now by a clear classification by race and ethnic group, could adopt a stark brutality. Between 1960 and 1989, there were 3.5 million forced removals of people who were found to be of 'incorrect' ethnicity for their location. (BUTLER, 2009, p. 20).

The struggle became harsher after the Sharpeville massacre. Mandela, for instance, was arrested in 1963 for burning his pass. So, the period of 1960 till 1976 was a period of internal struggle. Apartheid was still supported by the international powers. However, the year of 1976 became quite crucial for the world, as the harsh reality of injustice became clear after the massacre of students and the upheaval of Soweto. John de Gruchy and Steve de Gruchy notice the turning importance of this historic period for the struggle against apartheid.

> Post-Sharpeville South Africa was a society in crisis. Nothing quite like it had happened before to disturb the apparent tranquility of white South Africa and the confidence of foreign investors. Nothing comparable was to take place again until Soweto erupted in protest in 1976, and evoked support from nations and peoples throughout the world. (DE GRUCHY; DE GRUCHY, 2004, p. 101-102).

From 1976 onwards, a type of civil war took place in South Africa, especially by students, mostly inspired by the Black Consciousness Movement that has as leader Steve Biko. This is the way Biko conceptualize what is the Black Consciousness Movement:

> Black Consciousness is in essence the realization by the black man (sic) of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of the operation – the blackness of their skin – and to operate as a group in order to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude [...] It is a manifestation of a new realization that by seeking to run away from themselves and to emulate the white man, blacks are insulting the intelligence of whoever created them black. Black Consciousness therefore,

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[3]   Much of this historical presentation is available in Portuguese in the doctoral dissertation. This section is basically based on the first chapter of it: Buttelli (2013).

> takes cognizance of the deliberateness of God's plan in creating black people black. It seeks to infuse the black community with a new-found pride in themselves, their efforts, their value systems, their culture, their religion and their outlook to life. (BIKO, 2004, p. 53).

Internationally, the winds changed to the apartheid regime with civil society and states adopting a Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign, pressuring South Africa to end apartheid.[4] Important is to emphasize that from 1960 onwards, the political leadership of the struggle was strategically dismantled, either through life period sentences – like in the case of Mandela – or through assassinations (Steve Biko) or exiling leaders in other countries. Therefore, in 1976 we observed the youth taking lead in the struggle. This reality is important to understand the contemporary role of the youth in the mass protests and in the political activity, even nowadays (HEFFERNAN; NIEFTAGODIEN, 2016).

The context of the 1980 can be described practically as a civil war. Apartheid regime started to collapse, while black resistance movements were heavily struggling around different projects for the country after the imminent end of the racist regime. The African National Congress (Mandela's) party, had since the 1950 developed a "Freedom Charter", envisioning a project for the country, while there were other political movements that did not have in mind a conciliative project for the nation. The leadership of apartheid was under economic pressure, suffering an international boycott campaign and dealing with sanctions. Towards the end of 1980's they started a process of negotiation with the leadership of opposition such as Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo and others. Nelson Mandela was, for instance, released from prison in 11th of February of 1990 as a step in the transition process. The terms of the negotiation were not openly debated, what was criticized by a considerable group of the opposition. Terreblanche (2002) offered a deep analysis of this period of transition. His understanding is that the period of transition (1990-1994) represented the change or the adaption of the envisioned project for a new South Africa by the opposition movements into the tenets of the neoliberal agenda. That was observed in the economic programme executed by Mandela and Thabo Mbeki, his successor. Terreblanche also makes an extensive description of the politic and economic aspects that show the changes that happened during ANC's government towards a neoliberal agenda (2002, p. 95-149). He also listed the premises of the new economic order that was built by influence of the neo-liberal corporate sector in South Africa: Economic growth potential; integration to global economy; economic growth as a way to create jobs; the 'trickle-down' effect as a way to distribute wealth to the poor; economic growth should be led by market economic growth ((TERREBLANCHE, 2002, p. 424-425). His analysis, however, affirms that "a decisive paradigm shift from the *liberal capitalist* ideology of the British-American

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[4]   Similar to the BDS suggested by the Palestinian civil society today (BDS, 2018).

world (BA) towards the *social democratic* ideology of continental Europe (CE) can contribute meaningfully to solving South African's most pressing problems" (TERREBLANCHE, 2002, p. 439).

Regarding the transition to democracy in South Africa, as in Brazil, it was only possible with a wide plan of amnesty for those who perpetrated violence and those who resisted committing crimes, as much as an adjustment of the future democracies to the neoliberal global project that was disseminated after the end of "real socialism" in 1989. So Terreblanche described this "sudden" change in terms of political economic view that happened in South Africa during the transition and first years of Mandela's government.

> However, both Mandela and the ANC soon abandoned their commitment to a fundamental restructuring of the economic system. Three days after his release, Mandela declared in Johannesburg that 'the nationalization of the mines, banks, and the monopoly industry is the policy of the ANC, and a change or modification of our views in this regard is inconceivable'. [...] In December 1991 an important shift in ANC policy became visible when Mandela, speaking in Pittsburgh in the United States, emphasized the role of the private sector. [...] In May 1992 an ANC policy conference adopted a reworked economic policy document, entitled *Ready to govern*. In this document the term 'growth through redistribution' was not used at all, and the envisaged role of the state was scaled down considerably. (TERREBLANCHE, 2002, p. 86-87).

Similar process happened also in Brazil. After the end of military dictatorship, the first governments of Fernando Collor de Mello (1989-1992) and Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1994-2002) were mainly focused in applying the neoliberal agenda. Iulianelli sees that even during Lula's government (2003-2010), that was more concerned with social policies to overcome poverty, the basic principles of a neoliberal economy were not challenged. In his reading, "through compensatory policies, he [Lula] realized the largest income distribution that ever occurred in the country's history [...] the challenge of overcoming the paradigm that generates concentration of wealth, power and knowledge remained in societies such as Brazil" (IULIANELLI, 2009, p. 100). On the contrary, the economic policies of Collor, FHC and Lula ensured the continuity of a process of concentration of income and "transfer of income from the poor to the rich." (IULIANELLI, 2009, p. 101).

However, although we can see that the transition process in South Africa was already leading into an unequal economic system, there was a national feeling of hope, a narrative of victory over racism and reconciliation. South Africa became a symbol of a new era for the world, in which violent regimes were left behind and new democracies would be constructed in a spirit of economic and social development for all peoples. For how long would the "miracle narrative" last?

4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Speaking from a contemporary point of view, the young socio-analysts of South Africa have a completely different understanding of what happened in the country than those who celebrated the miracle of reconciliation. To describe the type of change that happened in South Africa with the end of apartheid we suggest a framework of three eras, focusing in the more contemporary period and its unfolding in the struggle for education. As already described in the previous section, the first period of struggle – which involves also the struggles of the youth for education as in Soweto (1976), we can refer to the *apartheid era* (1948–1994). This period was mainly focused on political liberation, political freedom, end of the apartheid regime and its range of policies that kept the black youth in sub-human conditions, entrenching inequalities and sharpening injustice. The object of the struggle was the *State* as political entity able to change the social reality. It was, therefore, a struggle against the *State* – and the institutions and ideologies that justified its policies and to achieve the control of the State, transforming it radically, what ended up leading to the promulgation of a new Constitution (SOUTH AFRICA, 1996) (KARIS; GERHART, 2013).

The second period, also to some extent described previously but not entirely, is the *democratic era* (1994–2015). The year of 2015 is suggested by us for two reasons. Firstly, because of the event, in a badiousian sense (BADIOU, 2005), when Chumani Maxwele threw faeces at the statue of Rhodes, an English colonizer, in Cape Town, in 2015. This was the beginning of the students' movement called Rhodes Must Fall, which in the next year became Fees Must Fall, as it became a national movement. The second reason is symbolic, as the age of 21 years old is, in South Africa, in the common sense, the age to become an adult. We have in mind that South African democracy is, then, becoming a "grown up" democracy, and it is now responsible for its own mistakes.

This era comprises the whole period of hope and expectation for social and political transformation. The building process of a new nation, post-colonial, post-racist, democratic and more egalitarian. This time was filled with the notion of public responsibility of all citizens and civil society organizations. Instead of a critical and deconstructive political praxis, as during the struggle against apartheid, this era was regarded as a time of opportunity, requiring positive engagement and a propositive political activity. The focus of the political activity at this period was not only around the transformation of the structures of the apartheid *State*. It was also a time of building a public sphere (HABERMAS, 2003), a space outside the limits of the state in which civil society and social movements could have the opportunity to be constructive. The human rights grammar was at the centre of this political activity. It was an era of hope that ended up leading to disappointment and frustration, as the old political alternatives and the former "liberators" did not deliver what was promised (GIBSON, 2004). This circumstance of

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disappointment and frustration created a context of anger and rage, especially by the youth (MISHRA, 2017). Twenty-one years after the end of apartheid, the generation of young people was already born under the auspices of democracy: in the rainbow nation. The so called "born frees" have a total different level of allegiance to the discourse of praising the former liberators. These ones, for the born free, are the current oppressors.

Therefore, the third period to be analyzed – the most important for our reflection, is the *current era* (2015-present). Like the period of 1976 (DUNCAN, 2016), when the youth and the students took a stance and lead the struggle against apartheid, this time the students are again the agents of protest for a just and equal society. Shortly comparing with both previous eras, before we move into a more detailed analysis, the current era can be identified with the slogan – famous during the liberation struggles in Africa – "a luta continua". The youth does not acknowledge the former liberators as comrades in their own struggle. On contrary, together with the "white capital" – as the corporate world that regulates state and society in the global neoliberalism – the former liberators (as Cyril Ramaphosa, recently conducted to the presidency after Jacob Zuma's resignation) are regarded as "sell outs", a black governmental elite that operates together and according to the interest of the white capital. For this reason, radical social transformation or radical economic transformation is demanded. Besides the economic critique, the youth – especially represented in the Fees Must Fall movement (BUTTELLI; LE BRUYNS, 2017) – has also moved into a deep critique to the colonial heritage – identified also in Latin America as colonial matrix (RESTREPO; ROJAS, 2012) of power or a regime of coloniality (MIGNOLO, 2013). The social movement known as Fees Must Fall has at its core the intersectional encounter of a decolonial critique, a feminist critique, an anti-racist critique and a critique against neoliberal corporate management of the universities and higher education in South Africa. As Naidoo (2016, p. 182) says: "the movement acknowledged a number of oppressive systems in addition to racism and capitalism and was committed to trying to work against all oppressions that presented themselves in universities and were also present within the student movements."

For this reason, in what concerns the sphere of the current era struggle, differently than previous ones which usually relied in the State and in the role of the civil society, the students' struggle found a space to be articulated in the social movements (BUTTELLI; LE BRUYNS, 2017; NEOCOSMOS, 2016).

To further describe the challenges faced in South Africa nowadays, according to the view of these "born frees", we will briefly present some of their arguments that are popping out in the form of publications (academic and not academic), released recently.

5 **DATA ANALYSIS**

Our observation of the reality of the struggle of students convinced us that the Fees Must Fall movement is deeply connected with the development of South African socioeconomic history. The main argument that we want to present, when we analyze some of the expressions of discontentment and rage against the present situation, is that Fees Must Fall movement protests against many injustices and is propositive in suggesting a curriculum decolonization. In so doing it is reacting against the continuity of neo-liberal economic order in South Africa which is lived in South Africa as a regime of continuous coloniality. In this sense, we can observe that some recent releases are indicating what is still something growing, but a clear tendency of disappointment, deception and the rise of a renewed discourse of struggle. Mda (1995), for instance, started early to reflect critically on the continuous social scandal in South Africa. The novel named *Ways of Dying* considers diverse ways poor people can die in the circumstances of the contemporary "rainbow nation", South Africa. This book came back to attention after the scandalous death of Michael, a five years old child that died in the pit toilet of his school after it broke, and the child drowned in the faeces.[5] Other example comes from the field of social sciences and relates to the discourse about reconciliation. Lefko-Everett, Govender and Foster (2017) surveyed people in South Africa on the theme for ten years and identified the shifts on expectations and on what was delivered by policies meant to promote reconciliation. As the book's description shows, their research managed to "reach critical conclusions on the state of reconciliation, including in the areas of economic transformation, race relations and social contact, political participation, national identity formation and transitional justice" and it helped to "confirm and disrupt theory on reconciliation and social change, and point to critical new directions in thinking and policy implementation."[6]

In *Always Another Country: a memoir of exile and home* of Msimang (2017), the author offers several chronicles describing her experience as women and mother returning to South Africa after a long period living in other places. Her chronicles problematize contemporary South Africa in a way that it enables the readers to see this fundamental reality of it: South African democracy is always promising, and people are always expecting to turn it into something different. When will finally a positive change effectively happen in this country so that the black children will at last have the chance to live the promise of a good and just life? In another novel named *Period of Pain*, Matlwa (2017) describes the challenges that affect South African society as the pains before birth, imagining it as a last part of a process of birth of a

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[5]   More information on Michael's death and its public repercussion in South Africa can be found in Section27 (2017).

[6]   These comments were extracted from the presentation of the refered book of Lefko-Everett; Govender and Foster (2017), available in https://www.hsrcpress.ac.za/books/rethinking-reconciliation (2019).

new country. She has captured the heartache of many South Africans, especially the youth, who feel defeated by the terrible headlines of xenophobia, rape, corruption and crime and for many the death sentence that is the public health system. It is a way to reflect on humanity and the suffering of South African people that is still the same even after a long period of democracy.

Maybe one of the social analysts who best describes this view with deception towards the political leadership of the country is Gumede (2012). In his book *Restless Nation: Making sense of troubled times*, he offers a series of short chronicles that points to the shortcomings of the ruling party, the ANC. One of his arguments takes on the difficulty of liberation movements to adapt to the institutional reality of politics at the state level. Gumede describes how the former liberation movement went into a distant place from the reality of people and allowed that their political principles deviated towards private interests of an emerging black economic elite. South Africa still is a restless nation, but now in another sort of struggle, teach us Gumede. Another impacting publication concerning the situation of South African democracy is Mpofu-Walsh's (2017), *Democracy and Delusion – 10 myths in South African Politics*. The author debates about free education, major theme of the students' protests, arguing that it is far not impossible to achieve, as much as a comprehensive land reform. Accompanying the argument of the protesters, He sees it not as the first step to chaos, but as the only way to achieve social justice in South Africa. Mpofu-Walsh presents also a view that media is actually not free in the country but controlled by the interest of corporate capitalism. In his informed book we find challenges to commonly held opinions and new solutions to old problems.

Emphasizing other aspects as the racist, cultural and linguistic continuous divide in South Africa, Qunta (2016) offers an incisive contribution in her book named *Why we are not a Nation*. The author brings back to public debate the limits and the incompleteness of the Reconciliation project of the "rainbow nation". South Africa has not sorted this problem out. We can consider that, to some extent, in the new established order the unequal and unjust division based on race and culture got even worse. A last contribution we want to refer to, more related with the social and human sciences epistemological debate, is the book organized by Msila (2017) called *Decolonizing Knowledge for Africa's Renewal: Examining African perspectives and philosophies*. This recent publication captures the reality of the students' struggle (Fees Must Fall) for a free, decolonized and decommodified education. Gathering many experts, it draws from the *African Renaissance* discourse and tries to point ways to deconstruct a Western dominant approach in the academic field and the reconstruction of it from African values, principles, cultural aspects and so on. Msila is evidently not the only one reflecting on this issue, as it has become a major theme for the human and social sciences not only in South Africa, but also globally, especially in the global south.

Besides all these books, which meet the line of our argument, some attention should be given to the independent publications organized by the students on the realm of the social movement Fees Must Fall. One of especial contribution is called "Publica[c]tion" (2017). This collective magazine presents several points of views in form of narratives of students, presenting their opinions, their experiences and their daily challenges as students struggling for free and decolonial education. This is significant, as it is collective, organized by students and presenting their voice, without the mediating role of analysts and intellectuals. It assumes that to decolonize properly, discourse should be formulated by those who are living the harsh reality they are speaking about.

6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this article we presented briefly historical and contemporary aspects of South African society.[7] Our place of analysis is our own participation in the students' struggle Fees Must Fall and our role as public academics. Our special focus and concern, therefore, is how it is all perceived and elaborated in the academic field. However, the social and political crises in South Africa have not only side effects in the higher education level but find one of their central places there. Kamanzi (2017) organized an independent publication with several contributions (including one related with the "Bolsa família" programme in Brazil, comparing realities in Brazil and South Africa) that allow us to understand the interconnectedness of the contemporary social issues in South Africa with the crisis in education, especially in higher education.

The impetus represented by students and social movements comes from the higher education crises. So it was named by South African Universities Staff Network For Transformation (SAUSNeT) (2017), formed gathering different representatives from all South African universities, in all levels of staff. The conference held in January 2017 released a declaration called "Re-imagining a More Responsible Public Higher Education in South Africa Today – Towards Feasible Policy Alternatives". It was meant to be a continuous process that would suggest public policies to address the social and political crisis in South African Universities.

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[7]   The reflection summarized here was presented in a deeper way in a two-days special module offered by both authors at the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC), under the Education Post-Graduation Programme, in October 2017. Thanks due to Prof. Dr. Elison Paim for the invitation and the critical interaction during those days, as much as to all the students who participated and engaged critically with us.

A recent article named *The Rebellion of the Born Un-frees: Fallism and the Neo-Colonial Corporate University*, by Mabasa (2017) pointed to some aspects of this crisis that allow us to understand to which extent is the educational crisis interrelated with the social and political crisis that we tried to address previously. He points to ten aspects that form the contemporary *Neo-colonial corporate university*, i.e., relating the university crisis with the stand of neoliberal capitalism. We mention six of them quickly in order conclude this reflection.

1) Epistemic Coloniality: The first aspect, interestingly, the first aspect that maintains the university under corporate control and mentality is an epistemic coloniality, which can only be transformed by a decolonization of higher education. 2) International Benchmarking and Colonial Assimilation: The second aspect could lead us to understand what Restrepo and Rojas and (2012) called a colonial matrix of power, that created its ways to invade all the spheres of society. The way to manage universities is controlled by the neo-colonial power. 3) Market Colonization and Colonization of the Academy. In the same line, we can understand that the contemporary colonial tool is the market rule and logic. It is, in neoliberal capitalism, the only true that cannot be challenged. Academy is also colonized by it. 4) Authoritarianism and Violence of Coloniality: This aspect relates to a harsh reality that we can see growing in different societies (to mention the violence against students and protesters in Brazil, in USA during Fergusson and many other places): the abuse of violence by the State to prevent any type of protest or contestation of the neoliberal established order. 5) Cheap labor: As much as in Brazil, South Africa also observes the imposition of a "labor reform", like the outsourcing of many services in the universities. This renders the social and economic realities of workers to become vulnerable, affecting quality in education. Students have been protesting in South Africa as much as in Brazil against the "labor reforms" of neoliberal capitalism in the field of education. 6) Patriarchy: Important to emphasize not only the intersectional nature of the contemporary Fees Must Fall struggle, but also the interconnectedness of many forms of oppression. It means you cannot struggle to decolonize society or against the imposition of a neoliberal agenda without struggling against the deep gender injustice of the same society and the vicious violence against women, intolerance towards sexual diversity, rape culture and an androcentric culture in academy. Other aspects he refers to are the epistemic disobedience of the "Fallist" movement, as much as the challenge it poses to the market colonization of the universities. It happens through the decommodification critique that is an essential part of the students' movement.

As we see, South African academic reality and the students' struggles experienced there relate to what happens also in Brazil. It gives us a good comparative case, not only related with the contemporary issues, but also with the colonial heritage, the history of racism and the high levels of inequality in both societies, as much as the transition processes, guided by the emerging global neoliberal imperialism. It is, in fact, part of the challenges we must find a way to address internationally, and not only locally. Therefore, it is important to foster

academic exchanges and joint academic ventures to draw from the challenges we share and to find heuristic solutions from our joint participation in the struggle against neocolonial and neoliberal capitalism and its effects to the field of education.

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