

## TRANSCRIPT:

### Rekgotsofetse Chikane: Rhodes Must Fall

**Simphiwe Laura Stewart (0:11):** You're listening to RightsUp, a podcast from the Oxford Human Rights Hub. I am Simphiwe Laura Stewart, a DPhil student at the University of Oxford. In today's episode, we speak with Rekgotsofetse Chikane, an author, activist and lecturer at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, about the Rhodes Must Fall movement, in which he is one of the leading figures.

**(0:51)** This episode is part of a four-part series in support of the Black Lives Matter movement. The Oxford Human Rights Hub is an anti-racist organisation and is committed to continuously working to be a better ally to black brothers and sisters protesting for the realisation of their basic rights. The horrific murder of George Floyd in the United States turned worldwide attention towards the scourge of endemic police brutality perpetrated against black communities and communities of colour. It also exposed the complicit cruelty of white indifference. These are not new issues. The struggle for racial equality has been the unforgiving work of generations, the heavy mantle of justice yet to be served has been carried across centuries by defiant peoples whose only demand is a recognition of their basic humanity. We can all do better, and we can all do something in our small corners of the world to support this imperative.

**(1:53)** In the spirit, this podcast series aims to amplify the voices of black and brown scholars, activists and practitioners. The Oxford Human Rights Hub also wants to acknowledge the long legacy of work that has collectively, across time and disciplines, built and bolstered to the foundations of this present movement. Now is the time to listen, learn, support, and amplify. The Hub is fortunate to have a diverse community of scholarship and practice to call upon to share their experience, but conscious to avoid complacency, the Hub is also committed to asking, 'Who is missing?' It hopes to answer this question by making space for others to be seen and heard.

**(2:36)** Rekgotsofetse Chikane is the author of "Breaking a Rainbow, Building a Nation: The Politics Behind #MustFall [Movements]". He was one of the leading figures of the Rhodes Must Fall movement in South Africa. Currently, Rekgotsofetse is a lecturer at the University of the Witwatersrand and pursuing a PhD in development, complexity economics and decoloniality. He studies public policy processes, public administration, and governance in a digital age. He is a graduate of the Master of Public Policy (MPP) programme at the University of Oxford's Blavatnik School of Government, as well as the University of Cape Town Public Policy and Administration (PPA BSc) programme. Rekgotsofetse is the former National President of InkuluFreeHeid (IFH), a non-partisan youth movement in South Africa, that works to create innovative solutions to socio-economic problems facing the youth, deepening democracy, and enhancing social cohesion.

**(3:36)** Rekgotsofetse, thank you for joining us today.

**Rekgotsofetse Chikane (3:39)** Thanks for having me.

**Simphiwe Laura Stewart (3:40)** So, what is the Rhodes Must Fall movement? What are its core aims, and how and when did it begin in South Africa and in Oxford?

**Rekgotsofetse Chikane (3:51)** I always attribute it to a movement that happened at the University currently known as Rhodes. And in January of that year [2015], they had a protest where they used the moniker "Rhodes So White". And they used that phrasing as a way of highlighting the experiences

of black students at Rhodes University, and why whiteness and white culture within the university was so pertinent. And it's very university specific, but it really stuck in the minds of a lot of people. And the previous year, before Rhodes Must Fall, we had quite a brutal year of student politics. So you kind of have this political climate where the SRC [Student Representative Council] is no longer representative necessarily of black students — and it's an over-simplification, but that happens. You have a breakaway group from the dominant political party, or black political party, being SASCO, and that breakaway was essentially saying, SASCO focuses too much on class analysis, and they don't focus enough on the experiences of black students, in particular. That breakaway becomes [inaudible], and within all that fight you have this brand-new organisation — not brand new in the country, but brand new to UTC, called PASMA, the Pan-African Students Movement, and they decide to rock up on campus.

**(5:07)** So all these different factions in different ways, bruised egos from the past years fights, etcetera etcetera, and you have this meeting that happens. So no prominent student leaders are really talking to each other, including myself, right, there were individuals that I just wasn't talking to anymore. And then you have this event organised by what was known there as The Collective, that was titled, Did Nelson Mandela sell-out? — something along those lines. And within that meeting, for the first time in a very long time, you got a lot of student leaders who would become quite prominent in Rhodes Must Fall, being in the same room for the first time in ages, and all agreeing on the same idea — that we all think Nelson Mandela sold out, in multiple different ways.

**(5:51)** So again, we don't need to get into that discussion... But that was hugely important because when Chumani, who in mainstream politics at UCT was a complete outlier, no one— like, he was there, but he was part of an older generation, no one really cared about him in any particular way. But when he threw shit at the statue that fateful day, sometime in March [2015], it set into motion a series of events over that week that brought together all these stakeholders in a formalised aspect. So, I hosted— in response to him shuffling shit at the statue, I hosted a meeting on campus that I thought maybe like 50, 60 people would come, as per usual — 1000 plus people ended up coming. In that meeting, you had a lot of black students who were explaining their experiences in different ways. And during that we also had black academics, who for the first time decided to put their necks out on the line. And all these different factors all essentially converged.

**(6:49)** So after this main meeting that I organised on campus, a meeting was held afterwards to discuss, how do we move forward? And that's where this idea of Rhodes Must Fall started gaining traction, but the ideals of Rhodes Must Fall only formed as we went on with our mobilisation and activism. So at the beginning of it, the core pillar of it was essentially black consciousness — that's really what it was. Within two weeks of our occupation, we realised that the men of the space were being ridiculous, awful human beings, and a call was made to kick all men out unless they start respecting women in the space, and from that moment, you then have the pillar of black radical feminism coming, and the influence of PASMA, which had never really been on campus before, to add the notion of pan-Africanism in particular. So I like simplifying Rhodes Must Fall, as you kind of need to understand that history, to eventually get to the three pillars of Rhodes Must Fall, at least at the very beginning, which was black consciousness, black radical feminism, and pan-Africanism.

**(7:55)** And the hugely important point I would like to make before I kind of end off now is that it is *\*extremely\** contested. Very few people held all three ideals at once. But those three pillars essentially guided the ideology of the movement at different points in time.

**Simphiwe Laura Stewart (8:16)** Thank you so much for that rich history, Rekgotsofetse. I didn't know how those three pillars came to be, even though I participated in Rhodes Must Fall in Oxford. A follow-

up question might be whether you think the three core pillars that were developed and identified in South Africa carried over to the movement in Oxford — do you think that they carried over?

**Rekgotsofetse Chikane (8:45)** I think they did to an— So I think black consciousness definitely carried over, because black consciousness has an ethereal ability to essentially intoxicate many people. So that's very easy. But notions of— I wouldn't know how black radical feminism would have come to Oxford or if it did, because as history has shown us— and I don't want to, like, stand as an expert on this in any particular way, but black radical feminism is never invited into the space, right? It's never— no one sits at the beginning and says, this is what we're going to do, ideally — that's not what happens. It's usually quite— it has to fight its way into a room. So I don't know if it ever came to Oxford, but I imagine if it didn't, it would be because there were gatekeepers who would have stopped it from coming in, who wouldn't have wanted it to come in.

**(9:38)** The pan-Africanism, I can see it clearly, mostly because the one funny thing — and this will be one of many controversial things I'll say today — is, Rhodes Must Fall really wasn't open to other African students at the very beginning. And we— Rhodes Must Fall was often called out by African students on campus, and different platforms in different ways. And the core fear was, you are not talking enough about— you're sitting on your soapbox, talking about how we should liberate the continent from Cape to Cairo, but you never actually talk to the African students on campus about the experiences on campus. It became South African centred in many different ways.

**(10:32)** But I imagine in Oxford — and you would know much better than me — that the amount of— the need to have an African community at Oxford is one that allows people to breathe, and have their lives, and live their lives as freely as possible, to share experiences with each other. So the community of African students at Oxford, I suspect, is a lot stronger than the community of African students of UCT [the University of Cape Town] in particular. I can talk about that for hours, about whether South Africans like the rest of the continent all too much...

**(11:05)** What I do know is a common theme between— or a common string between the two would be this notion of the black experiences on each individual campus, which would be different in different ways. But I think that central connective tissue, essentially, is what binds that organisation more so than the pillars. Because the pillars can— should change, depending on your context, right? You shouldn't live and die on your hill of black consciousness, black radical feminism, and pan-Africanism. Your context should dictate the experience that you have, and therefore if it does, the experiences should be first and foremost as the foundational pillar of your ideology. And that's how I like seeing the connection with the material — it allows me to essentially bypass the noise and better understand our foundational ideas, essentially.

**Simphiwe Laura Stewart (11:58)** Okay, so we've started to speak about what was common and what maybe was not as common in the two iterations of Rhodes Must Fall, in South Africa and in Oxford. But certainly, one central thing that united both movements was the goal to remove colonial iconography, and the focus on the statue of Cecil Rhodes at the University of Cape Town and certainly here at the University of Oxford. Why was the initial focus of the movement on the statue of Cecil Rhodes, and perhaps you can speak then about what the statue symbolises to you?

**Rekgotsofetse Chikane (12:43)** The first— [*Laughter*] Little fun facts about the statue. The first recorded protest against the Cecil John Rhodes statue on campus was essentially— I think it was like five years after it was erected, so 1930, whatever. It was a couple of years after it was erected, and the first students who protested against that were Afrikaans students. Afrikaans students— so it got erected and they were just like, "What on earth is happening here? Why would you put up the statue of this particular individual on the campus?" Right? So when people often talk about the statue, and

Rhodes Must Fall being this protest against it, that statue has been a bone of contention at the university for over 80 years. It's not a new issue in any particular way. And what it represented to a lot of people was the acceptance of the University of a particular ideology, that essentially said, "There are those who are better than others. Fact. There are those who are better than others, and because of that, I must conquer those that I am better than". And that's what the statue represented in many different ways, as a holistic idea, for people who protested against it.

**(13:59)** At a more micro level, how people experience the statue in particular was just a reminder of how... what's the word? How excluded you were from the space, how unwelcome you were [in] the space, how you didn't fit the norm of this institution. Now, if the statue sat in some random corner— So I always joke around about the statue in Oriel College, I couldn't see it the first few times that I went there, someone had to, like, point it out to me, because you kind of have to look up and all that jazz. But the statue of UCT is hard to miss when it was there. The majority of students who live on lower campus, which is the most densely populated area of UCT— If you walk from lower campus to upper campus, you have to walk past the statue, the vast majority of people will have to walk back past the statue. Its central position at the University, as this central, symmetrical line, meant that every single picture of the University had that statue in place, its position of prominence was a constant reminder to students about who you were, relative to the norm in that space.

**(15:10)** And I think a lot of people had issues with it, in multiple different ways, even the University itself. And I give the University credit for this, because the year before Rhodes Must Fall happened, the Vice Chancellor at the time, Max Price, had actually set up a process to remove the statute. So even the University itself as an institution recognised that— it took a while but it recognised itself that the statue has to go, at some point. That acknowledgement from different sectors tells the story of something that we all fundamentally— maybe not every single individual but we all have a fundamental belief that the statue isn't representative of the type of university we want to build, the type of country that we want to build. And the focus on the statue — I mean, I always kind of joke around about this, is that it was more of a lightning-rod issue than the core issue of our movement at the time. The Rhodes Must Fall statue gave us— I mean, the Rhodes statue gave us prominence, brought the media spotlight, and has brought the University attention on us. But most people would tell you, more often than not, that it really was not about the statue, but that the statue was a by-product of our activities, and that we were using the statue to gain attention in order to push through particular reforms in the University, some of which are still in place at the University, and some of which were pushed by the wayside. And I think that's why there was so much importance put on it.

**Simphiwe Laura Stewart (16:46)** I absolutely appreciate that. I think part of our thinking, as Rhodes Must Fall in Oxford this year, was certainly on that idea that you brought up about colonial iconography, and not the statue so much as what the statue represents. You've brought up something really interesting about this process of negotiation between students and the university. Why do you think that it's been so important for the university — whether it's the University of Cape Town or the University of Oxford — to be brought into the process of removing the statue, instead of students just taking it down themselves?

**Rekgotsofetse Chikane (17:33)** Yeah, so when Rhodes Must Fall started, the first response from the University, at least through our little negotiations we were having was, "Well, this is happening already. Just follow the normal University processes, it's going to go through this committee meeting, and then this committee meeting, and eventually it's going to get to Senate, and after Senate it will get to Council, and Council will decide", and that Council meeting was planned for, like, October or November, something like that. I remember listening to Max Price, and telling him, like, "I hear you, we hear your process. However, in two weeks' time, the statue is going to go down. Now \*you\* can go do whatever you need to do as an institution, 100 per cent. But we're telling you that this statue

will go down in two weeks' time" (whatever the time period was). Magically, the committee meeting got moved up ahead of schedule, and they had that committee meeting, they came back to us and said, "Give us a bit more time, we've moved everything up, the Council meeting is now going to happen in June", I remember that happening. And again, our response was, "We hear you. However, we're going to keep disrupting, we're going to keep occupying, because we know that on this particular date, the statue will be removed. So again, go off and do your process." All of a sudden, the Council meeting moved from June to March, in the middle of Rhodes Must Fall and our occupation. And the importance of that, and the importance of the University having to do what they call the "University Transformation Forum" — I think that was the name— Essentially they called the meeting of all students on campus to come talk about their experiences— The importance of that is that we needed the institution, not us as students, not particular academics, not the Vice Chancellor, not Council, but the institution as a whole, to be able to come to the conclusion that this needs to change. And the importance of that is that it allows you to fight less fights in the future. You come up against a lot less institutional barriers to change in the long run when the institution changes its mindset and its philosophy around particular ideals that it holds as a norm. And I think that's the importance of the university and institutions making that change. And students convincing these universities to make that change, because it just makes a better world in the long run, at least in my opinion.

**Simpfiwe Laura Stewart (20:03)** Part of what you said brings up an interesting question for me, in terms of the difference in relationships of power, and maybe subordination and control that exists between the movement in South Africa and the movement in Oxford. You spoke about occupation, you spoke about interruption, and those definitely were not strategies that we felt we could easily employ here in Oxford because of the precarity, I think, of our situation, as immigrants, visa holders, as guests, really, in the space that Oxford occupies. Can you speak about why that cultural difference and that strategic difference exists in your perspective?

**Rekgotsofetse Chikane (20:54)** Yes, you used the word "guest", then, which I find quite interesting. What— The politics that had happened in the previous two years and over the previous decade, essentially, that led up to Rhodes Must Fall, was a series of discussions, a series of events, a series of moments, etcetera, etcetera, that all essentially, not culminated, but pushed up the notion of, "If you're a black student at UCT, you're not a guest at this university." So when I first came to UCT, that was in 2011, at the time, the demographic split of the university— So remember, South Africa being 80 plus per cent black, and the demographics of UCT was that 50 per cent, at that time, 50 per cent of the student body was white, and the other 50 per cent was all other people of colour, including African students in general, who are also people of colour. So you can see that, immediately, you can say that this space is just topsy-turvy, right? If you grew up in a township, and you came to UCT, you would look at that space and wonder, "What country am I in? What is going on here? I've never seen this amount of white people in my entire life", as many people would say.

**(22:10)** So the efforts of the decade prior was a concerted effort to no longer feel as a guest. And once you no longer feel that your position within the university is threatened, that you don't feel like a guest, you then become emboldened to fight for what you believe should be your home. And your home should be decorated, it should be built in the manner that you see fit. And for people who stand in the way, who have power, sometimes the biggest way to get their attention is to make them feel uncomfortable with the power that they have and how they gained that power. And once you achieve that, I think you're then on the right path of changing things. So different factions have said, "We don't want to be like Oxford Must Fall" and "We just want to be our own Rhodes Must Fall", and etcetera, etcetera. For me, the strategy and tactics are bound to differ, but the underlying principles shouldn't, which is making power feel uncomfortable with the power that it has. I think that's what matters the most.

**Simpfiwe Laura Stewart (23:15)** So while there is Rhodes Must Fall in South Africa, and there's Rhodes Must Fall in Oxford, they're certainly part of a larger framework of anti-oppression, decolonial movements in history and across time space. Can you speak a little more about how Rhodes Must Fall specifically relates to other movements across the world and across time space? So, is there some relationship between our movement and the civil rights movement in the United States, or anti-apartheid movements, perhaps the women's rights movement, just to mention a few? And if there is some connection, what similarities, or what things do you feel that they have in common?

**Rekgotsofetse Chikane (24:06)** Yeah, so a lot of us at the beginning of Rhodes Must Fall, when we started, it was a quite a few of us who said, "Well, if we're going to do this, we're gonna have to study how everyone else did this." And a huge amount of effort was put into doing research into different movements. So in particular, I focused on how people organised for the Arab Spring, I focused on how the student protests in Chile — in particular, in 2010, 2011, I think — had formulated their thoughts, how they organised at a grassroots level, all the way to the macro level of how do you control a nationwide student protest? So there was a concerted effort to try and learn from others.

**(24:52)** There was a discussion of, how do we bring in Black Lives Matter into the movement? How do we bring their particular ideals and ideologies etcetera, etcetera... and I objected to it. Not the objection to Black Lives Matter as an organisation or as a movement, but an acknowledgement that these are different fundamental contexts that Black Lives Matter is fighting compared to the South African experience. And the underlying thing around the South African experience is that, unlike Black Lives Matter, we are not a minority population within a white dominant country — we are black majority in a black dominant country. The argument I was making was, if we take the stance of strategy and tactics informed by being a group fighting for your existence within a white dominant country, if we take on that tactic, we are then accepting defeats, at the very beginning, almost — we're starting on the backfoot. Our stance should be that we're not asking for existence, we're not demanding our existence. Our existence is here — we're a black dominant country, we are who we are. And the beauty of that was that it made us realise — it became — it made us more emboldened.

**(26:13)** So essentially that fight won out, and we brought Black Lives Matter in later on, almost like a month later, or two months later, and we became unified at the hip, in my mind. But I think at that point, it was unified at the hip in a manner that didn't compromise our foundational beliefs, our initial strategy and tactics. So there was a huge effort to connect to different movements, but it wasn't the case of "copy-paste" everything that you see — it's just an acknowledgement that we're all part of one movement that has certain variations to it, that we all need to conquer these little local fights in order for us to get onto the same page of what the global issue looks like.

**Simpfiwe Laura Stewart (26:56)** So my next question — and thank you so much for that response — is on human rights specifically, and human rights issues. At the core of both Rhodes Must Fall and Black Lives Matter is a concern for human rights — so, a need to remedy discrimination experienced by, and injustices perpetrated against, black people. How do you see human rights values being exhibited through these movements?

**Rekgotsofetse Chikane (27:25)** I mean, the very notion of asking to exist, right? The fight for someone to say that "I want to exist fully, and wholly" is someone essentially saying that "I am fighting for my basic human rights" — because that's really what human rights are, at least in my mind. And I think Black Lives Matter and Rhodes Must Fall are just different iterations of multiple different movements, fighting for that human rights to exist, and \*freely\* exist in the world. And some people might say, "Well, you're alive, aren't you? You've got a job, and you go to school", and all that jazz. But if you don't feel as if you're part of a society, if you don't feel as if you're part of something greater than yourself — and not in, like, a philosophical sense — that you're just part of something greater than

yourself, if you feel excluded from the mechanisms of what makes a human experience a human experience, that normal human experience, then you should do everything in your power to fight for it. And I think that's how both these movements understand human rights.

**Simphiwe Laura Stewart (28:33)** So we were just speaking about the statue of Rhodes, and human rights issues, and the sort of shared experience of trying to demand real humanity. In that context, what would you say to those who argue, pejoratively, that removing statues of colonialists, or changing curricula, is rewriting history?

**Rekgotsofetse Chikane (20:01)** I think it's the dumbest arguments in the world. [*Laughter*] I think, out of all the foolish arguments I've heard over my time on this planet, that's— it's right up there. I've got two issues with it.

**(29:15)** If we lived 200 years ago, 300 years ago, and someone wanted to remove statues, or books, or anything like that, cool, I get it, I completely get it. But when you live in a world in which so much information is available at your fingertips, the ability to rewrite history in our current day and age is almost nigh on impossible, especially if the history is about white culture, and whiteness, and white people in particular. Certain things can be hidden from history, 100 per cent, but the majority of things that are hidden from history are usually people of colour's history, across the world. You don't even have to make a superficial argument about this — just by sheer numbers, the amount of cultures that have been erased from history, who happened to be people of colour, vis-à-vis white people, is completely disproportional. So we live in a day and age where it is extremely hard now to essentially rewrite history. You can change a narrative, 100 per cent, you can try and talk about fake news, etcetera, etcetera, but it's really hard to just change history in this day and age. So that's my first argument against it.

**(30:38)** My second argument is, why is it that people who've never learned about Rhodes, have never studied Rhodes, have never learned a single piece of information about the man, become some of his most ardent defenders? That's more fascinating for me. If I like an old white academic, all white man, or all white funder in Oxford in the UK complains because, you know, he used to study Rhodes — cool, I get you, you've got a leg to stand on, I hear your complaints. But when a young student who's never really thought about Cecil John Rhodes, or any other white iconography, or anything of the sort of colonial symbolism, like you've never studied it, you've never thought deeply about it — Why does it— Why do you feel so— vehemently objecting the idea of removing such a statute, and people will say, "Well, it's on principle." And I say, "Well, there's many things in life that you could argue on principle, but you don't." Right? Why is it that this one takes such a prominent stance? And I think that question becomes more interesting to pose to people about the inclination to protect white symbols, colonial symbols, colonial statues, that inherent belief that this has to stay, that needs to be questioned. And I think that belief is one that bears a moment of pause from those who are fighting against the symbols to ask themselves, "How do you stop that way of thinking? How does society keep reproducing individuals who have no sense of history, but are willing to defend the most awful parts of our history, at the drop of a dime?"

**Simphiwe Laura Stewart (32:29)** So we've spoken very much about posterity, especially how white institutions— or the lengths to which white institutions and white supremacy more broadly will go to perpetuate and protect itself. One of the arguments that was made against the removal of the statue at the University of Cape Town was that there was some Will, or some legal reason why this couldn't happen. And so the question is, how should we deal with instances where the removal of statues could put academic institutions at risk of breaching certain legal obligations, for example, relating to conditions attaching to property conferred under a Will?

**Rekgotsofetse Chikane (33:10)** Institutions have this belief that if they change things that they are supposedly contractually obligated to uphold — old traditions, old pieces of structure, artwork, etcetera, etcetera — that somehow there is hell to pay if they do that. And I think what universities need to start pushing more towards is the understanding that as society changes, as the morals of our society change, they also dictate that the university has to change its approach to old legacies that are underpinned by things that they are supposedly contractually obligated to uphold. This is the argument that I used to give to UCT, for multiple— when they said, "Well, we need to talk to the heritage foundation", and I said, "Well, you can talk to them, but when you enter the discussion, don't enter the discussion from the perspective of you're \*protecting\* this, because then we've got it all twisted at that point. You should enter that discussion of what we do with the statue from the perspective of, "Where can we take this? What can we do with it? We know we don't want it on our property anymore, because our society dictates that this is not what we want." And obviously, you don't want that always to happen — society can be dreadfully wrong a lot of the time when it comes to these issues. But I think as a general guiding principle, nothing that is discriminatory, or offensive, that reminds people of their non-existence within a planet or within a space, should be protected by the rule of law. That's just my general perspective on what the rule of law should be about.

**Simphiwe Laura Stewart (34:51)** We've spoken very much about the futurity of the movement. What would you say constitutes success in the Rhodes Must Fall movement? How should we define "success" in this context?

**Rekgotsofetse Chikane (35:02)** For me, the success of Rhodes Must Fall is not the activities of the movement itself, the day-in-day-out machinations of this movement. The success of Rhodes Must Fall is the way that it has changed people's minds from here onwards, from the moment that it was created to the moment that it no longer organised within an occupied space, whatever people deemed the moment it ended. For me, the success is that you now have a generation of young people, in this country and across the world, who have the firm belief that the status quo is not sustainable anymore.

**(35:42)** And that's overwhelming success. You can never take it away, because you've inspired an entire generation of people to think differently about their circumstances, and not just think differently, right? We've thought differently for multiple years. But to have the belief to say that I will \*fight\* for this change, to change the way people view me, and to change the status quo that believes that I am "other" to a space, that I'm "less than" in a space, and I will be purposely antagonistic to those who want to perpetuate that belief system. And I think that is how you should, if you have to measure the success of the movement— and in that respect, you then start thinking about the movement, not just as people within the room, but the ideologies that it helped create.

**Simphiwe Laura Stewart (36:34)** So Rekgotsofetse, we're on the last few questions, and these are really about, "Where to from here?" These are questions about transition and transformation. In terms of the removal of statues, what or who should occupy the empty spaces?

**Rekgotsofetse Chikane (36:50)** So I remember... [*Laughter*] Why I am laughing was, I remember, I sat on the side of the fence, I was like, "We need to replace it with something", I was very vehement about it. And the original— I think the original idea I had, like the very early stages (I'm really embarrassed to even say it now), I was like, it would just be really, really interesting to have like a statue of either— and each one would say something very different, but you could have a statue of either Nelson Mandela, Robert Sobukwe, or Steve Biko, right next to the Rhodes statues, or maybe all three of them, looking at the Rhodes state with like a disapproving look. And I thought that was hilarious at the time, and I look back at it being like, "What an awful suggestion to make". I now sit on the side of the fence, I've been convinced to come over to it, of that I don't think there is a need to put anything there. I

think our desire— and I flip-flop on this for different reasons, but for that particular position at UCT, I don't think anything needs to be there. What I believe is that that space should be remembered as a space in which anyone can project, whatever they believe, as a symbol that makes them feel welcomed in that space. So that would be my argument for that particular spot on that campus — that you leave it empty, as just a reminder — You could put a plaque there that says, "This used to be where the statue was", I don't really care. But just as a reminder where people can project their own notions of representation in that space. And I think South Africa, in particular, — I can't speak about the UK, because I've never lived there for an extended period of time — I think there is a lack of effort that is put into remembering our culture outside of street names, and outside of museums. And I think a more concerted effort has to be made in making sure that the history that was etcetera, etcetera, and the way that we learn about the history of our country.

**Simphiwe Laura Stewart (39:11)** See, it's spoken very much about what you think should happen with the empty space that used to be occupied by the Cecile Rhodes statue at the University of Cape Town. But I wonder, how should we deal with other symbols of the colonial past and the legacies of Empire?

**Rekgotsofetse Chikane (39:30)** Societies always come to the conclusion, in multiple different ways— I mean, it's extremely subjective, but we've come to the conclusion that history that has showcased that it was brutal to those that are deemed an "other", it was brutal to those it deemed as "less than", it was brutal to those deemed it had "conquered" in a particular way — people don't like to remember that history. In general, like, we— as time has gone on, society has generally shown that kind of tendency. And I think people think colonialism was like a— it was like a hundreds of years ago type of thing, right? Colonialism only died— colonialism was with us until like, the early 90s, in certain aspects of the world, right? Like this is— colonialism as its raw form, as a function of our society over time, is still fairly new. And I think our society is now turning the corner on us being able to look at that particular piece of history and saying we need to move away from it. And because of that, I think, colonial legacies and iconography of statues or symbols, I think there'll be increasing— there'll be an increasing amount of critiques around them and increasing amount of disdain for those types of symbols. I think our society is naturally moving in that direction.

**(41:06)** The question then becomes like, "What do you do with them?" Do you burn them all? Do you do what the Russians did, create like a little cemetery for these statues? A funny story is, right now, the Rhodes Must Fall— the Cecile John Rhodes statue, I'm not sure if you know where it is right now? But it was being bid on by people across the world, and one of the people who I think almost won the bid, if I'm not mistaken — I don't know where the story last went off — was this Texan billionaire who's made a habit of buying up colonial statues from across the world, and puts them in his home. It's a weird, weird fact of life, and he desperately wants this statue. What we do with the statue, I think there shouldn't be as much of a preoccupation on it. You could do many things with it. It really depends on the context. If a billionaire wants to buy it, let them buy it. If a museum wants to hold it, let the museum hold it (as long as it's not stolen from you in any particular way). I think the bigger belief we should have is that we don't want those symbols in place anymore. And I think that should be the central aim of any movement that looks at these particular symbols and statues, etcetera.

**Simphiwe Laura Stewart (42:22)** Perhaps in closing, Rekgotsofetse, what are the long-term ambitions of the Rhodes Must Fall movement, and what do you think its priorities for the near future should be?

**Rekgotsofetse Chikane (42:33)** One of the unwritten aspects of the protests in 1976 — so the youth protests in 1976 — wasn't just the protest itself, right? It wasn't just that the apartheid state shot at individuals. But what it— as a lot of people say, it reignited the fight against apartheid. And for me, the long term goal of \*not\* Rhodes Must Fall as an organisation or as a movement, but the long term goal of every single person who associates themselves with Rhodes Must Fall — so it's independent

of having a physical structure in place, it's independent of having a particular individual being that rallying call, that freedom fighter [for] everyone— I think the long term goal is that every individual should be able to go preach the gospel of Rhodes Must Fall (if I have to use some biblical terms for it), whether it is to your colleagues, within your workplace, whether it is amongst your friends, whether it is to your children in the future. I think that should be the long-term mechanisation of Rhodes Must Fall, and I think if we do that, we don't just succeed, but what we actually end up doing is that you create the foundation for something new to be created. And I hope that's the case, and I hope it happens within my "youth lifetime", not my entire lifetime. My hope before I turn 40 is that I can see that firm foundation taking root, at least in South Africa, and in southern Africa as well. But we shall see.

**Simphiwe Laura Stewart (44:15)** Thank you so much for that. I'm actually reminded by a quote from Athinagamso Nkopo, who was one of the co-facilitators of Rhodes Must Fall while here in Oxford and who went on to co-edit the Rhodes Must Fall book, and she said, "We must hope that our actions and the voices we give confidence to will roll over into the next generation, so that they will align themselves to a global project of decolonisation." I thought that was really poignant, and it really made me reflect on how grateful and thankful I am for all of the work of activists like yourself, and student organisers like yourself, in organising, and demanding, and calling attention to this issue of decolonisation, and really paving the way under very difficult circumstances for students like me to participate in this movement, but also really to take it one step further. Thank you so much for your time today.

**Rekgotsofetse Chikane (45:15)** Thanks for having me.

**Simphiwe Laura Stewart (45:16)** RightsUp is brought to you by the Oxford Human Rights Hub. The Executive Producer is Kira Allmann. This episode was co-produced by Natasha Holcroft-Emmess and Sarah Dobbie, edited by Christy Callaway-Gale and Kira Allmann, and hosted by Simphiwe Laura Stewart. Music for this series is by Rosemary Allmann. Show notes for this episode have been written by Sarah Dobbie. Thanks to our production team members — Sandra Fredman, Meghan Campbell, Mónica Arango Olaya, and Gauri Pillai — for their valuable feedback in putting this episode together. Subscribe to this podcast wherever you like to listen to your favourite podcasts.