Dear All,

Please find attached my paper about the Rhodes Must Fall movement. Even though it arrives a little late, I hope you all still find time to engage with the argument. It is really my first effort to structure the research of the last months in to a paper with a cohesive argument. My goal is to publish it soonish in a sociological journal interested in race/social movements. I am particularly interested in any feedback on how to frame the case in the social movement literature. The paper is actually part of a larger project that explores the emergence, strategies, discourses and interconnectedness of the new global antiracism movement. How do new racial discourses travel transnationally and are culturally translated and implemented in different socio-political contexts? The three selected case studies - South Africa, The Netherlands, and the United States - expose the transnational ties in the antiracist movement and how antiracism discourses globally circulate.

Thanks again for reading and having present. I'm really looking forward to Tuesday!

Kind regards,
Jacob Boersema
Re-racing South Africa: Rhodes Must Fall as Antiracist Movement

Abstract
This paper analyzes the student protests at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in March 2015, which led to the removal of the statue of Cecil Rhodes. I examine how a diverse collective of student protesters coalesced around the Rhodes Must Fall movement. In particular, I look at how activists created and disseminated a new antiracist discourse around the concepts of black pain, institutional racism, whiteness, and decolonization. The analysis demonstrates that through symbolic action and discursive invention, students were able to make racism visible and reframe the meaning of race in post-apartheid South Africa. Through a process of re-racing, the movement members questioned the country’s dominant racial ideology of non-racialism. They drew thereby as much upon global antiracism discourses, as older discourses of black consciousness. The aim of the article is to situate #RhodesMustFall not as an isolated South African event, but as part of a new, global antiracism movement.

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Introduction
On the morning of March 9, 2015, Chumani Maxwele picked up a portable toilet near his home in a Khayelitsha township and brought it with him on a minibus to the University in Cape Town (UCT), where he had gained a scholarship in 2011 to study political science. Upon arrival, he carried the toilet to the center of campus where a bronze statue of Cecil John Rhodes (the 19th-century British colonialist who donated the land on which the university was built) stood. Donning a pink helmet while bare-chested, Maxwele placed a cardboard sign in front of the statue that read “Exhibit @ White Arrogance U.C.T. Where are our heroes and ancestors?” He then blew a whistle and began hurling feces onto the statue. It was the shit that started the Rhodes Must Fall movement, South Africa’s largest student protest since Apartheid.

Maxwele’s protest was well planned to gain maximum media exposure. On his way to UCT he had contacted the press and as he waited to throw the feces a second time on the statue, the photographer Ayanda Ndamane was ready to document his actions. The next day, the act would be on the front page of every major newspaper in the Western Cape. As Maxwele continued to throw feces on the statue, he said: “There is no collective history here. Where are our heroes and ancestors?” I feel suffocated by the presence of these colonial memorials at UCT. We take this protest across the country. Black students can't breathe on campus.”

Maxwele echoed a protest that the world had heard before. In the summer of 2014, a year before Maxwele’s protest, the New York Police had arrested Eric Garner on the suspicion of selling “loosies” (individual cigarettes sold loose from their original packs and untaxed). In the video of Garner’s attempted arrest, you see an officer making a chokehold, while Garner repeatedly cried, “I can’t breathe.” Eric Garner died due to the chokehold. The Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM) responded by protesting this type of extrajudicial killing of Black people by the police. Indeed, members carried protest signs that read, “I can’t breathe” and a quote by the anti-colonial philosopher Frantz Fanon: “When we revolt it’s not for a particular culture. We revolt simply because, for many reasons, we can no longer breathe.” By doing so, the BLM protesters drew a connection between the police violence in the United States and the global history of Black oppression.

A year later, the rallying symbol of “breath” had ricocheted to postcolonial South Africa with a new post-apartheid twist. Indeed, Maxwele borrowed from the BLM protests and from Cape Town politics. In 2013, the African National Congress (ANC) politicians Loyiso Nkohla and Andile Lili had dumped human feces on the steps of the Provincial Legislature in Cape Town to protest the city’s poor sanitation services.
in the townships. The protest had been met with derision in the media, and the politicians became known as the “poo throwers.” They were subsequently suspended from the ANC. Nonetheless, Maxwele and his group had decided that feces were exactly what they needed to make their point.

The day after Maxwele protested, he explained his logic on a local radio show in Cape Town (REF). Maxwele said:

We knew that the moment we do anything that is violent, or damaging the statue, we will be deemed with the stereotype of Black violence. We sat down and thought through this thing and—because of our lived experiences—we knew that we had to use our psychological pain, our trauma, that the statue gives to us as Black students and Black staff. I am deeply traumatized by that statute. We thought: lets take the pain of our parents, the pain of our brothers and sisters in Khayelitsha, who will be using porta-potty toilets for the rest of their lives. That is my pain. Let me take that porta-potty with feces back to where it belongs. So that the powerful people—the elite—can feel how it feels to be Black. How it feels to be on the ground and use those toilet as your way of relieving yourself. The dehumanization of Black people in this country has gone on for too long.

Maxwele took the influences of BLM protest, Fanon’s writing, and the Nkohla and Lili protest, and remixed it with a new protest and rhetoric centered on the notion of “black pain.” He describes his protest as an exercise in empathy, asking viewers to empathize with the pain of being Black, which is both a local issue and a global issue (in this case, the dehumanization of using a temporary toilet permanently but also having to walk by a statue commemorating a colonist and also referencing the pain of other Black cultures by invoking the "I can't breathe" slogan).

Furthermore, he demanded the end of Black pain by demanding the end of institutional racism and white privilege. In the radio interview, Maxwele required that the university transform and hire more Black professors to make UCT “a community of all people.” According to him, the Rhodes statue caused personal pain with Black students, while it symbolized the institutional racism at UCT. This racism was caused by whiteness, which he defined as white people having the power and privilege to set the norm and to ignore Black pain and the Black poor. He said:

There are white norms at UCT, white standards, and white attitudes. Every normal Black student knows, without having been lectured about it. To advance in UCT, the Black student must have a particular accent—an African
accent is not accepted. (...) That is the white arrogance and it emanates from the (Rhodes) statue. We are saying: it must come down. So we can believe who we are: that our culture is being accepted, our symbolism is being accepted, and we ourselves are being accepted.

The cultural arrogance of the Rhodes statue symbolized for Maxwele the whiteness of UCT. Taking the statue down, he argued, would be the first step in debunking whiteness as the preferred norm and reaffirming the value of blackness and the humanity of Black people. Maxwele’s protest ushered in the largest student protests in South Africa since apartheid.
Antiracism Protest Movements

A wave of antiracism protest movements against police violence and other racial injustices has occurred across the globe in the last few years. Most prominently, the extrajudicial killings of young Black men and women in the United States have ignited a new protest movement rallying under the banner of Black Lives Matter (BLM). The BLM movement ushered in a new phase in the struggle for Black liberation, introducing novel vocabulary, leadership models, and strategic toolkits. This and other Black protest movements raise new questions about the meaning and achievement of racial equality within liberal democracies.

In this paper, I investigate how the success of Black Lives Matter movement had inspired or influenced the Rhodes Must Fall Movement in South Africa—in other words, what are the global connections between these antiracism movements. While Black protest movements originate from local concerns, they often draw from a global repertoire of vocabularies, discourses, and strategies. Tracing these connections is not easy, because as McAdam argues, movement lessons cross national boundaries through complex diffusion processes (McAdam 1995).

Historically, the Black freedom struggle in America had great influence on how other groups understood the nature of human oppression and how to fight subjugation—although this exchange was never a one-way street (Davis 1983, Tilly 1978).

Global antiracism activism has not garnered the same attention from sociologists and social movement scholars as other recent global movements, such as the global human rights movement and the global Occupy movement (Tsutsui and Wotipka 2004, Halvorsen 2012). However, in other disciplines such as race studies and comparative history there is a long tradition of tracing the global connections between movements in the international Black diaspora (Marable and Agard-Jones 2008, Gilroy 1993), specifically by comparing the United States and South Africa (Fredrickson 1996, Marx 1998). Despite the obvious differences in racial demography, Fredrickson argues that Black South African leaders and intellectuals have often looked at African American movements and ideologies for inspiration (Fredrickson 1997).

In this paper, I analyze how the Rhodes Must Fall movement challenged South Africa’s non-racialism, in part by using a Black Lives Matters inspired antiracism vocabulary. Post-apartheid South Africa was long held up to the world as a model for its peaceful transition from apartheid to democracy, its process of reconciliation, and its commitment to non-racialism. Nelson Mandela and many others built the image of the Rainbow Nation to project an ideal of a successful multi-ethnic
community to the world. President Mandela argued that non-racialism constituted the foundation of South African society. For all that changed during Mbeki’s and Zuma’s presidencies, the ANC has remained committed to non-racialism. The idea also stayed remarkably popular amongst South Africans: in 2014, 61.8% of South Africans believed that “national unity across historical divides was desirable.”5

My central argument is that, with the influence of the BLM movement, the Rhodes Must Fall (RMF) movement re-raced South Africa’s discourse by making racism visible and intelligible. By re-racing I mean the process through which RMF used an explicit racial discourse to re-interpret and critique the ideology of non-racialism and the language of transformation, which has dominated political thinking in post-apartheid South Africa after 1994.6 Like the BLM movement and the Civil Rights Movement, the RMF movement’s central strategic problem was the performative and discursive challenge of making racism visible (Morris 1981, Bonilla and Rosa 2015). I trace how the RMF movement was able to re-race topics by using protest as a moral art and what re-racing achieved for the movement. In particular, I focus on the creation of the new notion of Black pain.

I also make two further arguments: first, the RMF movement demonstrates that racism makes race. I borrow this formulation from the American historian Barbara Fields, who sees racism as a practice and an ideology out of which race emerges (Fields 2001).7 I demonstrate how the RMF movement re-defined the meaning of whiteness and blackness in order to fight against institutional racism and eschew the prevailing conceptualizations around non-racialism and class. Indeed, many South African race scholars were surprised that Black middle-class students became antiracist activist (Mbembe 2015), and the debate between the importance of race versus class is a primary schism in South Africa (Seekings and Nattrass 2008, Mangcu 2017). My argument rephrases the question as: Who is experiencing the racism? In this case, Black middle-class students.

Second, I argue that the RMF movement can only be understood as part of the new, global wave of Black protest movements. South African scholarship, so far, has situated the movement by tracing its influence to the work of Biko’s Black Consciousness Movement and Frantz Fanon anticolonial writings (Biko 2015, Frantz 1995)(REF). However, I demonstrate how the RMF movement’s antiracism concepts of institutional racism and whiteness have direct American origins (Frankenberg 1993, Hamilton and Ture 2011). Moreover, RMF’s novel concept of Black pain must be traced not to Biko or Fanon but to American Black feminist writings from the likes of Alice Walker and Toni Morrison and the centrality of the body in Black Lives Matter, also started by Black feminists (Taylor 2016, Collins 2002, Weissinger and
That being said, locating the movement in this global antiracism discourse should not dismiss the movement’s South African particularities.

Additionally, in what context did these global influences and local issues coalesce to facilitate the RMF movement? Twenty years after apartheid, the wealth and income gap between white and Black people remains daunting. White households still earn, on average, six times the amount of Black households (Africa 2011). Despite the sweeping legislation introduced by the African National Congress (ANC) after 1994 to achieve racial redress, there has been little effect on wealth divided along racial lines (Ndletyana 2008). Nevertheless, the rise of the Black middle class is a distinct development in post-apartheid society in South Africa (2016).

While this racial class divide remains, Black South Africans have also continued to receive highly unequal educational opportunities, (from the early schooling until university). Furthermore, Roger Southall’s study shows that a university education is the ticket to entry to the Black middle class (Southall 2014, 119). However, Black South Africans have highly unequal educational opportunities, from the early school level till the university. For example, the best former white schools accept only a small number of mostly middle-class Black and coloured students (Lemon and Battersby-Lennard 2011).

Black students that attend the top universities of South Africa are part of a minute and elite segment of the Born Free generation. Born just after 1994, this generation makes up a large segment of the population; about 60 percent of the population is under the age of 35 according to 2011 census figures. In 2011, 44 percent of Born Frees were unemployed (Afrobarometer 2011), and in 2012, only 47 percent completed high school education while a mere 5 percent received some university education (Mattes 2012).

Nevertheless, American and South African research demonstrates that educational institutions, such as universities, have a profound effect not just on class position but also on racial discourse (Carter 2012, Pollock 2005, Soudien 2007, Warikoo and Carter 2009). In South Africa, after 1994, many invested great hope in the education system to foster citizenship building and a new sense of national identity among the young generation (Hammett and Staeheli 2011). New curricular content was developed based on the Constitutional values of non-racialism, equality, and human rights (Enslin 2003, 75). In 2012, the South African Reconciliation Barometer Survey found that Born Frees are optimistic about the future and they show growing approval of racial integration (IJR 2012). However, my own (forthcoming) and Vincent research demonstrated that amongst South African students, Black and
white, there is a large gap between their idealized discursive conceptions about diversity and the reality of everyday life at university. (Vincent 2008).

In the following analysis, I focus on the origins of the movement—the 9th of March 2015 until the 9th of April 2015 when the Cecil Rhodes statue was removed. Starting from Maxwele’s original protest, I detail how movement members started to organize, not just to bring the Rhodes statue down, but also against what they called the institutional racism at the University of Cape Town. I explore how they delegitimized transformation as an antiracism strategy and non-racialism as an ideology, and how they defined whiteness as the enemy of their movement. Once they occupied the main administrative building on the UCT campus, they also gave new meaning to blackness and presented a “decolonized” university setting as an alternative. In future work, I hope to explore the trajectory of the RMF movement after the fall of the Rhodes statue and its influence on the nationwide Fees Must Fall student movement that occurred in the fall of 2015.
The Birth of a Movement

Protests are born out of widespread discontent, but each potential movement participant is discontent in their own way. Kgotsi Chikane followed up Chumani Maxwele’s solo protest with his own solo-organized mass meeting at UCT. However, Chikane effectively re-raced Maxwele’s symbolic action against the Rhodes statue by focusing the protests on institutional racism at UCT. When a group of Black feminists joined and further re-raced Maxwele’s ideas into Black pain, and the Students Research Council offered institutional support, a movement started to coalesce.

Soon after Chumani Maxwele threw feces on the Rhodes statue, Kgotsi Chikane, the son of former anti-apartheid and ANC politician Frank Chikane, posted a Facebook invitation for a meeting: “Rhodes Statue? Open Air Dialogue/Plan of Action for Transformation.” Chikane did not agree with how Maxwele protested but saw his protest as an opportunity to challenge UCT’s institutional racism (a concept that Maxwele did not evoke in his protest). In the invitation, Chikane expressed his frustration with how UCT ignored students’ pleas.

“What we require now is a clear PLAN OF ACTION in order to change the institutional racism within this campus. We can’t have management constantly ignore both students and staff with regards to issues of race relations. (...) Right now, #IamNotUCT. I don’t want to be part of an institution that blatantly ignores the calls for real and honest transformation. All I want is Transformation I can see.”

Chikane demanded “transformation,” a word he would later stop using, and still referenced “race relations,” a decidedly neutral formulation for the problem of racism.

The meeting convened on March 12th on the Jameson Steps and drew hundreds of students. At the protest, some students had their mouth taped with Black duck tape. The practice was meant to signify that UCT silences students. A white student with his mouth taped also wore a sign that said, “Help me break free from white privilege.” Another student carried a poster with “Black Lives Matter.” Chikane himself wore a shirt with a placard taped on it: “Help me break free of institutional racism.” He told the crowd:

“In your face racism is easy to see. But when an institution actively works against a group of students—but doesn’t even know that it’s doing it—then we have a problem. That is what is happening at UCT.”
Loyiso Nkohla, the original “poo thrower” from the ANC, was also invited. The former politician and representative of the Ses’khona People’s Rights movement said he would approach Higher Education and Training Minister Blade Nzimande on the legal avenues that could be followed to have the statue removed. The Student Representative Council (SRC) also supported the cause and its leader, Ramabina Mahapa, argued, “The committee representation and the government structure is mostly controlled by white people and that needs to change. That representation needs to change.”

The media approached the organizers after the meeting for comment. Kealeboga Ramaru, a fourth-year student in gender studies who helped organize the meeting, said: “This meeting was organized by one student to get the institution to talk about institutional racism; this [works] not only through symbolism but also through the institutional structure and system itself.” Ramaru emphasized and explained institutional racism, but also connected it to Maxwele’s original issue of Black pain. Drawing upon gender studies, she stressed how Black bodies are sites of racial oppression at UTC. She said:

“The protesters equate the poo with the feelings that UCT [Black] students have to deal with on a daily basis, by passing the statue, by coming into the institution, by seeing the art all around the university, which reduces the pure existence and the bodies of Black students at the university. The statue is a minute issue compared to what we need to deal with.”

Ramaru argued that UCT makes Black students feel Black pain because UCT perpetuates a system of racial inequality and holds deep-seated prejudices against Black students.

At the end of the day, the SRC covered the Rhodes statue with a white blanket. The SRC also released an official statement after the meeting: “This university continues to celebrate, in its institutional symbolism, figures in South African history who are indisputably white supremacists. Rhodes has been praised for donating this land to the university, building the South African economy and bringing ‘civilization’ to this country. But for the majority of South Africans this is a false narrative—how can a colonizer donate land that was never his land in the first place?”

Twelve former SRC presidents also coauthored a letter to the press in which they emphasized that Maxwele’s arguments were nothing new and the statue removal offered an opportunity for progress. Jerome September, the SRC president in 1999,
tweeted a photo that showed the hundreds of students sitting on the Jameson steps and wrote, “UCT students demanding the removal of Rhodes... #Rhodesmustfall.” That new hashtag became a movement.

**Challenging Non-Racialism**

The Rhodes Must Fall movement began to organize and stage daily protests, but movement members also continue to further challenge the dominant ideology of non-racialism. In their media contributions and statements, they effectively re-raced the debate about transformation to clarify their positions and the workings of institutional racism. But it was also a way for movement members to connect their grievances to a longer Black history of white racism.

The day after the mass rally (March 13, 2015), the Cape Times featured an exchange between Kgotsi Chikane and UCT’s acting vice-chancellor Professor Sandra Klopper. Klopper wrote that the university respected the right of students to protest but that the “use of excrement as a form of protest is unacceptable, and we condemn such action in the strongest terms.” Klopper struggled to understand—or did not want to comprehend—why Maxwele had opted for this type of protest or what the argument of the movement was. Chikane inverted Klopper’s statement by replying, “Why must a student be pushed to the point of having to throw fecal matter over the statue of Cecil John Rhodes in order to have a conversation about transformation at UCT?” Maxwele did not choose to use feces, Chikane argued, but rather he was pushed to use it because of UCT’s lack of willingness to even discuss transformation—racial transformation,

Chikane directly challenged post-apartheid’s ideals of non-racialism. Institutional racism and privilege cannot be addressed, he argued, if there is no dialogue about race and acknowledgement of privilege. Institutional racism at UCT is both systematic and subliminal. He wrote:

“It is the privilege of being able to walk past a statue of Saartjie Baartman in the library and have no idea that simply placing her on display, with no justification, is an insult to her legacy and painfully offensive to many students. Why must we transcend race when white students are never told to accept their white privilege?”

Following this exchange, students started to organize daily marches. On Friday, March 14th, the students marched from the lower campus to the Rhodes statue. Standing at the statue, Maxwele started to chant: “Amandla! Down Rhodes Down, Down Rhodes down!” In his speech Maxwele called on the students to connect the
movement and their experiences, to the collective Black experience and history of Black resistance. He said:

“I knew from the 1960s, when AC Jordan arrived at this institution as the first Black professor, who was forced to live in the township of Langa because he was Black. We know very well, of Archie Mafeje, and how he left the university. We know very well, of Mamdani, and how professor Mamdani left the university. The Black resistance continues! We put at the center the question of race, today, at this institution. There is a history behind our actions. Those that came before us, we should acknowledge them.”

Vice-Chancellor Max Price acknowledged how “Black people in this institution feel uncomfortable,” and that UCT should change its cultural symbolism. “The only message we send to you and the council is: give us a date when the statue of Cecil Rhodes will fall. We want a date! We want a date!”

On the following Sunday, March 16th, the UCT campus happened to mark the finish line of South Africa’s largest cycling event, the Epic Cycle Challenge. The students hoped to take advantage of this to draw attention to their cause. They made a new banner, on which a white male student sprayed: RHODES MUST FALL. Some students wrote the slogan on their cheeks. The students invited staff members and workers to the rally because, as Kealeboga Ramaru said, “we all encounter institutional racism in one way or the other.” The group of around fifty students marched through the campus to the statue. Upon arrival, the protesting students covered the statue further in a dropsheet of black plastic as UCT’s security staff looked on. UCT’s executive communication director told the media that UCT was aware of the protest and that the issue would be addressed in the transformation seminar of 16th of March, the next day.

On Monday morning, Maxwele led another march to Jameson Hall. On the way, the students barricaded Madiba Circle Road. When they arrived at Jameson Hall, Maxwele explained that Jameson was a good friend of Rhodes and “a brutal killer.” The central placement of the Rhodes statue and Jameson Hall, he showed, makes it impossible to take a photo of the university that does not center the statue. Maxwele tried to demonstrate to the students how central Rhodes was to UCT, historically and spatially, but also for its global branding and aesthetic imagery.

In the afternoon, UCT had organized a “transformation seminar” with faculty, students, and management, for which the SRC was invited. Maxwele addressed the RMF movement unapologetic stance for the meeting:
“What do we do with the monster Cecil Rhodes? Today there is a seminar that the university has called. We will go there to listen to the SRC delivering our message to the Office of the Vice-Chancellor. We are saying there is no other discussion we will have with the university up until they'll give us a date when the remove the statue.”15

The invitation email for the transformation seminar, emailed to the university community by the management, sounded innocuous enough: “Have you ever wondered why the statue of Cecil John Rhodes stands at the foot of Africa's leading university?”16 Deputy Vice-Chancellor Crain Soudien called the debate vital to how UCT managed the challenge of transformation. It would involve a panel of academics, led by Soudien.

The room crackled with tension. Visibly nervous, Soudien said this meeting was “fully conscious of the events of the last week.” He expressed the hope that people would leave with confidence “in the sense of what a university is all about, a space that is fundamentally about argument and counter argument.”17

The SRC's opening statement made a further break with non-racialism. The SRC president Ramabina Mahapa started to chant: “Amandla! Greetings to the whites and the non-whites!” Mahapa recalled how a fellow Black student used this introduction to a meeting to explain how she as a Black woman had never identified with UCT. Mahapa quoted Steve Biko’s vision of integration as “the provision for each man, each to rise and attain the envisioned self. Each group must be able to attain its style of existence without encroaching on or being thwarted by another.” He called out the whiteness of UCT:

“UCT's institutional culture and symbolism is centered on a white, westernized, middle class and heterosexual male experience. Instead of true integration, Black students are being absorbed into the white hegemonic culture in the institution. Thus, denying the contributions of their cultural capital in shaping the university ethos. That has to change.”18

Black students like him could not identify with UCT. This, Mahapa claimed, is not surprising. “When you formed it, I was not there, I was not allowed to participate. Whose heritage are you preserving?” Finally, Mahapa used the RMF movements’ definition of institutional racism and Fanon to make his point:

“We have been here for a long time. Why has the university not done anything about the institutional symbolism? Why? Who are the keepers of our memory? Sons of daughters of Africa? Frantz Fanon says: When we revolt, it's not for a particular culture. We revolt simply because, for many
reasons, we can no longer breathe. We have come to that time, when students can no longer breathe in this culture.”

Mahapa gets out of his chair and projected his voice: “The winds of change are blowing through UCT. (...) We have begged, growled, and pleaded with management. NO MORE! AMANDLA!” Mahapa walked out of the room, followed by a large group of singing Black students.

The room fell silent; the panel members befuddled. Soudien started to speak. “I’m going to take you into my confidence. We anticipated this might happen. The question is: should we continue?” A scholar asked why Soudien had not addressed the gorilla in the room, the Rhodes statue? Another faculty member pointed to absence of trust between management and students. Finally, Sally Titlestad, one of the panelists who did not work at UCT, expressed her sympathy for the protesting students. “They fight for non-racialism similar to our fight in the 1980s.”

While Titlestad might have been sympathetic to the movement, however, she fundamentally misunderstood it. The RMW was nothing like the UDF non-racial movement of the 1980s, which was led by white South Africans opposing apartheid. This was a movement led by Black students. Maybe the RMF, at this point in time, did not repudiate non-racialism, but they did try to re-race the debate. Quoting Steve Biko, Mahapa broke with the ideal of racial integration, often seen as central to non-racialism. He framed the debate as between whites and non-whites. He reintroduced Biko’s idea that Black liberation meant that Blacks had to go at it alone (at least temporarily).

The next day, Tuesday, March 17, students gathered at the Rhodes statue to march to Beattie Hall. When they arrived, a lone faculty member the poet and language lecturer Azila Reisenberger, entered the hall. She wore a sign: “Don’t raise your voice. Improve your argument.” There was a kerfuffle between Reisenberger and the students, but others students set her free. Later, she commented to the Cape Argus: “For all they know, I can fully agree with their demands or I may not. The only thing that I have an issue with is that these students must remember that they are among a select few youngsters in this country that attend a university. Instead of throwing a tantrum they should be discussing the matter in a proper dialogue.”

Like other white liberals, Reisenberger could not grasp why upwardly-mobile Black students at UCT would protest and refuse dialogue. In her mind, class trumped race and class privileges meant you were willing to dialogue. However, it was precisely because of their class mobility and access to privileged white spaces like UCT, that the students understood why they were not being heard.
Defining the Enemy: Whiteness

As the movement solidified, it did so around the common enemy of whiteness. For the students, the problem had become the whiteness of UCT. They rejected non-racialism. Also, they said, UCT did not listen and ignore their voices because they were Black.

The newspaper Mail & Guardian called the movement a “race revolution” and reported how it had reached the other side of the country. At Rhodes University, students had organized a solidarity march for the UCT students that wanted to remove the Rhodes statue. Sanele Ntshingana, a third year politics and journalism student, said: “After the march, a student wrote on the Facebook page that if the statue was taken down, it must be bought to Rhodes University to chill here. It was a joke, but it sparked a lot of rage.” The Black students launched the hashtag #Rhodessowhite to challenge white privilege at Rhodes university.

Back at UCT, whiteness became central to the debate. On March 18, a group of white students sympathetic to the RMF movement invited students to the White Privilege Project. What that “project” entailed apart from a Facebook page was not totally clear, but one goal was to provide “a space for white students to educate other white students.”

The first meeting drew many white students, and also a few non-white students attended. On Facebook, the invitation said that the meeting is “not about white students educating people on Black struggles; this is about white students educating other white students about their role in these oppressions. If this already makes you uncomfortable, if you’re feeling defensive or misrepresented or that your own experiences are not heard, then come, let us talk and let us listen.”

The group introduced and defined the concept of white privilege and explained that the concept had nothing to do with white people being bad people or feeling guilty about your skin. “White privilege is how white people benefit beyond what is commonly experienced by people of color under the same social, political, or economic circumstances.” The group argued that they had a duty to try and educate “ourselves” before demanding an explanation from others. They wanted to explore what white privilege meant on campus and in South Africa, and what it means to be a white ally to #RhodesMustFall. The meeting was meant to be “a safe space to learn” and “where we can explore racial privilege.” Nick Fitzhenry, one of the organizers, explained, “one does not have to be an explicit racist in order to benefit from and perpetuate white privilege.”
A former chair of transformation of the SRC, Jessica Brekey, co-organized the meeting. She explained that at UCT, a white person was made to feel more comfortable than a Black person because of the structure and norms in the university. Brekey was deeply affected by the movement. On her blog, she had said that it had turned her “inside out.”

She wrote: “I cannot talk about white privilege as though I am an outsider, I cannot pretend I am not cloaked in freedom, opportunity and advantage. I cannot separate myself from this privilege that is so deeply embedded within everyone whose skin is a similar hue to mine.” The movement had made her aware of her previous positions as a white student. “I watched carefully as we proudly raised signs that said ‘racism is a two way street,’ I listened warily as we complained about ‘white victimization’ and preached ‘racial cohesion.’

Many white students had been deeply affected by the movement, and began considering their white privilege and how the reproduced it. The former member of the SRC, Jessica Brekey, explained at the meeting that a white person was made to feel more comfortable at UCT than a Black person because of the structure and norms of the university. The RMF movement had made her conscious of her position on campus as a white student and that it had turned her “inside out.”

She wrote:

“I cannot talk about white privilege as though I am an outsider, I cannot pretend I am not cloaked in freedom, opportunity and advantage. I cannot separate myself from this privilege that is so deeply embedded within everyone whose skin is a similar hue to mine.”

The movement made her critical of white students who argued for non-racialism, racial cohesion, or suggested that racism is often a two-way street. She argued there was too much talk of white victimization and too little discussion of white privilege. She concluded that whiteness had become the main antagonist for the RMF movement.

On March 20, the RMF movement organized a protest march that was larger than ever, stretching hundreds of meters. Organizers had created a coalition with staff, workers, union leaders, and political representatives. The placards read: “UCT stop protecting racists,” “Transform UCT’s Apartheid investigation department,” “Autocratic managers must go!” “We demand employment equity now.” and “Black pain matters too.” At the Bremner building, the end of the march, the crowd had swollen to about two hundred student.

Kgotsi Chikane wore his familiar t-shirt about institutional racism, but this time white privilege was the enemy in his speech. “We are all but here for one reason: because there was a student last week Monday who decided to defy white privilege.
Who decided enough is enough with this institutional racism. And I think it is unfair to allow that student not to address student. It is unfair to have that student have a silent voice.” Chumani Maxwele was handed the microphone and his speech was a call for UCT to recognize Black pain. “Amandla! On Monday, when I protested, my institution, UCT, thought I was a barbaric, a lunatic, who does not know what to do. But today you are answering that message. Our message is a cry of AC Jordan. It is a cry of Mafeje. It is the cry of Mamdani. It is a Black cry. It is a cry of the workers. It is a cry of the staff.”

SRC President Ramabina Mahapa’s speech also redirected the crowd towards issues of race and the demands of Black students. “Amandla! Rhodes Must Fall! Black people cannot identify with UCT. Black people cannot be proud of UCT. People don’t understand. They think this is an ordinary march. But we need to sit down. We need to educate ourselves. We need to read Biko. We need to read Fanon. Those materials are coming. We are going to bring them out. We are going to read them in there!!” at which point, he referenced the Bremner building.

In quick succession, Naledi Maponopono, the Secretary of the ANC Youth League Branch at UCT, and Keenan Hendricks, the Speaker of the UCT Parliament, spoke. Hendricks made clear that the students “will no longer accept the terms of engagement being dictated to us. We will no longer listen to your seminars. We have decided that the statue must go. We have decided that racism must go. And we will not be fooled.” Finally, Professor Xolela Mangcu made a speech, an early supporter of the RMF student movement and an expert on Steve Biko. He said:

“...For too long, some of us have been raising these issues and we have been met with the typical liberal mild mannered contempt. And you guys, have been watching us making these noises, lone voices, as if in the wilderness. And you guys have taken this by the scruff of the neck. And I’m asking you: not to let it go! Because if you let it go, you not only let yourself down, but you are letting Mafeje down, you let AC Jordan down, you are letting Black people down! Let me finish with this quote from Steve Biko that I want you to memorize: ‘we must reject the idea that white leadership is the sine quo non for progress in this country.’”

Mangcu formulated the RMF movement’s adversary most clearly: the white leadership.

That morning in the newspaper, the white Vice-Chancellor, Max Price, had argued for a collaborative decision. At the protest, he tried to make the argument that he—and the RMF movement—have a responsibility to educate to UCT community. He said: “Student, staff, and workers, thank you for being here!... ‘This’,” (Price was
pointing at the crowd,) “are the converted, this is the choir, everybody thinks the same thing! What about the 20,000 students of UCT that are not here?” He urged the crowd to organize teach-ins and to convince the others of the necessity of change.

But the students didn’t let the Vice-Chancellor speak for long. They sang and yelled over him. “We want a date! We want a date!” Price tried again to speak, “If you want to engage, give me a chance to speak. Why now? This is happening now, because we have achieved a new consciousness, a critical mass of people who think the time has come.” A student switched off his microphone. Students from the RMF movement argued that it was not their responsibility to educate others—it was his. When he attempted to speak for a third time, students pressed past him and busted into the Bremner building.

Decolonizing UCT: The Occupation

As the students marched into the halls of the Bremner building, the SRC chairman Ramabina Mahapa came back out. Someone asked him what the students will be doing at the Bremner building. He said:

“We will be engaging with learning materials. Engaging with what it means to be Black. Engaging of the once of Steve Biko, of Fanon. But also, we decide on what is the plan in going forward. We will draw up a plan of action from the students about what is to be done. We are saying to the university: ‘We are serious about this.’”

This statement marked the first time an organizer of the RMF movement defined blackness as a goal of the movement—specifically their aim became understanding what it means to be Black. The occupation of the Bremner building commenced a phase in which the movement could practice what it preached—to acknowledge and center Black pain. Ru Slayen, an Honors student in applied mathematics, was part of the occupation. He said: “In our first meeting (after the occupation) we started with speaking about how we were going to address the pain in the room before we started addressing our pain to the world. That was about trying to forge this space where everyone could be welcome.”

Over the weekend, the activists began planning their course of action and established six subcommittees: education, radical action, writing, creative expression (such as performance protest), media relations, and support (which included food donations). On Sunday morning, March 22nd, RMF posted a short communiqué on Facebook: “The occupation of Bremner continues. There will be a program of political education, seminars presented by Black lecturers and seminars on intersectional identity presented by students, all taking place in the Bremner building. Comrades bring your toothbrushes.” In fact, the SRC had obtained approval
from UCT management to occupy the Bremner building, but only for a few nights.\(^2\)

The students stayed beyond the allocated time.

Decolonization became a central concept for the movement and a potential solution to institutional racism. Around campus, movement organizers and participants put up signs and banners that read: “Rhodes Must Fall” and “Decolonize your education.” On Monday, movement members posted on their Facebook page the “Bremner Occupation Statement.” It state:

“We have claimed and transformed this space to begin the decolonization of the university. We are implementing a program of rigorous political education under the guidance of a group of Black lecturers from UCT and other South African universities that interrogates and problematizes the neo-colonial narratives pertaining to Africa. We have begun to question the entire neo-colonial situation, whether South Africa belongs to all those who live in it and whether it is us the people that are occupying this building or whether we are realizing the fact that this building and its land always belonged to the people.”

The text signified a shift in the movement from a focus on the statue and UCT’s management to a broader one—“radical decolonization.” The statement elaborated:

“This education has extended far beyond the falling of the statue and has reached the language of struggle … [The statue] is unacceptable to the Black (by this we mean all oppressed people of colour) students, workers and staff belonging to this movement. It is absurd that anyone besides those who experience the statue as a violent presence should have any say in whether the statue should stay or not. White students in particular cannot be consulted in such a process because they can never truly empathize with the profound violence exerted on the psyche of Black students. Management is making clear through this process that they are not interested in alleviating Black pain unless the move to do so is validated by white voices.”

The students’ refusal to debate did not stem from arbitrary unwillingness, but from their theory of racism as defined by Black pain. The students argued that, before any dialogue could happen, the UCT administration (and perhaps more broadly, white people) had to acknowledge their pain. White people, they said, cannot and should not be the judge of Black pain, particularly because white students had responded to RMF with even more racism (on Facebook and other outlets) and UCT had been silent.
The students wrote, “It is telling that a student had to go to the lengths that Chumani (Maxwele) did in order to garner the university’s attention on issues of Black pain.”

The students had rephrased Kgotsi Chikane’s earlier argument in the language of Black pain. They no longer asked for a “conversation about transformation,” as Chikane had originally done, but for recognition of Black Pain. “Our pain and anger is at the center of why the statue is being questioned, so this pain and anger must be responded to in a way that only we can define.” The students ended by saying that they would stay in the Bremner building until they received confirmation that the statue would be removed.

The movement now had a cohesive new ideological take on racism that centered the concepts of institutional racism, Black pain, and whiteness. They combined the three concepts by positing that UCT’s institutional racism forced Black students to assimilate to whiteness, which caused Black pain. Inspired by Steve Biko’s ideas about assimilation, Masixole Mlandu (an RMF organizer) was quoted in the student newspaper as saying:

“Black pain stems from the deep frustration of Black students around where they find themselves in this institution and how it perpetuates Black assimilation to whiteness. The statue and all the buildings represent a very psychological effect on Black students. Black people constantly feel that they have to behave, dress, and speak in a certain way in order to be included in the university culture.” 30

Azania House: A Space for Blackness.
During the occupation, “decolonization” and “blackness” became central terms for the movement. The occupation literally and figuratively created a space for Black students at the heart of the university. Indeed, the organizers signified this created space for blackness on the UCT campus by renaming the Bremner building Azania House. Black nationalists groups, including the PAC and AZAPO, used “Azania” to refer to South Africa during the apartheid era. Organizers also created a Facebook page for Azania House.

On March 24, a group of Black academics started TransformUCT to express their solidarity with the student movement. In the evening, the Black academics and students met in the Archie Mafeje room of the Bremner building. During that evening, the professors recounted their experiences at UCT of alienation, anger, and misery. Black pain was finally being centered. They talked about the skewed demographics in their classroom—too many white faces—and the absence of those who needed them most, the Black majority. They critiqued patriarchy, supported
African feminism, and posited the need for intersectionality. They encouraged the students to learn, work hard, and not to be afraid; to keep engaging and fighting for change. The professors promised support and more teach-ins. They planned a new seminar about “Black Consciousness and Health.” As the meeting came to a close, the students started to sing. An Indian academic from the sociology department said she wanted to sing an Indian protested song for the students. The night reminded her “of actions that had taken place in lands far away from where we now sit and stand.” Few understood the words of the song, but everyone grasped its meaning.

On March 25, RMF posted a new, elaborated mission statement on their Facebook page. It emphasized Black pain and the dehumanization of Black people at UCT and contrasted UCT’s rhetoric of transformation with the students’ demand for decolonization. This is “a violence only exacted against Black people by a system that privileges whiteness.” The RMF organizers argued that the changes at UCT had to flow “from the Black voices and Black pain that have been continuously ignored and silenced.” Quoting Steve Biko, RMF argued that white involvement can contribute by “conscientizing their own community on campus” and radical action, but only on the movement’s terms.

The statement also critiqued the way in which the UCT management had engaged with the movement and demanded specific actions. “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.” The RMF further demanded the renaming of buildings and roads on campus, the replacement of artworks that eroticize the Black experience, and the recognition of the history of those who built the university. The movement also wanted to re-center the curriculum on Africa and the subaltern, provide support to Black academics and staff, and change the representation of Black lecturers.

**Conclusion: Fall of Rhodes**
On March 27th, the UCT Senate met. On behalf of the university’s senior leadership, Vice-Chancellor Dr Max Price accepted a motion to remove the Rhodes statue from its current position. Two amendments proposed by the SRC were also accepted: to board up the statue and later remove it from the campus permanently. The RMF did not declare victory yet. On March 28th, Kgotsi Chikane said how important it was for the movement that UCT itself decided to bring down the statue.

“It’s the biggest symbol of the institutionalization of racism. That's why we wouldn't want to pull it down ourselves. We want the university to acknowledge this.”
More importantly, he said, is that after we see that the statue is a problem of racism, "we can start looking more deeply at the norms and values of institutionalized racism that don't physically manifest themselves, that are harder to see." Demanding more Black academics and a less Eurocentric curriculum, Chikane argued that RMF wants to "bring people together not under the false veil that we must be unified because Nelson Mandela said we must be unified, but because we understand each other."

Chikane contrasted the RMF movement with Mandela’s politics. “The idea that the 1994 political and economic compromise worked out best for all South Africans, we should be able to question that. We’re creating a space where people can make the point that those who can make the decisions must start chipping away at institutional racism.”

The students continued to occupy the Bremner building—now called Azania House—for another week, and organize activities, discussions, and learning opportunities, in order to transform it into the beating heart of the student revolt where the new politics of the RMF movement could be developed. Indeed, Ramaru student remarked, “Essentially, we’re creating a new politics that we need right now.”33 The strands of ideological thinking, which fed the movement, come from varied sources—from historical Black Consciousness and Pan-Africanism to the contemporary queer and Black feminism politics. The students had rejected “transformation,” which they saw as a superficial catchphrase. Instead, RMF organizers argued that the university must be decolonised. “From the time that it was colonized there was never an attempt to decolonize the university. The university culture is still very white, it’s very elitist, patriarchal, and it’s very heteronormative,” Ramaru said.

On April 9, students celebrated the fall of the Cecil Rhodes statue at the University of Cape Town.34 Cheers went up as a crane removed the bronze statue from its pedestal at South Africa’s oldest university after a month of student demonstrations against a perceived symbol of historical white oppression. Some students in the crowd of hundreds slapped the statue as it came down, while others splashed red paint on it and wrapped Rhodes’s head in paper.
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1 Cape Times, March 11, page 4.
2 The actual quote is: "It is not because the Indo-Chinese discovered a culture of their own that they revolted. Quite simply this was because it became impossible for them to breathe," Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2001), p. 201.
3 Cape Times 26 June 2013.
4 In 2013, the movement began with the use of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter on social media after the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of the African-American teenager Trayvon Martin. They made the police violence a symbol of the institutional racism of mass incarceration. See: Fredrick C. Harris, “The Next Civil Rights Movement” in *Dissent*. 
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On Facebook, this white student immediately gets respect from fellow black students!

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