



RHODES MUST FALL

**THE STRUGGLE TO DECOLONISE
THE RACIST HEART OF EMPIRE**

**WRITTEN BY
RHODES MUST FALL, OXFORD**

PROTESTING THE RHODES STATUE AT ORIEL COLLEGE

Ntokozo Qwabe

On 6 November 2015 more than 250 Oxford students gathered in front of Oxford University's Oriel College to call for the statue of Cecil John Rhodes to fall. The protest lasted for more than two hours and chants such as 'Rhodes was bailed out, we were sold out!', 'Rhodes Must Fall! Take it down!', 'De-de-decolonise', were shouted throughout. Vice Provost Prof. Annette Volting and Senior Dean Dr Francesco Manzini of Oriel College came out to receive a petition, but were told by students to sit down with them as equals. The representatives from Oriel as well as the entire crowd sat down as Rhodes Must Fall Oxford organising member, Black South African Rhodes scholar, and UCT alumnus Ntokozo Qwabe, presented the 85-page petition. The petition had more than 1,900 signatures and 45 pages of comments from signatories. What follows is Ntokozo's powerful speech given before he presented the petition to Oriel College.

I can no longer be silent and complicit in the glorification of colonialism. I am quite unwell today and I was wondering

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whether or not I would be able to do this and in fact, yesterday I went to see a doctor who said I must stay in bed. Amandla!

Crowd responds: Awethu!

After that I rejected the suggestion that I should stay in bed while you are out here fighting the continuation of a brutal system. Thank you for taking the fight to this institution. You guys are making history. You are the first people to come out and do this at Oxford in years. You are the ones that history has been waiting for. You are the ones that history will remember. Amandla!

Crowd chants: Awethu!

Now, before I address the authorities of Oriel College I have a special request that I want to make of the authorities. Often when we engage with these authorities we are often suffocated by the institutional titles behind which they hide. Alright? So often we engage with them as the Provost of Oriel College, the Dean, the so-and-so of Oriel College and we don't engage as human beings. And that in itself is a process of dehumanisation because I, as a descendant of the people that Rhodes brutalised, am told that I should talk to some institution and not to a person who interacts with me as an equal and as a human being. Amandla! So the request that I'm going to make is that I'm going to sit down, this is a trend which the South African movement has adopted when engaging authority, OK? So, we sit down with the authorities. Alright? So we ask the authorities that they sit down with us so that we engage at the same level. Amandla! So we asked the authorities that they sit with us and that they sit with me. I know that I am a person of colour but we don't bite so I would very much appreciate if we can sit down and engage as equals rather than as a student and as authorities of Oriel.

Crowd chants: Please sit down! Please sit down!

So now I would like to request that you comrades sit down with us because we are doing this as a collective and we are engaging with the authorities of Oriel as equals, seated down because there are our representatives that we have entrusted with power but they are one of us at the end of the day. How does it feel to sit down with me? Amandla!

Crowd chants: Awethu!

Amandla!

Crowd chants: Awethu!

Forward with Rhodes falling forward!

Crowd chants: Forward with Rhodes falling forward!

Forward! Amandla!

Crowd chants: Awethu!

Alright, now that we've gotten that business out of the way, a few things. This is how the process of handing over the petition will follow, so I will read you excerpts from the petition. I might read the entire thing in case Oriel needs to hear the entire thing in order to get it that Rhodes must fall!

Crowd chants: Take him down!

Rhodes must fall!

Crowd chants: Take him down!

So, I will read the petition and then I will read a few comments from people from Oriel College because we mustn't paint everyone who is within Oriel College as the enemy. The enemy is the institution. The enemy is the college. The enemy are the titles behind which people hide. But there are progressive people

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at Oriel and there are people who have told us that they stand with us in our call to decolonise Oxford and in our call for the statue to fall. Because they recognise that silence is violence!

Crowd chants: Silence is violence!

Silence is violence!

Crowd chants: Silence is violence!

We can no longer be silent!

Crowd chants: We can no longer be silent!

Amandla!

Crowd chants: Awethu!

So after reading if you have those comments I will then read something of my own to the authorities of Oriel, not as an activist but as a child of my ancestors and as a person who has to deal everyday with the legacy of this man who is glorified in this place, and who has to deal with the everyday violence that comes with the mass impoverishment of South Africans in South Africa, which Oriel apparently celebrates because you know, violence is nice. Amandla!

Crowd chants: Awethu!

Now, let me read you excerpts from the petition. The petition is here comrades, the petition is here. We had to protect it from the elements.

Crowd laughs.

Unfortunately there is no one to protect us in Oxford, but you know. Now, I'm sure that the authorities might have already had a glance at the petition so I want to read the entire thing and in any event, I think like, they can just utilise Google and frankly just download it themselves. Amandla!

Crowd chants: Awethu!

Now, the petition reads, and in your voice as the students of Oxford who are tired in being complicit in the racist glorification of the brutal colonial project:

'We the undersigned call upon Oriel College to take down the statue of Cecil Rhodes that sits overlooking the High Street. This statue is an open glorification of the racist and bloody project of British colonialism. An architect of apartheid in South Africa, Rhodes is the same apartheid colonialist who said' – and I will not sanitise this part, I will not sanitise it. I will see it as he said it. Rhodes, to my people – 'I prefer land to niggers. I prefer land to niggers. The natives are like children, they are just emerging from barbarism. One should kill as many niggers as possible.' Rhodes to my people – 'and in putting his murderous colonial project into practice' – instead of tacit complicity, like we are seeing here at Oriel College.

Crowd cheers.

Amandla!

Crowd chants: Awethu!

Amandla!

Crowd chants: Awethu!

Down with racist symbols down!

Crowd chants: Down!

Down with racist symbols down!

Crowd chants: Down!

Amandla!

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Crowd chants: Awethu!

We find it deplorable that Oriel College continues to glorify an international criminal through its uncritical, deeply violent iconography. As long as the statue remains, Oriel College and Oxford University in general continues to identify with Rhodes' values and to maintain a toxic culture of domination and depression. We believe that colonialism, racism and patriarchy, that the statue is steeped in, has no place in our university. The removal of the statue would be a welcome first step in the university's attempt to redress the ways in which it has been an active beneficiary of empire. While it remains standing, the statue of Rhodes remains a celebration of not just the crimes of the man himself, but the imperialist legacy on which Oxford University has thrived and continues to thrive. While the statue remains, Oxford University continues to condone the persistent racism that shadows this institution even today. For centuries Oxford University has produced, profited from and memorialised the violent conquest of Rhodes and other great Imperial men, including of course, Christopher Codrington, Benjamin Joab and Augustus Pitt Rivers and many other racist colonialists whom, frankly, it would take the whole day to list and mention individually. The university is strewn with visible symbols of its colonial inheritance and remains at the intellectual heart of unjustly attained global privilege. At Oxford, those whose histories, like myself, have been marked by imperialism, are shadowed by statues of their oppressors as they walk through the University and find their history held within the archive of oppression. Here, at Oxford, at Oriel College, a growing number of students are plagued by the absence of legitimate critical means to articulate their experiences and are excluded from a culture rife with Imperial apologism.' Amandla!

Crowd chants: Awethu!

'This exclusion violates the university's own purported commitment to fostering an inclusive culture which promotes equality, values diversity and maintains a working and learning social environment in which the rights and dignity of all its staff and students are respected. The University of Oxford continues to colonise the minds of future leaders through its visual iconography, the concepts and histories on its curricula, the gross underrepresentation of people of colour and other marginalised groups in its staff and student community, the exclusionary networks of power, the cultural capital. This will never be able to change if statues of racist and murderous men maintain their position and visibility as part of Oxford.'

Crowd cheers.

'There is no place for Cecil Rhodes on the High Street, at Oriel College, at Oxford university or anywhere else in the world.'

Crowd cheers.

'The statue must therefore fall.'

Rhodes must fall!

Crowd chants: Take him down!

Rhodes must fall!

Crowd chants: Take him down!

Rhodes must fall!

Crowd chants: Take him down!

Now, before handing over the petition, which I will do in a moment, I want to say something to Oriel College and to

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the authorities of Oriel College who are here with us today. Oriel College has made a number of statements regarding this issue and many of them I find, quite honestly, offensive and violent, as a descendant of the people that Rhodes wronged, and the people that Rhodes butchered and brutalised. Now, what even hurts me the most is that this violent language that Oriel uses is couched in progressive speak. Oriel goes telling people in its pseudo progressive rhetoric that it is proactively acting to deal with the question of Rhodes. It mentions how it has offered to meet with us and how it is somehow leading the project to make Oxford an inclusive space. But where is the proactivity? Where is the proactivity? The fact that it took an entire movement for you to recognise that actually, a statue of a racist colonialist is a problem. The fact that it took an entire movement and hundreds of students at Oxford sitting down with you for you to get the message, and to even come out is an indication that you are not proactive. So please stop lying to us. Down with lies, down!

Crowd chants: Down!

Down with institutional lies, down!

Crowd chants: Down!

Amandla!

Crowd chants: Awethu!

Now I'm further upset by even more violent language that Oriel College uses in its pseudo progressive rhetoric. So, Oriel, in its statements and in the statements of its leaders and authorities, including its Provost, continuously refers to Rhodes as a diplomat, as a businessman, as a benefactor. This is deeply offensive for me because it means that Oriel College is saying to me that diplomacy entails the raiding of an entire

people's land, that diplomacy is holding guns to people's heads. That diplomacy is the mass murder of people.

Crowd cheers.

Oriel College is telling me that business is the mass murder of people into an exploitative system of migrant labour, of exploitative capitalism, of greed, which Rhodes is characterised by. So Oriel College cannot deny, as it seeks to in its pseudo progressive liberal speak, where it continues to say that it is not implicated in Rhodes' values but continues to act and speak in ways which actually recognise him as a diplomat, as a businessman and as a benefactor. A benefactor? So benefactors are people that go dispossessing and stealing from others to benefit other people unjustly? Is that what a benefactor is? Is a benefactor a person that mass murders people in order to make money?

Crowd cheers.

Is Oriel College telling us that these things are OK, because if you recognise, the act of recognising Rhodes as a diplomat, as a businessman, as a benefactor, means that no matter how much you denounce the values (because Oriel has said, we don't identify with the values, we just wanted the money, you know, we want the Ching Ching but we don't want the values.) But in the speak, in the speak, we see the remnants of Rhodes in the language that Oriel uses. Rhodes is present! Rhodes is here! Rhodes is with us! Rhodes is at Oriel! And Rhodes Must Fall!

Crowd chants: Take him down!

Rhodes Must Fall!

Crowd chants: Take him down!

Now, as I hand over the petition, and I want this to be captured on camera, as I hand over the petition as a descendant of the

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people who have been affected and brutalised by Rhodes, I do not want to look at the authorities of Oriel because I do not recognise them. I do not recognise people who will not treat me as an equal and who will dehumanise me by recognising a person who violated my people as a diplomat, a businessman, a benefactor and by glorifying him with a statue, therefore saying it identifies with him. Until the statue has fallen, I refuse to recognise Oriel College. I refuse to enter into a space, and this is what I will continue to say no matter how many times Oriel College invites me and others like you, like me, to come and talk behind some boardroom, I will refuse to do so because the terms of the conversation will already be violent. The language being used will already be dehumanising to me. How can I speak when I am not human? So as I hand over, I will not look at Oriel authorities, I will look the other way, and I want this captured. Alright? Because they have not recognised me, they have erased my entire people's history and that erasure must be captured and the public must know. Alright? The world must know that to Oriel I am invisible. So, I will hand over, and I want this to be captured, that I am not looking at them and I have no interests in looking at them because they have no interest in looking at me. Amandla!

Crowd chants: Awethu!

Amandla!

Crowd chants: Awethu!

We will kindly now ask the Oriel authorities to leave because we, until they have changed their ways, and changing those ways entails committing that they are bringing down Rhodes and they are bringing down the statue, until they have made that commitment, we refuse to give them a platform to speak.

NTOKOZO QWABE

So they will not be addressing us, they will be leaving us to continue with the project that we have started. To decolonise Oxford and to bring Rhodes down.

Cheers.

As they leave we will tell them that Rhodes Must Fall!

Crowd chants: Take him down!

Rhodes Must Fall!

Crowd chants: Take him down!

Rhodes Must Fall!

Crowd chants: Take him down!

Rhodes Must Fall!

Crowd chants: Take him down!

Rhodes Must Fall!