MODERN AFRICA
POLITICS, HISTORY AND SOCIETY

ISSN 2336-3274 (Print) ISSN 2570-7558 (Online)
https://edu.uhk.cz/africa

Francis B. Nyamnjoh 2016. #RhodesMustFall: Nibbling at Resilient Colonialism in South Africa. Bamenda, Cameroon: Langaa RPCIG. x + 298 pp.

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Recommended citation:

Horáková, H. (2017). Francis B. Nyamnjoh 2016. #RhodesMustFall: Nibbling at Resilient Colonialism in South Africa. Bamenda, Cameroon: Langaa RPCIG. x + 298 pp. Modern Africa: Politics, History and Society, 5(1), 131–139. Retrieved from https://edu.uhk.cz/africa/index.php/ModAfr/article/view/175

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There is hardly a more fitting statement regarding the timing of the book under review than the one by Sanya Osha, one of its reviewers, saying that "Francis Nyamnjoh's book couldn't have come at a more appropriate time." Indeed, the theme of the book, focusing on the wider context of the current student protests engulfing many South African universities, particularly liberal, elite institutions such as the University of Cape Town (UCT) or WITS, calling for "real" decolonisation in post-apartheid South Africa, could not be more topical.

Currently Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, Francis B. Nyamnjoh, a highly prolific scholar who widely published on globalisation, citizenship, media and the politics of identity in Africa, offers a volume capturing the context in which the current calls for decolonisation are articulated, focusing on the Rhodes Must Fall (RMF) student protest movement at UCT, in order to raise critical questions of race, identity, belonging, and citizenship.

The book revolves around the key question about the root causes of the student protest movements, which are gaining momentum after more than twenty years of South African democracy, despite the triumph of political freedom in 1994, and the subsequent efforts at truth and reconciliation and nation-building under the former president Nelson Mandela.

It reminds us that the legacy of colonialism and apartheid is far more resilient than initially appeared in the new South Africa. From the era of the enthusiastic demise of apartheid, followed by the intoxication over the newly acquired political freedom, many South Africans have begun to question the very nature of the transformation and raise unpleasant questions concerning the meaning of the post-apartheid development.

Unsurprisingly, the issue of "race" is again on the table; this time, however, the majority of the "discussants" does not come from the historically disadvantaged social classes – poor, destitute, unqualified

South Africans who would have every right to challenge the post-apartheid transformation because the quality of their lives has improved either negligibly or not at all (some would even say that it got worse). South Africa is arguably the most unequal society in the world. The country, trapped in racialised poverty, an ever increasing socio-economic inequality, and worsening race relations, seems to turn back to those who impede "real" transformation – in this case, the statue of Rhodes viewed as a symbol of oppression and white privilege.

Mandela's reconciliation and rainbowism is seen by many black people, especially the young generation, including influential public figures such as Julius Malema, the founder of the political party EEF (Economic Freedom Fighters), as too modest. Their rhetoric sounds revolutionary – the time is ripe for angry, radical, and sometimes inevitably violent reactions. The outrage is directed both against the *makwerekwere*, i.e., black people coming to South Africa from other parts of Africa in the quest for greener pastures, and against the symbols of colonialism and apartheid that epitomise the unfinished business of post-apartheid transformation in higher education.

The discourse of race has been taken up by the young, educated generation of South Africans, the so-called born-frees, university students many of whom are far from destitute. Organised student protests that have engulfed many South African universities tend to challenge the very nature of the transformation. Their requirements are directed in a different way: they accentuate the issues that have been until now rather implicit and covert. Public discourse is replete with slogans like "black lives matter," originally a slogan from the USA. The protests reflect South Africa's unfinished business and their demand of "real" transformation. As Nyamnjoh rightly argues, the issues emphasising identity, belonging, and citizenship enable to engage both significant figures of the colonial era, such as Rhodes, and current xenophobic manifestations of violence against black immigrants from other parts of Africa. Nyamnjoh sees the processes both as "parallel but complementary protests" (p. 116), and as attempts to unfold correlations that are not immediately obvious. A red thread that goes through the discussion and connects the apparently non-linkable issues is human mobility, which relentlessly tests the boundaries of citizenship and belonging.

Nyamnjoh's assumption that South Africans are all *makwerekwere*,[1] starts with the author's focus on Sir Cecil John Rhodes, an exemplary and extraordinarily powerful *makwerekwere,* who managed to define and confine the erstwhile "host" society and turn the natives into settlers in their home country, unlike today's *makwerekwere* who come from other parts of Africa (p. 26–34). The fact that Rhodes conquered South Africa culturally had elevated him to a position of an imperial hero cherished by colonial and apartheid elites. The imposition of Western forms of knowledge production, which Mudimbe (1988) called "epistemic domination," is particularly salient in education. Hence, it is not surprising that the youth's anger has turned on Rhodes, a symbol of colonialism, i.e., the subjugation, inferiority and marginalisation of the black population in South Africa, which resulted in the ultimate removal of his statue from the UCT campus in 2015, which, surprisingly, was met with little resistance from the side of the official university bodies.

The cardinal question Nyamnjoh raises in his book, why Rhodes had to fall, is approached from diverse perspectives. Basically, as the author writes, Rhodes fell because of a (costly) illusion of the rainbow nation. There are two mutually intertwined reasons behind this that refer to the present-day South African transformation as unfinished business. First, the socio-economic situation that severely affects the masses of the historically disadvantaged South Africans, primarily black; and second, the unresolved "race" issue. For both, the "guilt" resides primarily in the legacy of colonialism and apartheid. By deploying Ngugi wa Thiong'o's appeal for "decolonising the mind" (1986), Nyamnjoh primarily turns his attention to the latter issue, how whiteness can be demythologised if whitening up is an aspiration for many black people in South Africa (and elsewhere). As he rightly points out, whiteness as the embodiment of modernity has not stopped to attract Africans, even in the "new" South Africa.

What lessons can be learned from the RMF protest, asks Nyamnjoh in one of the book chapters. First, one should view it as an opportunity to carry out the bold task of transformation, both socio-economic and mental, in order to mitigate wider societal dissatisfaction. Despite

1 This is a derogatory slang word used to denote current illegal immigrants coming to South Africa from other parts of Africa. It refers to the allegedly unintelligible language these people use in communication with "native" South Africans.

the multiple, seemingly unbridgeable divides present-day South Africa is facing, Nyamnjoh argues for conviviality, characterized by open-mindedness, open-endedness, and the spirit of togetherness as the essential ingredients of identity that stand in sharp contrast to "completeness." This seems to be the strongest argument of the book.

However, the burden of such a daunting task lies primarily on whites, as the author claims: "Change can come about only if whites and whiteness as epitomes of privilege and supremacy in South Africa move ... to substantive gestures of inclusivity" (p. 207), through three R's: Restitution, Reparation, and Redistribution. It reads to me as if the "failure to enforce greater integration beyond elite circles" combined and "ignorance and arrogance" (p. 208) comes solely under the eight-percent minority, though powerful and largely privileged. Whites, however, cannot be blamed for both the "slow socio-economic transformation and [the] slow reconfiguration of attitudes, beliefs and relationships" (p. 208). The necessary redress must entail all social categories of South Africans to combat narrow nationalism, violence and intolerance and fulfil the ideal of a truly democratic, inclusive society. As Nyamnjoh aptly points out at the very end of his book, these challenges require a productive and inclusive leadership with political vision and carefully articulated policies, tenacity, commitment and open-mindedness. This hope is immediately followed by a sceptical concern on how feasible the aim to implement "real" transformation is; that is, to accomplish a mental decolonisation. The author does not seem to be sympathetic with those voices expressing the idea that a complete sociological renewal is not possible within one generation. The key question I would raise in extension of his argument is who blocks or hinders the "exchange" between the two epistemic "cultures" (white and African). If it was only the elite, it would be easy to overthrow it "overnight" – but, as Nyamnjoh persuasively shows in his book, it is being supported by the masses of most impoverished South Africans, irrespective of their skin colour – the gain of material wealth that will guarantee dignity and real human rights.

The author has succeeded in providing readers, both those concerned with present-day South Africa, and those interested in global issues of belonging and citizenship, with a coherent, meaningful volume that convincingly demonstrates that wider processes such as South Africa's transformation are never completed. He paints an intricate

and evocative picture of the recent processes. Although the focus is on South Africa, it would be a good read for anyone interested in the complexity and global dynamics of social change in other parts of the world. Yet, despite the indisputable breadth and appeal of the text, there are some weaknesses in the main argument and certain aspects that remain rather unexplored.

In spite of Nyamnjoh's frequent appeals for a universal black humanism, including the role of whites in Africa (p. ix), which would allow for a "flexible citizenship" (articulated primarily in the last chapter), and his insistence on the hierarchy of blackness (particularly in chapter 3 titled "Not Every Black is Black Enough"), his juxtaposing of "black pain" and "white privilege" tends to essentialise the allegedly frozen categories and thus ignores the fact of a more than twenty years struggle of South Africa into democracy, under black political dispensation. The usage of the concepts of "black pain" and "white privilege" loosely links to a discursive strategy popularised as "strategic essentialism," which is deployed positively in those instances in which the motivations are morally justified in the struggle for equality as opposed to those cases in which strategic essentialism, in the hands of whites under apartheid, leads to oppression, exploitation, dispossession, and domination. I argue that *any* kind of strategic essentialism is dangerous, particularly in such an explosive milieu as current South Africa because it bears the risk of being abused by those who become powerful. As Stephanie Rudwick (2017) argues, race discourse based on essentialism, currently framing the decolonisation discourse in South Africa, have a propensity to freeze "population groups" as was the case in the colonial and apartheid periods, instead of bringing the coveted multicultural, inclusive society. The "decolonising" attempts to reject whiteness in its entirety – individual, societal, and institutional – tend to reinforce colonial and apartheid racial identities.

More ethnographic consideration could be given to the descriptions and interpretations of key concepts, such as white privilege at universities. The only specific privileges mentioned in the book include outside aspects, such as the affluent suburban backgrounds, or well-resourced schools, but otherwise only "less obvious aspects" of white advantage are mentioned (p. 98). In the same vein, lamentations over the current neoliberal culture of academia, which privileges science

over humanities and social sciences, have often little to do with "race." A tendency to minimise the costs of higher education is part and parcel of neoliberalisation processes taking place at universities in literally every corner of the globe. The same applies to the complaint of an Associate Professor of Sociology at UCT (now full professor) to the VC about how he finds it "racially offensive" that the issue of standards always come in when a promotion is discussed (p. 87). To deploy race in situations which happen elsewhere in academia seems rather opportunistic. Moreover, the issue of "standards" is always ambiguous.

Manifold statements on white privilege at universities in South Africa are rather vague and nebulous. How can one understand the statement that "Many black students have had to come to terms with the fact that, despite their relative privilege at universities, they do not benefit from the structures of the academy in the same way as white students" (p. 147). Pointing to the often "invisible structures and mechanism that sustain institutional racism" (ibid) is inadequate, once there is a genuine urge to change things. What does the grievance about the "failure of universities to take seriously the financial, social and academic conditions of black students or to take black students seriously" mean (ibid)? How can it be translated into meaningful actions? The accusations that a "deep-seated, institutional and systemic form of racism … is swept under the carpet," are lacking empirical evidence and support, which is, largely missing in the book under review. In the same vein, statements such as "there has been very little effective transformation for twenty years," "non-supportive environment," a "sense of alienation, marginalisation, exclusion" (p. 81) reveal very little about the reality of institutional racism and white arrogance that the author frequently evokes in the text.

Intangible propositions also deal with the way a transformed curricula should emerge: they should "aim to activate and bring into critical conversations and dialogues sensitivities and sensibilities informed by African life-worlds, experiences and predicaments" (p. 161). How can one come to terms with the statement that "African academics are often schooled largely in Western traditions of knowledge production, which they are expected to reproduce uncritically" (p. 161)? Critical thinking must be at the core of the intellectual equipment of every academic, and not at the service of elite interests. The scholarship that

uncritically reproduces taken-for-granted dichotomies and teleology has no place in universities, neither South African nor beyond.

There are other aspects in the book that remain largely unexplored or lack supporting evidence. It is not clear is the profile of the student protesters is, or which study programmes they are enrolled in. Are these predominantly humanities and social sciences? What are their specific proposals to change curricula to "incorporate" Africa? How can, say, the study of medicine be changed to accommodate such demands? What is lacking is the emic perspective one would expect to find in a book written by a social anthropologist.

More attention could have been paid to the relation between decolonisation and the current processes of Africanisation enforced from the top. From time to time, the author evokes the ills narrow nationalism post-apartheid South Africa has inherited but he is rather silent on recent attempts to invocate racial difference within the ANC political programme. He is more or less silent about the role of the ANC as one of the major actors in shaping the overall atmosphere in South Africa, apart from scant insinuations on its incompetence and corruption. In particular, what does the current political dispensation do to mitigate the effects of neoliberalisation that have such a severe grip on the functioning of universities? The above comment is inseparable from the question of the extent of institutional autonomy for universities. What is the role of today's academic institutions in South Africa? How complicit are they in perpetuating white epistemic culture?

Despite its limitations, the book is of great value since it provides a highly competent image of the complexities of a belated transformation in the new South Africa. What remains is to grasp the issue of a possible roadmap or the scenario of a transformation in higher education in South Africa which the author is outlining. What does it mean to decolonise higher education in general and in specific disciplines? What should the Africanised tertiary education involve? How could it be transformed to comply with the "local" needs? What does it mean to radically transform curricula? What will be the nature, form and contents of decolonised curricula look like? Last but not least, what is "a truly African university"? (p. 82). This constitutes a daunting agenda. How can the culture of "togetherness,

interprenetration, interdependence and intersubjectivity" (p. 69), which Nyamnjoh proposes, assert itself in South African tertiary institutions which need to be competitive internationally? The present-day global neoliberal culture, of which universities are part, is merciless. As a Czech female academic, I tend to symphatise with most of the grievances the author mentions regarding today's South African academia – the pressure to publish in international impact-factor journals rather than promote local publishing; international ratings; audit culture; the emphasis on achievement. I could equally complain about the pressure of academic standards – those who reach the most lucrative posts in academia are often those who have captured the neoliberal culture complex in the best way. If the author's assumption that whiteness does not refer to skin colour is correct, then the world is replete with unfulfilled dreams of whitening up. It would be equally easy to replace "African" with Czechs, Poles, or Hungarians in the following sentence: "Some Africans would rather graduate from Oxford, Harvard or the Sorbonne" (p. 71). Therefore, to me it is an exaggeration to understand such an ideal, when not fulfilled, as culminating an "internalised sense of inferiority and inadequacy," which produces "disillusioned" and "incomplete" Africans (p. 72).

The shopping list of a post-apartheid transformation in higher education includes the "promotion of black lecturers and enrolment of more students from disadvantaged communities" (p. 146). Nyamnjoh, however, challenges the very idea of transforming South African universities by making radical demographic changes in order to increase national and racial diversity on campus, through recruiting more black students and staff from South Africa and the rest of Africa. He writes that "co-optation of blacks by a powerful hyper-capitalist appeal to consumption" is not realistic (p. 91). And if, ideally, or ultimately, South African tertiary institutions utterly changed its epistemic culture, how could they survive – how would they attract African scholars and students who tend to worship the ideal of whitening up? How can scholarship be Africanised while simultaneously keeping English as the main language of instruction? And where do universities find resources to implement such a radical change? By and large, there are more doubts, challenges and questions than answers. What has become clear, though, is that the eradication of one epistemic structure and replacing it with another is an insurmountable task, as Nyamnjoh himself anticipates in this

book. This is perhaps the greatest contribution of this book, which will inevitably attract a wider readership than a strictly anthropological or African(ist) audience.

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Within the research project "Political Partisanship in Western Africa" three Africanists attached to the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Hradec Králové, have extended the series of similar studies concerning other African countries published so far. While the previous volumes concentrated mostly on one African country, this annotated book covers three countries with different colonial history and diverse geostrategic positions. Burkina Faso, a former French colony (*Haute-Volta*) in the interior part of Western Africa, Sierra Leone, a former British coastal colony and protectorate founded for liberated slaves, and Cameroon situated on the Gulf of Guinea with a complicated German colonial heritage and French and British mandate administration represent different historical, geographical and population cases. Surprisingly, however, when analysed after 1945 (mostly during the latest three decades) by using the theories of political science all three countries seem to have been passing a very similar political development. A deeper analysis of such evidence of global impact would have exceeded the framework of the research