

candidates may be viewed as an affront to the principles of equality and diversity.

Let us close on a slightly less dismal note—with Paul Ewart’s just-announced victory in his legal case against the University. This is the latest of several in which senior academics have fought the University’s attempt under its Employer-Justified Retirement Age (dating from 2011) to make them retire before they wanted to. Some were successful, others not. That, however, is hardly the point. Rather, in Tim Horder’s words (*Oxford Magazine* No.383, Noughth Week, Trinity Term 2017), “Using its full financial muscle the University is doggedly defending its stance against its own employees. What a waste of money, money that could be much better spent in helping retirees to continue to contribute to the work of the Uni-

versity.” And in my own words from the succeeding issue (No.384) of the *Magazine*,

“Nothing remotely like the present situation would have arisen under the regime of the General Board. Comprehensive inter-faculty discussion...would have eventuated in a consensus that laboratory-based scientists are in a different category from other scholars as regards the significance of retirement thresholds; and an appropriately differentiated retirement scheme would have been readily prescribed. The present climate of mistrust and exasperation...would never have developed, being due entirely to the exclusion of faculties and departments from top-level decision-taking, and to the correspondingly unwarranted authority now exercised by the central administration.”

Rhodes Must Fall

MICHAEL BIGGS

THE ‘Rhodes Must Fall’ (RMF) campaign emerged in Oxford in 2015. It climaxed in November when around two hundred protesters rallied outside Oriel College, making sweeping demands for decolonizing the University. Their symbolic focus was the statue of Cecil Rhodes, perched prominently above the college entrance. In the most vivid moment of the campaign, Ntokozo Qwabe, a charismatic Rhodes Scholar from South Africa, harangued Oriel’s Vice-Provost and Senior Dean while refusing to look at them. The volume* published by Zed Books provides a useful compilation of documents from the RMF.

The campaign was inspired by developments overseas. RMF started at the University of Cape Town in March 2015, and RMF Oxford was launched in May. Some of the local activists had been involved in the campaign ‘I too am Oxford’, featuring black students, which in turn had been borrowed in 2014 from Harvard. By comparison, RMF was more militant in tone, and it exploited the symbolic prominence of Rhodes in Oxford to dramatize substantial demands to transform the curriculum and increase the number of black academics. Possibly these larger demands were overshadowed by the focus on the legacy of Rhodes.

The volume is particularly informative on symbolism. Patricia Daley (now Professor in the Human Demography of Africa), who studied at Oxford in the 1980s and has lectured here since the 1990s, describes the ‘symbolic violence associated with the silences surrounding the human exploitation at the source of the wealth that funded Rhodes House’ (p. 76). She conveys the disquiet or even disgust felt by people of African descent who had to visit Rhodes House to consult the Commonwealth and African Studies Library. (The collection relocated to the Weston Library in 2014.) The volume also examines symbolism elsewhere. One of the more intriguing chapters, by Odádélé Kambon, recounts opposition to a statue of Gandhi which appeared at the University of Ghana on the eve of a visit by the President of India.

Although RMF’s demand to purge Oxford of problematic imperial symbols evoked passionate opposition, the removal of the statue and the erasure would have no noticeable effect on the life of the University. The same cannot be said for decolonizing the curriculum. The volume is surprisingly vague on specifics. There is an indisputable argument for greater awareness of the colonial and imperial context with which so much Anglophone scholarship was entangled. Akwugo Emejulu points to Locke’s connections with slavery in the American colonies, though her claim that he defended ‘the right to own, rape and murder fellow human beings for profit’ (p. 172) is tendentious.¹ Likewise, the demand to broaden the curriculum in the humanities and social sciences to include non-white and non-Western subjects and scholars should be welcomed. But some of the volume’s authors go much further. According to Ayo Olatunji, ‘scientific empirical data’ manifest the violence of whiteness (p. 357). For Chandra Kant Raju, decolonized mathematics will focus on ‘approximate calculation for practical purposes’ (p. 270) and reject the formalism of deduction and proof. Such sweeping demands for the fundamental transformation of mathematics and natural sciences do not seem likely to succeed.

Like any social movement, RMF constructed a history that served its political purpose. The volume presents mythistory without critical scrutiny. One powerful indictment of Rhodes, for example, was the declaration ‘I prefer land to niggers’. Qwabe repeated these words outside Oriel College (p. 10). This phrase derives from a novel by Olive Schreiner, which misquoted (or perhaps sexed up, as we might say today) Rhodes’ statement to Cape House in 1892: ‘You want to annex land rather than natives. Hitherto we have been annexing natives instead of land.’² Conversely, the volume paints a rosy portrait of precolonial Africa as a land of ‘sharing and inclusive practices’ (p. 88), while colonialism is blamed for recent wrongs. Lwazi Lushaba describes the victims of the 2012 Marikana massacre as ‘Black people whose crime was to be Black in a country that is anti-Black’ (p.

281). The strikers were shot by black policemen working for a black Minister of Police and a black President, apparently encouraged by the mining company's black non-executive director (the latter, Cyril Ramaphosa, a familiar hero from the anti-Apartheid struggle).³ A racial lens can obscure as well as reveal.

The volume does not address the puzzle of why RMF—after garnering significant support and widespread media coverage—failed to achieve its goals. It is not surprising, of course, that activists did not force the University to rewrite the curriculum and transform the racial composition of academic staff. But the statue along with other tangible reminders of Rhodes should have been an easier target. At the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, to take one example, the monument to the Confederate soldier was vandalized continually from 2015, and pulled down in 2018.

An obvious explanation is demographic: there are relatively few persons of colour studying or teaching at the University of Oxford. Against this, however, most of the protesters outside Oriel were white, and so the campaign succeeded in attracting racially diverse supporters. Another explanation is the fracturing of RMF along the lines of race and sex. The volume includes an enigmatic chapter on 'Anti-Blackness, Intersectionality and People of Colour Politics', which castigates nameless 'Women of Colour' (capitalized in the text) for criticizing the African men who led the campaign. Unfortunately their original critique is not included.

One might speculate that symbolism is easier to add than to subtract. Contrast the failure of RMF to dethrone Rhodes with the remarkable recent success of LGBT in branding Oxford with the rainbow: almost every building is bedecked with flags and most non-academic staff make their obeisance by wearing a rainbow lanyard. Given the fact that Rhodes never married but was devoted to a series of male companions, perhaps a neat solution to Oxford's embarrassment would be to rebrand him as a queer pioneer.

¹ Holly Brewer, 'Slavery, Sovereignty, and "Inheritable Blood": Reconsidering John Locke and the Origins of American Slavery', *American Historical Review*, vol. 122, no. 4, 2017, pp. 1038–78.

² <https://thepoorprint.com/2016/01/22/misinformation-in-the-rhodes-campagin/> (sic).

³ A moving documentary is Rehad Desai (director), *Miners Shot Down*, 2014.

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