

STAGNANT DEBATES, STAGNANT MINDS

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What do you think about the statue? Can you tell us how the statue will solve anything? These are some of the questions that I've had to answer in the past three weeks of protest that have taken place at the University of Cape Town. In my opinion, the initial group that started the Rhodes Must Fall Movement did not realise that the interpretation of the Rhodes Must Fall symbolism would reveal the state of South African consciousness as it has to this present day. The movement used the statue as a symbol of the institutional racism and other exclusionary politics that are linked to the racism, such as patriarchy and white cultural supremacy.

Although three weeks have past and numerous protests and interviews have been done, the debate is still predominately centred on the statue and the historical implications of its removal. It is disheartening to say that the counter-debates that have surfaced do not directly address our call to a more inclusive institutional culture, but merely address the physical evidence of the lack of transformation. This is telling of the current paradigm that our society exists in - the same European paradigm that Post-Imperialist writers were writing about. From the first black consciousness movement, called Negritude, to the more recent black consciousness scholars, the European paradigm has been problematized in its African context. The European paradigm as the post-colonialist scholar Oyewumi (2005) in *Visualizing the Body: Western Theories and African Subjects*



states that western thought is fixated on reason that is constructed based on the physical. In saying the physical, I'm referring to physical evidence that either supports or critiques an argument. This same Eurocentric reason or logic is present in most European languages that use dualisms such as black-white, male-female and physical-imaginative. In turn, these dualisms simplify the experience to be one or the other. This western ideology constrains citizens from understanding that the physical statue has meaning, feeling and a narrative on transformation embedded in its central positioning on the campus.

I envisaged that the debate would have progressed and transcended the physical at this point in the movement, but the debate has stagnated due to the unwillingness of public to shift their consciousness to a new paradigm of thought. Once the debate starts to use imagination to understand the oppressive nature of institutional racism and other exclusionary politics in institutions, the transformation agenda would begin to be understood holistically.

Therefore, I urge the public to not fall into the trap of the statue debate because it only reinforces the western paradigm of thought that this movement

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is opposing. This debate is complex because black bodies have complex historical grievances that translate into present society. So, in order for Rhodes to fall, I encourage the public to prepare for a shift in consciousness in order to delegitimise white supremacist knowledge. This shift in consciousness entails stripping layers of intergenerational conditioning that have been passed onto society from colonial times. Therefore, in order to start the decolonising process, allow your imagination to move past the physical and think about your counter argument after understanding the narrative. Our narratives have for centuries been simplified for western conquest, so I urge you to conquer your ideological framework by observing, listening and understanding the context of South Africa through the voices of the marginalized. We see it and feel it because society does not provide us with a narrative; this is our narrative, this is the identity of blackness.

REFERENCES

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