



## CECIL JOHN RHODES STATUE AT UCT Cape Town, South Africa

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### Executive Summary

In 2015 the #Rhodesmustfall protests erupted at the University of Cape Town in South Africa. The resulting debate and movement soon spread globally, with similar protests occurring at the University of Oxford. This case study shows how protests over symbolic historical representations can draw wider attention to issues of structural inequality and the necessity for decolonising public spaces. It also illustrates how compliance with heritage laws need to be taken into consideration and can require multi-stakeholder discussions in order to effect change.

## Introduction

Cecil John Rhodes remains one of the most controversial figures in the history of English imperialism. Rhodes accumulated immense wealth as a diamond magnate in South Africa, founding the infamous De Beers Consolidated Mines, and served as prime minister of the Cape Colony from 1890-96. As a colonial statesman, Rhodes promoted policies that deprived Africans of their land rights, forcing many to become migrant labourers.<sup>1</sup> Rhodes' chauvinism, racism, and imperialist desires to colonise Africa have made him a despised figure by many, leading to contentious debates about statues and memorials to the businessman and political leader. The high profile removal of his statue at the University of Cape Town (UCT) after intense protests and demonstrations by students and faculty sparked a global movement striving to decolonise education. This case study takes an inside look into the #Rhodesmustfall movement at UCT.

## Background

Cecil John Rhodes was perhaps the most iconic figurehead of British Colonial endeavours in South Africa. He accumulated immense wealth through founding the De Beers Group of Companies, a mining conglomerate that amassed great wealth from the diamond trade. Aside from his involvement in the diamond trade, Rhodes gained infamy as prime minister of the Cape Colony, where he enacted a series of discriminatory policies which restricted African land ownership, voting rights and coerced Africans into exploitative wage labour to fuel the mining industry.<sup>2</sup>

Rhodes is perhaps best remembered for his adamant dedication to the extension of the British Empire, embodied in his 'Cape to Cairo' Railway Project, which aimed to connect South Africa to Egypt and consolidate British interests and colonies across the continent. Rhodes's expansionist hopes were based on his belief in Anglo-Saxon superiority and his desire to civilise the 'uncivilised' world.<sup>3</sup> Citing divine providence, the noble virtues of Englishmen, and the areas of the world inhabited, in his words, 'by the most despicable specimen of human beings', Rhodes' imperialist vision was underpinned by deeply entrenched racism and prejudice. Indeed, his commitment to colonialism was made clear in his own writings in which he stated: 'I contend that we are the first race in the world and that the more of the world we inhabit, the better it is for the human race, just fancy those parts that are at present inhabited by the most despicable specimens of human beings what an alteration there would be if they were brought under Anglo-Saxon influence.'<sup>4</sup>

The costs of these imperial conquests are now well known and well publicised. Subsequently, the contemporary presence of numerous statues commemorating Rhodes in public space, especially in South Africa, has become deeply controversial in light of his strong association with racism and colonialism.

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<sup>1</sup> South African History Online, "Cecil John Rhodes," South African History Online, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Amit Chaudhuri, "The real meaning of Rhodes Must Fall," *Guardian*, 16 March, 2016

## History of the Contestation

Rhodes' brutal imperialist legacy and racist worldview have prompted much discussion about how he should be remembered and how societies should deal with artefacts and objects that bear his name or honour his legacy. One such statue was located at UCT.

UCT has an intimate relationship with Rhodes. The land on which 'Upper Campus' is built was bequeathed to the university on behalf of Rhodes in 1928--land claimed by the British--and it is here that the controversial statue was prominently displayed directly in the centre of the campus (Figure 1).<sup>5</sup> The bronze statue of Rhodes was sculpted by British artist Marian Walgate, it is 1.5 times life-size statue, styled in the pose of Rodin's 'The Thinker'.<sup>6</sup> The statue depicts Rhodes seated, holding in one hand a map, symbolizing his imperial dreams for Africa and depicts Rhodes gazing out on the landscape below the hills.

The statue is located on the main square of the university campus and was first unveiled in 1934 at a formal ceremony which included a performance by the Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra and a speech by the Earl of Clarendon.<sup>7</sup> The statue was an ode to Rhodes Imperial dreams, facing east in the representation of Britain's 'northwards Imperial aspirations' the plinth of the statue was inscribed with Kipling's poem: I dream my dream by rock and heath and pine of empire to the northward ay, one land from lion's head to line.<sup>8</sup>



**Figure 1:** "Close up of the Rhodes Statue" Image by Ian Barbour via Flickr CC BY 2.0

A reference to Rhodes' goal of a unified British Empire stemming from Cape Town to Cairo. In its application for removal, UCT described the decision to commission the statue 'an accident of history', explaining that it was only paid out of the remaining funds left over from the construction of the nearby Rhodes Memorial and only relocated to Upper Campus due to the widening of the road below the rugby fields where the statue was originally located in the 1960s.<sup>9</sup> While the statue may have been 'accidental' its overt homage to imperialism and glorification of Rhodes caused it to come under contestation throughout its lifespan, often becoming the centrepiece of various student protests throughout the years. Predating the #Rhodesmustfall movement.

<sup>5</sup> Amanda Castro and Angela Tate, "Rhodes Fallen: Student Activism in Post-Apartheid South Africa," *History in the Making* 10, no.11 (2017): 202.

<sup>6</sup> Britta Timm Knudsen and Casper Andersen, "Affective politics and colonial heritage, Rhodes Must Fall at UCT and Oxford," *International Journal of Heritage* 25, no.3 (2019): 242.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>8</sup> Nicholas Coetzer, "An Imperial Axis, Counter-memorials, and the Double Bind: The Rise and Fall of Rhodes at the University of Cape Town," *Arq* 24, no. 1 (2020): 73.

<sup>9</sup> Ashley Lillie, "Heritage Statement on Behalf of UCT," *University of Cape Town Property and Services*, August 28, 2015.

During UCT's 150th anniversary celebrations in 1979, student activists covered the statue in pink paint in protest against the Apartheid policies of the South African State.<sup>10</sup> In 2007 in celebration of South Africa hosting the FIFA World Cup, the monument was adorned with football regalia, with the notable inclusion of oversized glasses shaped out of diamonds, intended to both highlight the statue's 'imperial gaze' while simultaneously blocking his Cape to Cairo viewpoint.<sup>11</sup> Following the 2012 Marikana Mine Massacre, where 34 miners were killed by police during a strike, the statue was covered in red text reading 'Remember Marikana.'<sup>12</sup> While the statue has come under contestation previously, 2015 was the first time its removal had been explicitly called for.

The Rhodes statue has served as a major touchstone for the larger debate surrounding the legacies of colonialism and apartheid in South Africa. Protests and vandalism of statues associated with these eras have occurred across the country, and political parties have become polarized over the issue. Some critics claim that until South Africa properly addresses the legacies of colonialism and apartheid, including their physical representation in public spaces, the past will continue to create contentious ruptures in the present.<sup>13</sup>

It is within this context that the #Rhodesmustfall movement materialized, building upon a history of using the statue as a place of protest. The trigger of the movement was the actions of UCT student Chumani Maxwele.<sup>14</sup> On the morning of March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Maxwele travelled from Delft, a predominantly black township on the outskirts of Cape Town, with a bucket filled with human excrement used by local residents as a makeshift toilet.<sup>15</sup> Upon arriving at the UCT campus, Maxwele shouted 'Where are *our* heroes and ancestors?' before throwing the contents of the bucket onto the statue of Rhodes, setting in motion a period of intense protest on his own campus and an intense discussion over the political or social image that was embodied by such an act.<sup>16</sup> When Maxwele's use of human excrement as a form of protest was critiqued by the press, he replied that:

We want white people to know how we live. We live in poo. I am from a poor family; we are using portaloos. Are you happy with that?.. I have to give Cecil John Rhodes a poo shower, and the Whites have to see it.<sup>17</sup>

He further emphasized in interviews with journalists that the unorthodox protest measures were undertaken 'to explain our collective black pain' and to 'express our collective disgust at the resilience of colonial education and symbols and institutional racism at UCT and in the country at

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<sup>10</sup> Britta Timm Knudsen and Casper Andersen, "Affective politics and colonial heritage, Rhodes Must Fall at UCT and Oxford," *International Journal of Heritage* 25, no.3 (2019): 242.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Eusebius McKaiser, "South Africa's Odious Monument to Cecil John Rhodes," *New York Times*, March 26, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Eve Fairbanks, "The Birth of Rhodes Must Fall," *Guardian*, November 18, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Eusebius McKaiser, "We Know from South Africa that Toppling Statues is No Silver Bullet- but it's a Start," *Guardian*, June 9, 2020.

<sup>16</sup> Eve Fairbanks, "The Birth of Rhodes Must Fall," *Guardian*, November 18, 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Francis Nyamnjoh, *RhodesMustFall: Nibbling at Resilient Colonialism in South Africa* (Bamenda: Laanga Research and Publishing CIG, 2016), 77.

large.<sup>18</sup> Adding that he chose to deface the statue as he found it unbearably humiliating to walk every day past 'a statue glorifying an undeniable racist.'<sup>19</sup> In the three days following Maxwele's actions, thousands of students gathered in the university to discuss Rhodes and his role in colonising Africa, and the #Rhodesmustfall (RMF) movement was born. The movement's mission statement referred to the statue as 'an act of violence' as well as 'the perfect embodiment of black alienation and disempowerment.'<sup>20</sup>

The movement issued a number of objectives based on a decolonial framework centred on Pan-Africanism and black consciousness.<sup>21</sup> These objectives included the 'removal of white supremacist iconography' from the university and the implementation of 'a curriculum which critically centres Africa and the subaltern.'<sup>22</sup> In the following five weeks students continued to focus on the statue as a symbol of wider goals of decolonisation of UCT.<sup>23</sup> As the RMF movement erupted, it commanded the national stage and placed the UCT administration under immense pressure to respond to the demands of the protestors.

## Decision-Making Processes

The University leadership was responsible for deciding how to deal with the statue. At the time of Maxwele's protest Vice-Chancellor Max Price was abroad at a conference and acting Vice-Chancellor, Sandra Klopper, addressed the incident in Price's absence, stating in an open letter on March 13<sup>th</sup> that:

While we respect the right of our students to protest and, in so doing, draw attention to the complex issues that confront all of us at UCT and in society at large this is not a licence to engage in actions that, in our view, are reprehensible.<sup>24</sup>

Three days later, Price returned to UCT and published an open letter on the 18<sup>th</sup> to the community, acknowledging that the protests were 'not about the statue' but 'spoke to a much broader feeling of alienation in the institution, which could be named colonial hegemony.'<sup>25</sup> The following day, students occupied Bremner Building, which housed Price's office, renaming the building 'Azania House' a reference to the historical pre-colonial name of Southern Africa.<sup>26</sup>

On March 24<sup>th</sup>, Price published a second open letter underscoring that the administration was making progress towards removing the statue. This included an open University Assembly the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>19</sup> Amanda Castro and Angela Tate, "Rhodes Fallen: Student Activism in Post-Apartheid South Africa," *History in the Making* 10, no.11 (2017): 205.

<sup>20</sup> Ahmed Kayum, "#RhodesMustFall: How a Decolonial Student Movement in the Global South Inspired Epistemic Disobedience at the University of Oxford," *African Studies Review*, 63, no.2 (2020): 282.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 283.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Eve Fairbanks, "The Birth of Rhodes Must Fall," *Guardian*, 18 November 18, 2015.

<sup>24</sup> Sandra Klopper, "Open letter by Acting Vice Chancellor Professor in 'UCT Rhodes statue protest – both sides,'" *IOL News*, March 13, 2015.

<sup>25</sup> Max Price, "From the VC's Desk: Rhodes Statue Protests and Transformation," *University of Cape Town News*, March 18, 2015.

<sup>26</sup> Amanda Castro and Angela Tate, "Rhodes Fallen: Student Activism in Post-Apartheid South Africa," *History in the Making* 10, no.11 (2017): 205.

following day and extended the debate about the statue into all of the universities constituencies.<sup>27</sup> Following a meeting with UCT's Senate, the institution's governing body, on the 27th of March 2015, eighteen days after Maxwele's actions, the UCT Senate voted 181-1 for the statue to be permanently removed from the campus and 'handed over to the government heritage authorities for safe custody.'<sup>28</sup> On April 9<sup>th</sup> 2015, the statue was removed. Leaving behind only the lower plinth. The move was widely celebrated on campus and witnessed by a large crowd.<sup>29</sup>



Figure 2: "The Removal of Rhodes" Image by Desmond Bowles via Flickr CC BY-SA 2.0

### *The Road to Permanent Removal*

While the triumphant scene of thousands of students cheering as a crane removed Rhodes from his almost seventy-year resting place came to define the RMF movement, this was only the beginning of a lengthy process towards permanent removal. The removal of April 9<sup>th</sup> of only a temporary measure as UCT itself was not vested with the authority to permanently remove the statue unilaterally. The statue of Rhodes, having been constructed more than 60 years ago, was protected under Section 27(18) of the National Heritage Resources Act, 1999, which the Western Cape government was quick to remind in a press release:

provides that no person may destroy, damage, deface, excavate, alter, remove from its original position, subdivide or change the planning status of any heritage site without a permit issued by the relevant heritage resources authority, in this case, Heritage Western Cape (HWC).<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Helen Swingler, "Cry for Transformation Rings Out at Packed Assembly," *University of Cape Town News*, March 25, 2015.

<sup>28</sup> Patricia Lucas, "Further info on UCT Senate vote in favour of moving Rhodes statue," *UCT Press Release*, March 27, 2015.

<sup>29</sup> Amit Chaudhuri, "The real meaning of Rhodes Must Fall," *Guardian*, March 16, 2016.

<sup>30</sup> Western Cape Government, "Media Alert: Memorials and Public Monuments," *Media Alert*, April 10, 2015.

The removal of the statue from Upper Campus and its placement in storage on the UCT premises was thus a short-term measure, authorized after the administration had received a temporary permit from the HWC on March 31<sup>st</sup> 2015, which allowed for the events of April 9<sup>th</sup> to proceed legally, without contravention of the Heritage Act. Following this removal, UCT had a period of 90 days to submit a Section 27 application for permanent removal to the HWC, if they had failed to do so, the statue would legally have to be reinstated in its original form.<sup>31</sup> This process included a mandatory public consultation process, in which anyone was allowed to submit a comment on the statue from April 16<sup>th</sup> until May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2015.<sup>32</sup>

However, UCT did not meet this time frame. A decision taken on April 22<sup>nd</sup> 2015, extended the time frame stipulated on the original permit by an additional two months until August 2015. However, in the wake of the national attention stimulated by RMF, HWC itself in June 2015 released their new *Draft Guidelines For Public Monuments And Memorials*, which outlined 'principles for managing existing and creating new monuments and memorials and to establish processes for identifying, assessing and managing monuments and memorials.'<sup>33</sup> The guidelines took into account the recent events, including a section entitled 'Redressing Past-Inequalities', which outlined that;

It is clear that existing public monuments and memorials do not reflect the whole of South African history, nor do they express the identity of the nation, which includes different cultural groups.<sup>34</sup>

This required that when evaluating existing memorials, it would be better to 'reinterpret than to relocate and better to relocate than recycle or destroy.'<sup>35</sup> As a result of these new guidelines, UCT, once again, on July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2015, requested an extension on the original permit in order to allow the administration 'time to consider any possible implications of the Draft Guidelines' on their application for removal.<sup>36</sup> This was granted by HWC on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August 2015, the same date the initial extension was set to expire.<sup>37</sup> Finally, on November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2015, seven months after the statue was temporarily removed from its plinth, UCT submitted its request for permanent removal of the Rhodes Statue to HWC.<sup>38</sup>

The application for removal was made by Ashley Lillie, an independent heritage practitioner appointed on behalf of the administration. The application included the submission of a 'Heritage Motivation Statement' which consisted of a 'statutory assessment of the history, context and heritage significance of the statue, consideration of alternative options for the statue and an

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<sup>31</sup> UCT Communication and Marketing Department, "Application for permanent removal of CJ Rhodes Statue," *UCT News Room*, September 16, 2015.

<sup>32</sup> Gerda Kruger, "UCT applies for permanent removal of Rhodes statue," *UCT News Room*, April 16, 2015.

<sup>33</sup> Heritage Western Cape, *Draft Guidelines For Public Monuments and Memorials* (Cape Town: Heritage Western Cape, August 26, 2015), 2.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> UCT Communication and Marketing Department, "Application for permanent removal of CJ Rhodes Statue," *UCT News Room*, September 16, 2015.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

assessment of the outcome of the public consultation process,' to be considered by the HWC before they rendered a decision.<sup>39</sup>

The Heritage Motivation, prepared by Lillie, outlined the key elements of contestation that underscored UCT's decision to request the removal of the statue. Namely, that the statue was an 'uninspired work' which was directly derived from Rodin's Thinker, lacking both originality and aesthetic merit.<sup>40</sup> It commemorated someone with a 'substantial' and 'problematic' impact on the country's history and that while Rhodes was 'already a controversial figure in his own lifetime,' in the present era, it was clear that he was 'racist' and played an 'active role in preparing the way for apartheid.'<sup>41</sup>

After consideration of Lillie's Motivation and supporting documents, on October 31<sup>st</sup> 2016, eighteen months after the initial removal of Rhodes, the HWC approved the statue's permanent removal. In reaching this decision, the HWC considered two 'heritage reports prepared by heritage consultants, a technical report which considered the physical state of the statue and submissions from interested and affected parties.'<sup>42</sup> Noting that the preamble of the *Heritage Act* directly underscores the 'importance of heritage in promoting national well-being and nation-building', the HWC concluded that 'the statue currently represents cultural distress to many, which cannot be ignored.'<sup>43</sup>

Subsequently, the statue's permanent removal was granted on the conditions that the 'storage and safe-keeping of the statue' remain the duty of UCT, any future location of the statue be subject to HWC approval and that the 'future of the upper and lower plinth and the role of the plinth in the reinterpretation of the space previously occupied by the statue is subject to a separate Section 27 application and needs to be informed by a consultation process.'<sup>44</sup>

The Chair of the HWC Committee Sarah Winter underscored that this 'was the first time that HWC had had to deal with an issue of such symbolic significance' while HWC CEO Mxolisi Dlamuka remarked that 'South Africa was in its current space because of a negotiated settlement, not because of a 'revolution' which as a result meant that the HWC was in this position 'because victims have said this is a symbol of pain.'<sup>45</sup>

### *The Final Resting Place of Rhodes Statue*

During the HWC proceedings, UCT deputy-vice-chancellor Sandra Klopper told the Committee that the space around the plinth had been 'spontaneously reclaimed' by the students and that the University remained open to retaining the lower plinth as this decision has been 'directly

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<sup>39</sup> Gerda Kruger, "UCT applies for permanent removal of Rhodes statue," *UCT News Room*, April 16, 2015.

<sup>40</sup> Ashley Lillie, "Heritage Statement on Behalf of UCT," *University of Cape Town Property and Services*, August 28, 2015.

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Heritage Western Cape, "Heritage Western Cape Approves Permanent Removal Of C J Rhodes Statue At UCT," *Heritage Western Cape*, November 4, 2016.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> News24wire, "Permanent removal of Rhodes statue at UCT is approved," *Business Tech*, November 1, 2016.

influenced by student representation.<sup>46</sup> She further stressed that 'allowing it [the plinth] to be owned by students [was] psychologically important.'<sup>47</sup>

UCT also stressed that 'it would be deeply offensive to various constituencies both on, and off-campus if the Rhodes statue were to be returned to the Upper Campus, or relocated elsewhere on this or any of its other campuses.'<sup>48</sup> Proposing that the plinth either be demolished or an alternative location be further investigated.<sup>49</sup> As of 2020, the plinth remains on UCT Upper Campus, and no further requests for removal or destruction have been filed.

According to Lillie's 2015 report submitted to the HWC Committee, UCT had received four offers for the relocation of the statue. The first proposal was from the Texan based Crow foundation, the Lillie Report outlines that they offered to cover all costs associated with the removal, transport and return of the statue.<sup>50</sup> However, given that the Lillie Report draws a direct comparison between RMF and 'recent debates in the USA regarding the continued display of the Confederacy flag on public buildings and public sites,' the administration of UCT was 'sensitive' to the notion that the relocation of the statue to the USA, to be displayed in a memorial park that 'includes works of Winston Churchill and Vladimir Lenin' would only 'court further controversy.'<sup>51</sup>

The second proposal was from Baker Square, the site of old offices of the De Beers explosive factory, and includes 'two old rooms known as 'The De Beers Room' and 'The Rhodes Room'.<sup>52</sup> UCT concluded that if the statue was to be housed here, it could potentially be 'reinterpreted through an appropriate plaque and would remain accessible to local visitors.'<sup>53</sup>

The third proposal was from the Nooitgedacht Estate, which is housed on land brought by the Wirth family from Rhodes estate in 1923. The patriarch of the family, Fritz Otto Witrth, was both a friend and business partner to Rhodes. However, despite this connection, the Estate houses the Bronze Foundry Art Gallery, which displays numerous sculptures by South African artists. If the statue was to be relocated here, the Estate, in conjunction with UCT, would commission additional sculptures 'reflecting the creativity of local artists' to be displayed alongside Rhodes Bronze statue.<sup>54</sup>

The final proposal of the South African Institute for Heritage Science and Conservation, would move the statue to a private college campus. They proposed that relocation to the 'Institute would stabilize the statue's bronze surfaces in order to reverse the current 'vandalized condition', as well as allow it to be repurposed for the goals of education and research.'<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Jenna Etheridge, "Permanent removal of UCT Rhodes Statue gets green light," *News 24*, October 21, 2016.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Ashley Lillie, "Heritage Statement on Behalf of UCT," *University of Cape Town Property and Services*, August 28, 2015.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

Despite these proposals, almost six years after the initial removal, the statue of Rhodes remains in storage in an undisclosed 'secret' location on the UCT campus.<sup>56</sup> Since the 2016 ruling of the HWC on the statue's removal, no further attempts of relocation have been made.

### *The Impact of the Rhodes Must Fall Protests*

Although some protestors have since moved away from activism, the statue was a catalyst for continued protests surrounding the need to decolonize UCT.<sup>57</sup> In 2015 Price established a 'Task Team' to address the legacy of colonialism at UCT and further established the Naming of Buildings, Rooms and Spaces and Roads Committee, headed by Dr Maanda Mulaudzi. The Task team initiated an open call for submissions on an audit of other controversially named sites or monuments on the UCT Campus.<sup>58</sup> The rationale behind the task team was as follows;

[The] University is a living organism and as time passes successive generations of students, who then become alumnae/i, must also be given the opportunity to reflect on the ethos of the institution and inscribe in turn their interpretation in names given to buildings.<sup>59</sup>

The Task Team further set up a procedure for dealing with contested sites on campus, issuing an open call for comments and proposals 'for the renaming of other buildings which may be seen to recognise or celebrate colonial oppressors and/or which may be offensive or controversial.'<sup>60</sup> This process focused on three key areas: the legal opinion and heritage implications, the significance historically of the name and the moral question, namely which circumstances necessitated the renaming of a building.<sup>61</sup> On the basis of this assessment, the Task Team would create a proposal for renaming, which would be open to comments from the UCT Community, before these recommendations were submitted to the Naming of Buildings Committee for recommendation to Council.<sup>62</sup>

As a result of this process, on March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2019, Jameson Hall was re-christened Sarah Baartman Hall.<sup>63</sup> Later that year, in December, the Council further approved the renaming of the residence 'JP Duminy Court' in honour of 'Phillip Kgosana.'<sup>64</sup> As of June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the Task Team is currently considering the renaming of three rooms and a space in the Wilfred & Jules Kramer Law Building. As of 2021, the work of the Task Team and Committee remains ongoing, and new sites continue to come under review.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Nicholas Coetzer, "An Imperial Axis, Counter-memorials, and the Double Bind: The Rise and Fall of Rhodes at the University of Cape Town," *Arq* 24, no. 1 (2020): 80.

<sup>57</sup> Eusebius McKaiser, "We Know from South Africa that Toppling Statues is No Silver Bullet- but it's a Start," *Guardian*, June 9, 2020.

<sup>58</sup> Max Price, "Naming of Buildings," *UCT VC Desk*, March 30, 2016.

<sup>59</sup> Max Price, "Council agrees to change name of Jameson Hall," *UCT Newsroom*, June 23, 2016.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Carla Lever, "A South African university is replacing a colonial ruler's name with a symbolic and powerful figure," *Quartz*, January 19, 2019.

<sup>64</sup> Siphon Pityana, "Report on UCT Council meeting of 20 June," *UCT Chairs Desk*, June 30, 2021.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

While the RMF movement led to visible structural changes within UCT beyond the statue itself, at the time of its apex during the 2015 protests, it did not receive universal support. Resistance from conservative groups saw a rally behind monuments in the wake of the RMF protests. The movement, however, has largely been both popular and replicated with similar efforts to remove a statue of Rhodes in Company's Garden in Cape Town.<sup>66</sup>

It also migrated internationally to Oxford University, which became the epicentre of its own RMF movement. One of the protest leaders at Oxford, South African Student Ntokozo Qwabe, commented that Rhodes's legacy is presented in a very uncritical way. Stating: 'It's a celebration of his triumphs, as opposed to any critical reflection on who this guy was and the consequences of what he did.'<sup>67</sup>

Perhaps the most significant impact of UCT's Rhodes Must Fall movement was the sparking of #FeesMustFall movement, whose first goal was the 'removal of apartheid and colonial symbols' that RMF had initiated, where students 'gathered in numbers to say that these symbols carry with them the historic violence of colonial rule and that we need new symbols that reflect our vision towards an ideal and oppression free society.'<sup>68</sup> The second was the "opening up of universities so that those from historically disadvantaged communities can also access higher learning, and the third demand was a change in the makeup of the university, where the staff, the curriculum and institutional cultures are often steeped in deep colonial practices."<sup>69</sup> In many ways, the RMF movement was the ideological precursor and accelerant of the #FeesMustFall movement. #FeesMustFall began to mean not only a questioning of the iconography of apartheid but the 'shattering' - as Prof. Pumla Gqola describes the 'post-racial, rainbowist' ideology that Mandela and other post-1994 peace brokers had touted as the way forward for South Africa.<sup>70</sup>

### *The Continuing Legacy of the Rhodes Must Fall Movement*

Unlike later movements in Oxford and across Europe and the United States, media and student opinion on whether Rhodes *should* fall was relatively unified, perhaps explaining UCT's swift action in removing the statue. When asked 'why now?' student leader Rekgosofetse Chikane, who later wrote a book on his experience with RMF, stated:

This is happening now because South Africa is coming out of its infancy years and into the teenage years of questioning everything. We're not taking the words of Nelson Mandela at face value. The idea that the 1994 political and economic compromise worked out best for all South Africans, we should be able to question that.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> News 24, "Attempt to cut down Rhodes statue foiled," News 24, January 27, 2016 ; Mary-Anne Gontsana, "Rhodes statue in silicosis protest," *GroundUp*, February 8, 2017.

<sup>67</sup> André Rhoden-Paul, "'Oxford Uni must decolonise its campus and curriculum, say students,'" *The Guardian*, June 12, 2015.

<sup>68</sup> Welcome Lishivha, "The fallist movement and the changes it has made," *Mail & Guardian*, May 3, 2019.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Pumla Gqola, "Defining People: analysing Power, language and representation in metaphors in the new South Africa," *Transformation* 47 (2001): 200.

<sup>71</sup> Don Buroughs, "Why South African Students Say The Statue Of Rhodes Must Fall," *NPR*, March 28, 2015.

Another student reflecting on the timing of the protests and the symbolism of Rhodes commented;

The systems and processes in place here have worked in such a way to exclude us from feeling as though we are part of this university. We feel alienated. The statue just dramatises those feelings. We don't want it destroyed, we just want it removed from the campus.<sup>72</sup>

While key activists from the Rhodes Must Fall movement have aged into political and activist roles in the last four years, the 'fallist' ideology sparked by the movement persists even today. Fallist movements have re-surfaced periodically in South Africa, underscoring that despite the structural changes enacted by UCT in the five years since RMF erupted, addressing colonial legacies goes beyond just the relatively easy removal of statues. In fact, it is these very public symbols, such as Rhodes, that can direct the national conversation to wider societal inequities.

## Summary and Conclusions

The legacy of Rhodes has always proved controversial as an imperialist and holder of regressive views on race. The presence of prominent commemorations and statues in public space have symbolised the unresolved legacy of colonial pasts and offered a focal point for contemporary activists. Protestors at the University of Cape Town made use of Rhodes' statue to both vocalise and visualise structural problems at the institution and the need for it to be decolonised. Acting as a highly symbolic rallying point, which triggered a wave of protests in South Africa that drew attention to the persisting and unresolved colonial legacies. While the UCT Administration, under Price's leadership, made a quick decision to remove the statue, as the delays in the HWC procedure indicate, responses to public calls for removals can often be complicated by bureaucratic procedures and the need to conform to legal considerations in regard to heritage sites.

The actions of UCT in the six years since the initial RMF protests further evidence that fully addressing all remaining legacies of colonialism in institutions is a long journey that requires both structural changes and continued public consultation with concerned stakeholders.

The publicity and capturing of the public psyche exemplified by the RMF movement at UCT draws comparison to the recent uptake in similar protests brought about by the 2020 global Black Lives Matter protests. This case study allows for reflection on the extent to which the removal of symbolic material statues and memorials could be a useful way of resolving long term structural problems.

Research contributed by Hugh Greenwood, Cameron Scheijde, Jadé Botha

Last updated September 2021

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<sup>72</sup> News 24, "Rhodes Must Fall: Students Have Their Say," News 24, April 2, 2015.

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## About Contested Histories

In recent years, there have been many contestations over memorials, street names, and other physical representations of historical legacies in public spaces. These contestations often reflect deeper societal tensions whether triggered by political transitions, demographic shifts, inter-ethnic strife, or a growing awareness of unaddressed historical injustices.

The Contested Histories project is a multi-year initiative designed to identify principles, processes, and best practices for addressing these contestations at the community or municipal level and in the classroom. Conflicts about history, heritage, and memory are a global phenomenon, and, although each case is different, comparative cases can indicate lessons learned and reflect best practices.

## About IHJR at EuroClio

The Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation (IHJR) is a research centre at EuroClio - European Association for History Educators in The Hague, The Netherlands. The IHJR works with educational and public policy institutions to organise and sponsor historical discourse in pursuit of acknowledgement and the resolution of historical disputes in divided communities and societies.

## Contact information

Marie-Louise Jansen  
Program Director  
+33 66828327  
contestedhistories@euroclio.eu  
www.contestedhistories.org

EuroClio Secretariat  
Riouwstraat 139  
2585HP The Hague The  
Netherlands  
secretariat@euroclio.eu  
www.euroclio.eu

Published by IHJR-EuroClio in February 2021  
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To cite this publication:  
The Contested Histories Initiative, "Cecil John Rhodes Statue in Cape Town", *Contested Histories Case Study #140* (September 2021), retrieved from [link].

The Contested Histories Initiative receives support from the Europe for Citizens Programme of the European Union. The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.