

## UCT RHODES MUST FALL MISSION STATEMENT

We are an independent collective of students, workers and staff who have come together to end institutionalised racism and patriarchy at UCT. This movement was sparked by Chumani Maxwele's radical protest against the statue of Cecil John Rhodes on Monday 9 March 2015. This has brought to the surface the existing and justified rage of black students in the oppressive space cultivated and maintained by UCT, despite its rhetoric of 'transformation'. We want to be clear that this movement is not just concerned with the removal of a statue. The statue has great symbolic power; it glorifies a mass-murderer who exploited black labour and stole land from indigenous people. Its presence erases black history and is an act of violence against black students, workers and staff – by "black" we refer to all people of colour. The statue was therefore the natural starting point of this movement. Its removal will not mark the end but the beginning of the long overdue process of decolonising this university. In our belief, the experiences seeking to be addressed by this movement are not unique to an elite institution such as UCT, but rather reflect broader dynamics of a racist and patriarchal society that has remained unchanged since the end of formal apartheid.

This movement is not just about the removal of a statue. The statue has great symbolic power - it is a glorifying monument to a man who was undeniably a racist, imperialist, colonialist, and misogynist. It stands at the centre of what supposedly is the 'greatest university in Africa'. This presence, which represents South Africa's history of dispossession and exploitation of black people, is an act of violence against black students, workers and staff. The statue is therefore the perfect embodiment of black alienation and disempowerment at the hands of UCT's institutional culture, and was the natural starting point of this movement. The removal of the statue will not be the end of this movement, but rather the beginning of the decolonisation of the university.

### CENTERING BLACK PAIN

At the root of this struggle is the dehumanisation of black people at UCT. This dehumanisation is a violence exacted only against black people by a system that privileges whiteness. Our definition of black includes all racially oppressed people of colour. We adopt this political identity not to disregard the huge differences that exist between us, but precisely to interrogate them, identify their roots in the divide-and-conquer tactics of white supremacy, and act in unity to bring about our collective liberation. It is therefore crucial that this movement flows from the black voices and black pain that have been continuously ignored and silenced.

With regard to white involvement, we refer to Biko:

"What I have tried to show is that in South Africa, political power has always rested with white society. Not only have the whites been guilty of being on the offensive but, by some skilful manoeuvres, they have managed to control the responses of the blacks to the provocation. Not only have they kicked the black but they have also told him how to react to the kick. For a long time the black has been listening with patience to the advice he has been receiving on how best to respond to the kick. With painful slowness he is now beginning to show signs that it is his right and duty to respond to the kick in the way he sees fit."

"The (white) liberal must understand that the days of the Noble Savage are gone; that the blacks do not need a go-between in this struggle for their own emancipation. No true liberal should feel any resentment at the growth of black consciousness. Rather, all true liberals should realise that the place for their fight for justice is within their white society. The liberals must realise that they themselves are oppressed if they are true liberals and therefore they must fight for their own freedom and not that of the nebulous "they" with whom they can hardly claim identification."

We support the White Privilege Project and encourage white students to engage with that. They can contribute through conscientising their own community on campus. We also welcome their participation in radical action as a sign of solidarity, so long as that participation takes place on our terms.

#### AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH

We want to state that while this movement emerged as a response to racism at UCT, we recognise that experiences of oppression on this campus are intersectional and we aim to adopt an approach that is cognisant of this going forward. An intersectional approach to our blackness takes into account that we are not only defined by our blackness, but that some of us are also defined by our gender, our sexuality, our able-bodiedness, our mental health, and our class, among other things. We all have certain oppressions and certain privileges and this must inform our organising so that we do not silence groups among us, and so that no one should have to choose between their struggles. Our movement endeavours to make this a reality in our struggle for decolonisation.

#### ON 'REVERSE RACISM'

In line with our positions, we reject the policing of the responses of black students to their violent experiences. We want to add that we feel that the Constitution's conception of racism is fundamentally racist because it presupposes that racism is a universal experience, thus normalising the suffering of those who actually experience racism.

"A derivation from the word 'race' is 'racism'. The mere definition of the word race does not amount to racism. Racism is a set of attitudes and social mores which devalue one race in order to empower another, as well as the material power to deploy those values in the devaluation or destruction of the lives of the devalued race. Therefore those at the receiving end of racism cannot be racists. They may develop counter values which despise racists, but precisely because of racism, they lack the material power to implement those values" - Yvette Abrahams, UWC Women and Gender Studies Department.

The Constitution's conception of racism has systematically been used to deter irrepressible urges by black South Africans to challenge racism and violence. An example of this was the Human Rights Commission ruling against the Forum for Black Journalists, when white journalists were banned from the organisation in February 2008 and this was declared unconstitutional and racist. An examination of South Africa's political history reveals the necessity for black people to organise to the exclusion of white people in the fight against racism.

It is laughable that UCT has a building named after Biko, when Biko himself said "Those who know, define racism as discrimination by a group against another for the purposes of subjugation or maintaining subjugation. In other words one cannot be racist unless he has the power to subjugate. What blacks are doing is merely to respond to a situation in which they find themselves the objects of white racism. We are in the position in which we are because of our skin. We are collectively segregated against - what can be more logical than for us to respond as a group?"

#### STUDENT LEADERSHIP

We have noted that the UCT SRC has supported this movement, and we welcome their solidarity and appreciate the strong stance they have taken. However, we are wary of the contradictions inherent in the SRC taking up such a cause. Given that they are a structure specifically designed to work with management, having them lead puts this movement in a compromised position in which we would have to negotiate with management on their terms. To be clear, we see SRC involvement and support as crucial in this movement, but believe leadership and direction must come from students themselves. Any attempt by the SRC to co-opt the movement will thus be rejected.

## ENGAGEMENT WITH MANAGEMENT

We find the way in which UCT management has 'engaged' with this movement to be disingenuous. At no point have we been engaged directly by management. Management has responded to various media houses and has made attempts to isolate individuals from within the movement to divide us. Black outsourced workers are used to deal with protests, despite their own exploitation at the hands of the same institution, whilst management keeps itself unseen. Their releasing of statements reflects the way in which the university prioritises pacifying public opinion and defending its public image over the interests of its own black students. Our expectation is that management makes a genuine attempt at meeting with us, on our terms, which involves the removal of investigations that frame us as criminals. Meaningful engagement cannot happen if one party is under duress.

We also find it infuriating that management is attempting to open up a process of debate through their 'Have Your Say' campaign. Alumni have been emailed and asked for input, and notice boards have been put up near the statue to allow for comment from the broader student body. This is not meaningful engagement of black students by management, and in fact shows a complete disregard for the black experience. Management is making clear that they are not interested in alleviating black pain unless the move to do so is validated by white voices. It is absurd that white people should have any say in whether the statue should stay or not, because they can never truly empathise with the profound violence exerted on the psyche of black students. Our pain and anger is at the centre of why the statue is being questioned, so this pain and anger must be responded to in a way that only we can define. It must be highlighted that the push for dialogue around the statue reflects the disturbing normalisation of colonisation and white supremacy at UCT. That the presence of Rhodes is seen as debatable shows that management does not take seriously the terrible violence against black people historically and presently. Finally, it is revealing that while black protestors are threatened with and are facing investigations, the racist backlash from white students has not been dealt with by the university.

## OUR DEMANDS

Our immediate demands are that we receive a date for the removal of the statue from campus grounds, and that the university investigation of student protesters be withdrawn. We find it unacceptable that management has presented a date on which council will discuss the statue; we reject the notion that the university has any decision to make here. Our position is clear and will not be hampered by bureaucratic processes which management hides behind. Our pain should be the only factor taken into consideration, and therefore the statue's removal from UCT must be a non-negotiable, inevitable outcome.

Our long-term goals include:

- Remove all statues and plaques on campus celebrating white supremacists.
- Rename buildings and roads from names commemorating only white people, to names of either black historical figures, or to names that contribute to this university taking seriously its African positionality.
- Replace artworks that exoticise the black experience (by white, predominantly male artists) which are presented without context, with artworks produced by young, black artists.
- Recognise that the history of those who built our university - enslaved and working class black people - has been erased through institutional culture. Pay more attention to historical sites of violence, such as the slave graves beneath the buildings in which we learn.
- Implement a curriculum which critically centres Africa and the subaltern. By this we mean treating African discourses as the point of departure - through addressing not only content, but languages and methodologies of education and learning - and only examining western traditions in so far as they are relevant to our own experience.
- Provide financial and research support to black academics and staff.

- Radically change the representation of black lecturers across faculties.
- Revise the limitations on access to senior positions for black academics. This includes interrogating the notion of “academic excellence” which is used to limit black academics and students' progression within the university.
- Increase the representation of black academics on the currently predominantly white, male decision making bodies which perpetuate institutional racism.
- Re-evaluate the standards by which research areas are decided - from areas that are lucrative and centre whiteness, to areas that are relevant to the lives of black people locally and on the continent.
- Introduce a curriculum and research scholarship linked to social justice and the experiences of black people.
- Adopt an admissions policy that explicitly uses race as a proxy for disadvantage, prioritising black applicants.
- Remove the NBT as a requirement for admission because it systematically disadvantages all students except those who attend Model C schools and private schools.
- Improve academic support programmes.
- Meaningfully interrogate why black students are most often at the brunt of academic exclusion.
- Develop an improved financial aid system.
- Radically reduce the currently extortionate fees.
- Improve facilities which deal with sexual assault, as well as facilities which help black students deal with the psychological trauma as a result of racism.
- Implement R10 000 pm minimum basic for UCT workers as a step towards a living wage, in the spirit of Marikana.
- Get rid of the Supplemented Living Level, which prescribes a poverty wage.
- Stop using the Consumer Price Index which ensures that wages never really increase, leaving workers in poverty.
- End outsourcing. The companies must go, the workers must stay.
- There should be no capitalist companies making profits at this public sector institution. Workers must know that their job is safe, has decent working conditions and ensures comfortable lives.
- Education for workers and their families must be free.
- Stop the victimisation and intimidation of workers. No worker must be penalised in any way for supporting and joining protest action, including strike action, at UCT.
- Workers must be able, without penalty of any kind, to refuse work that is a danger or hazard to their health and safety.
- Provide workers with access to services dealing with labour, family, housing issues.
- Provide workers with avenues through which to report and address experiences of racism, sexism and other forms of abuse. These avenues must assist in enforcing legal action against the perpetrator.

In solidarity,  
The Rhodes Must Fall Movement