

Retrospective : UCT : LGBTQIA The founders of the #RhodesMustFall Movement (& the guys) March2015 09sep15



(<https://bizlinks.files.wordpress.com/2015/09/rmf-sign-history.jpg>)

The LGBTQIA (<http://lgbtqia.ucdavis.edu/lgbt-education/lgbtqia-glossary>) movement were the founders of the Rhodes Must Fall Movement at the University of Cape Town (UCT). This is what makes the movement extraordinary & why it has taken off world wide.

[LGBTQIA = Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex, Asexual]

“Rhodes Must Fall: How black women claimed their place” M&G

Without black women in the movement, “I felt that my own intelligence and knowledge would either be questioned or dismissed” – **Mbali Matandela**.

“When the Rhodes Must Fall movement began, UCT feminists quickly called a meeting with its leadership. They were not going to let their voices be drowned out.

After the movement’s first meeting, myself and a small group of black, radical feminists decided that we needed to stake our claim in talks about the university and its institutional racism. We began speaking up at meetings about what it means to be a black women or LGTBQIA people in an institution that still celebrates misogyny and white supremacy symbolically with the statue of Cecil John Rhodes statue. We knew how easily patriarchy can dominate any context, even protests about equal rights, and they were not going to let the Rhodes Must Fall movement become one of them.

We were not going to let only men lead the movement.

Decolonising a university means figuring out what the intentions behind its creation were. Universities are created as organs of knowledge, art and expression in society and as with other institutions in former colonial states, universities’ histories are based on the bodies that carry histories and culture on them and what these

bodies look like. In South Africa, educational institutions were built to cultivate European ideologies and to create an 'enlightened' Africa.

But this idea of an 'enlightened' Africa was implemented using European ideas of modernity: patriarchy, capitalism and racism. These systems oppress and silence some populations and have made themselves painfully clear to black students by controlling their knowledge, their expression of art and the way they behave. At UCT black students feel this oppression in the way black identity is not shown in the university's buildings, statues, lecturers and curriculum. What this shows them is that their history, culture and language is inferior. How this makes students feel about themselves is at the core of the Rhodes Must Fall Movement.

Since the first radical protest on March 9, students have been talking louder than ever about their pain over what the university categorises as success. One student said in one of the debates that the university is 'built on white success' because its institutional culture does not celebrate being black or being a woman. I know what this feels like. I have felt it in the Political Science department. There is only one black woman lecturer in the department this year who can channel the politics of being a black woman in her discipline.

Mocked because of accent

In my second year, I was sitting in a lecture and the accent of a black lecturer triggered comments from white students about the credibility of his expertise. This made me so angry because in that moment I realised that there must be so many students who were too scared of expressing their opinions in lectures because of the fear of being mocked about their accents. I felt that my own intelligence and knowledge would either be questioned or dismissed in this space which is actually meant to promote engagement and critical thinking.

These same feelings were echoed by a group of black feminists at the start of the Rhodes Must Fall debates. The feminists said their pain, which at times is different to men's pain, needs to be known. We asked for a meeting with the movement's leaders and told them that before the movement became a powerful resistance to institutional racism, there needed to be healing within to be able find solidarity. This meeting enabled those that had been silenced to reconcile with the black males who had previously simplified or devalued women's experiences.

As a member of this group of feminists, I have had the chance to voice the pain that black females experience based on how the 'ideal' personality of an elite white male has influenced how black men treat black women and LGBTQIA people. In that meeting we decided that the way this movement was happening needed to change. And it did. Strong black women took up leadership positions in the movement and LGBTQIA members have taken leadership positions in our sub-committees, joint-meetings and protests. The movement also changed one of the songs we were singing at protests to make it inclusive of women. The song Nantsi indonda emnyama meaning: "Here is a black man" was changed to include black women by adding Nangu umfazi omnyama, which means: "Here is the black woman", to the lyrics. This song also added to the process of healing, which was so important because the differences that often divide movements were dealt with within the first week of this one being formed.

But there are still men and women in the movement who have never even thought about how racial oppression differs according to class, gender, sexuality and 'able-bodiedness' and we still have a long way to go before we can consider ourselves a well-oiled movement. We will keep building.

What I hope for is that people will look back at this movement one day and see how a small group of black feminists changed the politics of a black consciousness space – a space that has previously excluded these populations. They will remember how black women and members of the LGBTQIA community became valued members of one of the most important movements in the university's history." – **Mbali Matandela**

Mbali Matandela is a fourth year UCT student studying gender and transformation

<http://mg.co.za/article/2015-03-30-rhodes-must-fall-how-black-women-claimed-their-place>
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