The Rise of Fallism:
#RhodesMustFall and the Movement to Decolonize the University

Abdul Kayum Ahmed

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy under the Executive Committee of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2019
© 2019
Abdul Kayum Ahmed
All Rights Reserved
When a black student threw feces against a bronze statue of British imperialist, Cecil John Rhodes, located at the University of Cape Town (UCT), it sparked the formation of the #RhodesMustFall (#RMF) student movement in March 2015. The Black-led #RMF movement sought to decolonize the university by confronting institutional racism and patriarchy at UCT through a series of disruptive and creative tactics including occupying university buildings and erecting a shack on campus. As part of their decolonization process, black students tried to make sense of their experiences in a predominantly white university by de-linking from UCT’s dominant model of Euro-American knowledge to construct their own decolonial framework comprised of Pan-Africanism, Black Consciousness and Black radical feminism. A few weeks later in May 2015, students at the University of Oxford in the United Kingdom who were inspired by the student movement at UCT, created the #RhodesMustFall Oxford movement, using the Rhodes statue at Oriel College as a focal point in their call to decolonize the university.

This dissertation explores the formation of the radical #RMF student movements at UCT and Oxford—referred to as the Fallist movements. I first consider what led the #RMF movement at UCT to adopt a decolonial framework centered on Black radical feminism, Black Consciousness, and Pan-Africanism, and then examine how the #RMF’s decolonial framework generated the emergent idea of “Fallism” that extended beyond the students’ demand for the
Rhodes statue to fall. Finally, I assess the ways in which the formation of #RMF Oxford was influenced by the #RMF movement in Cape Town.

The #RMF mission statement characterized the black experience at UCT as “black pain” or as “the dehumanization of black people” informed by the “violence exacted only against black people by a system that privileges whiteness”. In order to better understand their experiences of black pain, student activists de-linked from the university’s dominant knowledge production systems that privileged whiteness through its epistemic architecture. The #RMF UCT movement’s de-linking or “epistemic disobedience”, was also employed by students at Oxford who wanted to integrate “subjugated and local epistemologies” into the Eurocentric university curriculum.

Based on this empirical analysis of the #RMF’s engagement in epistemic disobedience at both UCT and Oxford, I argue that the university occupies a paradoxical position for Black and other marginalized bodies: it is simultaneously empowering and dehumanizing; it offers the possibility of acquiring knowledge that could serve as a liberatory tool from the violence of socio-economic marginality (Black liberation), while at the same time, the physical and epistemic architecture of the university can create an oppressive, alienating space for Black, queer and disabled bodies among others (Black pain).

This assertion leads me to experiment with developing Fallism into an emergent decolonial option that emanates from acts of epistemic disobedience to unveil the hegemonic intellectual architecture of the university. Through a combination of 98 interviews, one year of observations, and document analysis, this study offers insights into the formation and evolution of the #RMF student movements at UCT and Oxford, while contributing to a critical understanding of the university’s paradoxical epistemic architecture.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

I - INTRODUCTION

Rationale and Significance 8
Dissertation Outline 11

II - BACKGROUND

Introduction 14

Historical Context 15

A Timeline of the #RMF Movement in Cape Town 22

A Timeline of the #RMF Oxford Movement 49

III – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction 57

Epistemic Disobedience 59

Social Movements Theory 67

Public Pedagogy 72

Theory from the South 75

IV – RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction 80

Interviews 83

Observations 88

Document Analysis 91

Coding Research Data 94

Coding Software 94

The Coding Process 95
Validity and Trustworthiness 98
The Researcher 99
Limitations 100

V – BLACK PAIN/BLACK LIBERATION 105
Introduction 105
The Birth of a Movement 106
Constructing a Decolonial Framework 114
Black Consciousness 116
Black Radical Feminism 124
Pan-Africanism 136

VI - THE RISE OF FALLISM 146
Introduction 146
The Emergence of #Fallism 148
On Constructions of Fallism 149
Fallism and the Question of the Human/Non-Human 157
Fallism as a Decolonial Option 168

VII - ON EMPIRE 177
Introduction 177
The Influence of #RMF Cape Town on the Oxford Movement 180
Comparing the #RMF Oxford and Cape Town Movements 192
Race as an Organizing Tactic 193
Theoretical Frameworks 198
Gender and Intersectionality 204
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fallism as a Decolonial Option from the South</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII – CONCLUSION</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Written in part from a hospital bed prior to my appendectomy on January 1, 2019, and during my convalescence at home, this inadequate list of acknowledgements represents my feeble attempt at expressing gratitude to the many individuals and institutions who nurtured, encouraged and inspired the writing of this dissertation. My research was generously funded through grants provided by Teachers College, the Oppenheimer Memorial Trust, the Advanced Consortium on Cooperation, Conflict and Complexity, and the National Academy of Education/Spencer Fellowship.

I would like to firstly acknowledge and thank my dissertation advisor, Professor S. Garnett Russell, who gently guided me through the Ph.D. process to emerge with radically new ways of thinking and being. Your generous trust and encouragement created the space for my political and intellectual evolution, while simultaneously ensuring that I remained grounded in the academic project. Thank you to Professor Nicholas Limerick who read through an earlier draft of my dissertation providing comprehensive and meticulous notes that critically influenced my emergent thoughts and ideas. I am also deeply appreciative to the rest of my dissertation committee, chaired by Professor Souleymane Bachir Diagne, and comprised of Professor Vanessa Agard-Jones and Professor Lewis Gordon, who played a fundamental role in offering insights and advice that profoundly shaped my thinking and scholarship.

To my family and friends in South Africa, the U.K. and the United States who encouraged, supported, housed, entertained and fed me during my research, I am incredibly grateful. My parents, Hawa and Abdul Wahab, thank you for providing me with the many opportunities that you were so forcefully denied and prohibited from even dreaming about. Thank you for guiding, supporting, and loving me before, during and after this research project.
To my brother Jaleel, thank you for the regular calls to check up on how I was doing, and Hakeem, for not getting upset when I returned your car late on several occasions after conducting interviews or field work. En dankie Selena, vir al U ondersteuning gedurende my studies.

Thank you to my mother-in-law for feeding me on Friday feast nights, and to my sisters and brothers-in-law for your support and encouragement. To my friends Naseera and Michael, Fathema and Anas, Michelle, and Fathima and Luc, thank you for housing and entertaining me during my many sojourns to South Africa. To Mansur, thank you for the welcome distraction on poker nights, and for the many lunches and dinner conversations you invited me to and generously paid for. I am equally grateful to my friends in New York, including fellow Ph.D. students Lucia, Phoebe, Ji, and Manuel, as well as Dr. Sandra Sirota and Dr. Diana Rodriguez, for their invaluable support and advice during the Ph.D. process. To my network of friends in New York who have become my extended family, thank you for the laughter and love that you showed during this intellectual journey, and for tolerating my invocations of “epistemic coloniality” in many late night conversations.

To my wife Farzana, who taught me the meaning of “uxorious”, you have been such a powerful and influential force for nearly half my life that it is hard to figure out where I end and where you begin. I want to thank you for contributing so profoundly to who I have become, and who I am still in the process of becoming. This dissertation could not have been written without your unconditional love and support.

Finally, I am also deeply indebted to every student, professor, administrator, worker, activist and public intellectual, who took the time to meet with me and who contributed to the research for this dissertation. The #RhodesMustFall activists profoundly shifted the way I see the world so that my perspective will never be the same again.
DEDICATION

For Biko Ahmed
I - INTRODUCTION

On March 9, 2015, Chumani Maxwele, a black student at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in South Africa, took containers filled with human feces and emptied its contents onto a bronze statue of Cecil John Rhodes located on the university's campus (Nyamnjoh 2016, Mamdani 2016, Jansen 2017). Maxwele’s defacement of the Rhodes statue was an important catalyst in the formation of #RhodesMustFall (#RMF)—a radical student movement centered on decolonizing the university by confronting questions of institutional racism, access to education, and reforming the Eurocentric university curriculum (Mbembe 2016, Luescher 2016, Gibson 2016). While the statue glorified the white British imperialist and racist Rhodes, and was characterized in the #RMF’s mission statement (2015) as “an act of violence” as well as “the perfect embodiment of black alienation and disempowerment”, it served primarily as a symbolic focal point for the movement’s broader decolonial objectives. According to the #RMF mission statement (2015), “[w]e stress that this movement is not simply about the removal of a statue, and removing the statue is only the first step towards the radical decolonization of this university.”

At the same time, the #RMF mission statement acknowledges that “[t]his movement was sparked by Chumani Maxwele’s radical protest against the statue of Cecil John Rhodes on Monday 9 March 2015” (#RMF 2015). Sitting across the table from Maxwele at a coffee shop in Woodstock, Cape Town (interview, August 31, 2016), I was initially struck by the loudness of his voice; so loud in fact, that people at the coffee shop turned to stare at us. It felt as if Maxwele was performing for an audience. During our first interview, he talked about the importance of

1 The hashtag (#) that precedes the name “RhodesMustFall” is used on social media networks such as Twitter to identify and search for messages on a particular issue.
“creating drama” to draw attention to the experiences of black students at UCT. However, it was only during our second meeting (interview, June 27, 2017) that he revealed more fully, the performative dimensions of throwing feces onto the Rhodes statue. Maxwele explained that he chose March 9, 2015 to collect human waste from the poor, black township of Khayelitsha on the outskirts of Cape Town, and throw it onto the Rhodes statue at UCT–located on the mountainside of the wealthy, white suburb of Rondebosch–because it coincided with the start of *Infecting the City*; an annual public art event that wanted “to re-claim public space for the public” through performance art and exhibitions in open spaces across Cape Town (Infecting the City Facebook page). Recognizing that he could face serious legal and disciplinary consequences for his actions, Maxwele used the annual public art event as a cover for his protest. His protest was therefore deliberately masked as a performance to avoid disciplinary action; it was a performance of a performance.

This research offers an empirical analysis of #RMF’s formation—initially centered on the removal of the Rhodes statue—and its subsequent evolution into a student movement that sought to decolonize the university. As part of this analysis, I examine the three pillars of the #RMF movement that Maxwele described as consisting of Pan-Africanism, Black Consciousness, and Black radical feminism. At our first interview, Maxwele specifically mentioned Frantz Fanon’s (1963) work on decolonization, Steve Biko’s (1978) Black Consciousness philosophy, and Kimberlé Crenshaw’s (1991) intersectionality framework as he explained the intellectual foundations of the #RMF movement.

Based on 98 interviews with student activists, university faculty, administrators, workers, and public intellectuals, as well as hundreds of hours of observations, and thousands of pages of document analysis, it became apparent that Pan-Africanism, Black Consciousness, and Black
radical feminism constituted the three ideological pillars of the movement, and that Fanon, Biko, Crenshaw, as well as Audre Lorde and bell hooks, among other black scholars, were continually referenced to support and creatively develop these pillars. The three pillars of Pan-Africanism, Black Consciousness, and Black radical feminism are collectively referred to in this dissertation as the #RMF’s “decolonial framework”.

In the #RMF’s mission statement, decolonization was understood as the antithesis of “transformation”—a term often associated with South Africa’s transition from apartheid to democracy. But decolonization was also referred to by #RMF as the “very destruction” of “a violent system of power” which defines “our existence as black people” (JWTC 2015, p. 12). While #RMF sought to destroy rather than transform the power structures that defined black existence embedded in the university’s architecture, the movement simultaneously recognized the advantages of being located within the university space. During an interview with Masixole Mlandu, a student representative from the Pan-Africanist Student Movement of Azania (PASMA) and a prominent member of #RMF, he noted that the university “is the only space that we, as black people, have to think… they are spaces for organizing and mobilizing… so to me my brother, #RhodesMustFall can be seen as the awakening to a cry that has always been there… #RhodesMustFall was… at the heart of it was a critique of how the university is structured” (interview, June 30, 2017).

Mlandu’s assertion that #RMF’s formation can be characterized as a critique of the university, leads me to argue that the university occupies a paradoxical position for Black and other marginalized bodies: it is simultaneously empowering and dehumanizing; it offers the possibility of acquiring knowledge that could serve as a liberatory tool from the violence of socio-economic marginality, while at the same time, the physical and intellectual architecture of
the university can also create an oppressive, alienating space for Black, queer and disabled bodies among others. The #RMF’s mission statement characterizes this form of alienation as “black pain” which the student activists define as “the dehumanization of black people” informed by the “violence exacted only against black people by a system that privileges whiteness” (#RMF 2015). As Black radical feminist and student activist, Wanelisa Xaba, put it: “Getting an education is violent and hard and demoralizing for the Black child” (Facebook, June 28, 2018). At the same time, Xaba (2017) noted that while the student movement challenged the university, it also sought to confront “a militarised State” (p. 96). Using Frantz Fanon’s work as her theoretical framework, Xaba (2016) argued that South Africa “is a colonial State that inflicts structural violence on poor black South Africans daily” (p. 96).

In their attempts to decolonize UCT, the #RMF movement employed disruptive tactics such as the illegal occupation of the university’s central administration building, culminating in the burning of artwork that students believed, depicted black bodies in dehumanizing ways. Some students involved in these disruptive moments indicated that they were influenced by #RMF’s decolonial framework centered on Pan-Africanism, Black Consciousness and Black radical feminism. In developing this decolonial framework, #RMF simultaneously delinked from Eurocentric ideas (Mignolo 2009), rejecting human rights discourses embedded in South Africa’s progressive constitution. While the rejection of human rights can be characterized as delinking, the burning of artwork appears more like erasure, raising important epistemological questions about the value ascribed to some knowledge over others.

Drawing on Mignolo’s (2009) assertion that decolonial thinking “starts from epistemic de-linking: from acts of epistemic disobedience” (p. 15), I consider whether #RMF’s adoption of Black Consciousness, Pan-Africanism and Black radical feminism and their rejection of
Eurocentric ideas, amount to an act of “epistemic disobedience”. The first dimension of this dissertation therefore considers the following research question: what led #RMF activists to adopt a decolonial framework centered on Pan-Africanism, Black Consciousness, and Black radical feminism?

The students involved in the #RMF movement were referred to as “activists” as well as “hooligans” (Gild 2016), and were also compared to Boko Haram (Mbembe cited in Laing 2016). Sometimes, these student activists were called “Fallists” (Healy-Clancy 2016, Davis 2016, Modiri 2016, Bofelo 2017) and their movement to decolonize the university was referred to as “Fallism” (Ngcaweni 2016). The term “Fallism” denoted the students’ demand to remove the Rhodes statute from UCT; for the statue to fall. But Fallism appears to have several meanings. According to Sizwe Mpofu-Walsh (2016, p. 82), “‘Fallism’ is a nascent, complicated and emerging viewpoint...”, while Godsell and Chikane (2016) suggest that “the basic foundations of Fallism reside within the ambit of the decolonization project of the African university…” (p. 59).

For student activists such as Chumani Maxwele (interview, August 11, 2016) who sparked the formation of #RMF when he threw feces onto the Rhodes statue, Fallism is an attempt to make sense of the experiences of black bodies in a white, liberal university, through decolonial theories centered on Pan-Africanism, Black Consciousness, and Black radical feminism. The second dimension of this research seeks to better understand the notion of Fallism through the following research question: how did #RMF’s adoption of a decolonial framework give rise to the emergent idea of Fallism? This dimension of the research examines Fallism through the framework of “public pedagogy” (O’Malley and Nelson 2013); pedagogical performances that deliberately contest dominant power structures.
Throwing feces against the Rhodes statue has a performative dimension that simultaneously draws attention to a particular problem and engages the public about this problem. In order to give credibility to his radical protest as performance, Maxwele brought along props including a pink hard hat used on mining or construction sites, a whistle, and an African drum that he borrowed from a black lecturer at the music school (Maxwele 2016). In pictures capturing the moment before Maxwele threw feces onto the Rhodes statue, he stood topless wearing running tights and sneakers with a sign placed at the base of the Rhodes statue proclaiming that the bronze statue was an exhibit of “white arrogance” at UCT. In an article written by Maxwele (2016) describing the props he used in his protest, he states, “this had to be true performance” (no page number).

In an interview with Black radical feminist and prominent #RMF leader, Mbali Matandela (July 31, 2017), she also recognized Maxwele’s protest as “performative” and “artistic” and suggested that these tactics were adopted and employed throughout the movement. I suggest that pedagogical performances facilitate the formation of collective identity (Fallist) shaped by a rejection of old symbols (Rhodes) and the adoption of new ones (Fanon, Biko, Crenshaw).

A few weeks after the formation of #RMF at UCT, students at the University of Oxford who were inspired by the decolonial movement in Cape Town, created their own #RMF Oxford movement also centered on the removal of a Rhodes statue located at Oriel College in Oxford’s High Street (Mpofu-Walsh 2016, Newsinger 2016, Gebrial 2018). Students from the U.K., South Africa, the U.S. and elsewhere, who were based at the University of Oxford, started a #RMF movement using the Rhodes statue located at Oriel College as a symbolic reference point in their call to decolonize the university (Mpofu-Walsh 2016). Student activists at Oxford indicated that
they were inspired by the #RMF movement in Cape Town (N. Qwabe, interview, August 3, 2016), suggesting a flow of knowledge and ideas from the global South to the North—from the colonized to the colonizer. The third dimension of this research examines the formation of the #RMF Oxford movement approximately two months after #RMF started at UCT.

While the Rhodes statue was eventually removed from UCT precisely one month after Maxwele threw feces onto it, the statue remains standing at Oxford. This difference in the outcome of the two movements offers some indication of the varying strategies and tactics employed, and leads to the following research question: in what ways was the #RMF movement in Oxford shaped by #RMF in Cape Town? Despite important differences between the two movements, this study argues that the formation of #RMF Oxford may contribute to what Comaroff and Comaroff (2011) refer to as a “theory from the South”. I therefore consider whether the emergence of the #RMF movement in Cape Town and its subsequent exportation to Oxford can be assessed through the Comaroffs’ (2012) theory, which asserts that the South is able to prefigure historical trends and export them to the global North.

In order to develop a deeper understanding of (i) how #RMF’s adoption of a decolonial framework centered on Pan Africanism, Black radical feminism, and Black Consciousness resulted in the emergent idea of Fallism, as well as (ii) how Fallism was articulated through public pedagogy, and (iii) then exported, in part, from Cape Town to Oxford, this dissertation draws on Mignolo’s (2009) notion of “epistemic disobedience” as an overarching theoretical framework. Epistemic disobedience, according to Mignolo (2011) leads to the creation of “decolonial options”, which recognizes the effects of colonization on the colonized. “Its aim,” according to Mignolo (2018), “is decolonial liberation from [the] colonial matrix of power (CMP)” (p.224). Epistemic disobedience advocates for a process that delinks from dominant
Western sources of knowledge, and develops “decolonial options” that “places the problem or problems to be addressed (and not the object or objects to be studied) in the foreground” (Tlostanova & Mignolo 2009, p. 131). For Tlostanova and Mignolo (2009) the project of developing a decolonial option should be led by “social actors Frantz Fanon referred to as ‘les damnés de la terre’ (1967); all those humiliated, devalued, disregarded, disavowed, and dealing with the ‘colonial wound’” (p. 143).

In developing my understanding of decoloniality, I also seek to experiment with the idea of constructing Fallism as a decolonial option based on articulations of Fallism gathered through interviews with #RMF activists. This experiment was inspired in part by a reading of Walter Mignolo and Catherine E Walsh’s (2018) book entitled, On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis. Their book operates at two levels: “the thinking-doing, and the doing-thinking of decoloniality” (p. 9). Walsh and Mignolo (2018) recognize that decoloniality starts with doing-thinking; with communities that engage directly with decoloniality, and that theory is then derived from these community actions. I therefore experiment with developing Fallism, as a concept that originated through the #RMF movement, into a decolonial option that emerged from acts of epistemic disobedience. Fallism’s creation by black and marginalized student activists in the global South seems to flow from the paradoxical positioning of the university as a space that simultaneously serves to empower and dehumanize those on the margins of the institution.

Rationale and Significance

This study has important research and theoretical implications for understanding the university as the authorized site of knowledge production. It provides a perspective of the university from those on the margins of the institution, to offer three primary insights. First, by employing theory in a similar way that an optometrist uses a phoropter to determine eyeglass
prescriptions, this dissertation employs multiple theoretical lenses to offer a sharper, more detailed analysis of the #RMF movement. Epistemic disobedience is employed as an overarching theoretical framework and used in conjunction with three supplemental theories, namely, social movements theory, public pedagogy, and theory from the South. Given the limited research on the #RMF movement, this study demonstrates how examining a student movement through a combination of theoretical lenses offers nuanced insights into the #RMF’s contribution to decolonizing the university.

Second, current scholarship on #RMF does not fully incorporate the voices of students, academics and administrators, and focuses almost exclusively on #RMF in Cape Town (Pithouse 2015, Hefferman and Nieftagodien 2016, Nyamnjoh 2016, Gibson 2016, Mbembe 2016). My research contributes to a more “actor oriented approach” (Salman and Assies 2010, Booysen 2016) through interviews and observations in both Cape Town and Oxford and establishes the epistemic connections between these two sites of resistance. Based on my analysis of the range of publications available on #RMF, this dissertation offers the most comprehensive actor oriented analysis of the #RMF movements in Cape Town and Oxford. In addition to capturing a range of student perspectives, it also shares details of important #RMF meetings and documents that have as yet, never been published.

Third, by adopting a perspective that privileges the voices of students, particularly those on the margins of the university, it becomes apparent that the university occupies a paradoxical position. It offers Black and other marginalized bodies opportunities for empowerment through the acquisition of knowledge and as spaces to think, while simultaneously engaging in practices that dehumanize and alienate those on the margins. This conclusion emerges through an examination of the #RMF’s critique of the university as a site of “epistemic coloniality”
(Mbembe 2016, p. 36). At the same time, I also consider #RMF’s response to this form of coloniality through its development of a decolonial framework, that subsequently leads to the emergent idea of Fallism.

Fourth, I experiment with developing Fallism into a nascent “decolonial option” (Mignolo 2018) that could serve as a framework to challenge the university as the “authorized center of knowledge production” (Mamdani 2016, p. 69). Fallism as a decolonial option comprises epistemological, ontological and pedagogical dimensions that are outlined in more detail in Chapter V. As an option that emerges from activist practice, Fallism reverses the relationship between the Black body as the object of study, to become the subject that questions the epistemic basis of this objectification. In my development of Fallism as a decolonial option, I limit its application to university spaces, firstly, as a way of pointing out the paradox of the university as simultaneously empowering and dehumanizing for marginalized students, and second, to contain the initial development of the option to address its flaws and limitations.

Lastly, the University of Oxford is widely regarded as one of the foremost academic institutions in the world and is ranked as the best university in the World University Rankings (2018). Knowledge and ideas developed at Oxford over hundreds of years have been exported to various corners of the world. In our collective imagination, Oxford is often considered as the generator, rather than the recipient, of new knowledge and ideas. It is therefore counterintuitive that an idea with its genesis in Africa should make its way to Oxford. Consequently, the formation of the #RMF Oxford movement, which was inspired by #RMF Cape Town, provides an important contribution to the growing literature acknowledging the value of Southern knowledge and its influence on Euro-America.
Dissertation Outline

This dissertation comprises eight chapters starting with Chapter I, which offers a broad overview of the research project. Chapter II provides a background on the emergence of the #RMF movements at UCT and Oxford. The #RMF movement in Cape Town is considered through five moments between March 2015 and March 2016, following which, the emergence of the Oxford movement is discussed. Chapter III sets out the theoretical framework employed to analyze the three research questions that form the basis of this study. Mignolo’s (2009) concept of “epistemic disobedience” is used as the overarching theory in my analysis, but is also supplemented by social movements theory, public pedagogy and theory from the South. I develop this theoretical tapestry rather than simply using one theoretical lens as a way of sharpening my analysis, but also because I recognize the limitations of all the theories I employ in this dissertation. Acknowledging on the one hand, that the use of multiple theories may complicate this study, I also believe that employing multiple lenses through which to analyze the #RMF movement could offer new insights into how the movement is understood.

It is however important to clarify and distinguish the movement’s theories adopted by #RMF activists that established the basis for their decolonial framework, and the academic theories I employ to analyze #RMF’s formation and evolution. The students specifically refer to Pan Africanism, Black radical feminism and Black Consciousness, which I collectively describe as #RMF’s decolonial framework. The #RMF’s decolonial framework and the events that surrounded its creation are then analyzed through the theoretical tapestry that I set out in Chapter III, comprised of epistemic disobedience, social movements theory, public pedagogy, and theory from the South.
Chapter IV offers an outline of the three research methods employed in this dissertation. The qualitative methods used for this study combine information derived from observations (including participant observations), document analysis, and 98 interviews with activists, faculty, university administrators and workers, collected in Cape Town and Oxford between 2016 and 2018. My methodology is informed by Smith’s (1999) work on decolonizing methodologies, which she argues, is not a total rejection of Western theory but rather, “centering our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our perspectives and for our own purposes” (p. 34).

The three research questions that form the basis of this dissertation are discussed in three respective chapters (Chapters V, VI, and VII). Chapter V explores the first research question by considering what #RMF to adopt a decolonial framework comprised of Pan-Africanism, Black Consciousness, and Black radical feminism. This chapter analyzes the formation of #RMF at UCT through the lens of social movements theory. Furthermore, the chapter draws on epistemic disobedience to explain why student activists employed a decolonial framework and de-linked from Eurocentric scholarship.

Chapter VI examines the second research question by considering how the adoption of a decolonial framework by #RMF UCT gave rise to the emergent idea of Fallism. By employing public pedagogy as a framework, this chapter considers the disruptive tactics used by student activists as pedagogical performances that served as moments of learning for both students and the broader public. This chapter argues that Fallism emerged in the context of these pedagogical performances as part of the movement’s engagement in epistemic disobedience. Furthermore, Chapter VI considers how the idea of Fallism can be extended into an emergent decolonial option that seeks to disrupt the university’s hegemonic knowledge development process.
Chapter VII explores the third research question by considering the influence of the #RMF Cape Town movement on the formation of the #RMF movement in Oxford. It examines how ideas developed by the Fallist movement travelled from Cape Town to Oxford, and uses the Comaroffs’ (2011) theory from the South as a framework for understanding this transfer of radical ideas from South to North. In addition, this chapter considers the similarities and differences between #RMF UCT and the #RMF movement in Oxford. The chapter concludes by asserting that while #RMF Oxford’s formation was inspired by the #RMF movement in Cape Town, questions remain about whether #RMF Oxford’s formation constituted a theory from the South.

The concluding chapter (Chapter VIII) discusses all the findings reflected in Chapters V through VII and suggests further areas for research. It is also important to note that while epistemic disobedience serves as a cross-cutting theoretical framework that connects each of the three substantive chapters, Chapters V, VI, and VII introduce social movements theory, public pedagogy and theory from the South respectively as supplementary frameworks that are used to consider the research questions. Furthermore, the three research methods employed in this dissertation are used as a common source of data to support the assertions and conclusions developed in each of the substantive chapters. Since the #RMF came into existence in March 2015 and largely dissipated in Cape Town by March 2016 and in Oxford by December 2016, this dissertation will limit its focus by primarily considering the events that unfolded during the 2015 to 2016 period.
II - BACKGROUND

Introduction

Sometime between Chumani Maxwele’s protest on March 9, 2015 and the moment the #RMF released its mission statement on Facebook on March 25, a movement is created. The 16 days it took to formulate the ideas and the demands contained in the #RMF’s mission statement is a relatively short period given the multiplicity of actors involved and the conceptual complexity demonstrated in the mission statement that was widely shared on Facebook. This background section offers an overview of the evolution of the #RMF movement starting with a brief history of resistance struggles in South Africa, followed by an examination of the early stages of the #RMF’s formation at UCT, and a discussion of five critical moments that shaped the expansion, and ultimately, the collapse of the movement in Cape Town. While #RMF UCT started in March 2015, the movement had largely dissipated one year later by March 2016. The #RMF Oxford movement on the other hand, started in May 2015, but continued with its activism until December 2016, with limited activity in early 2017. The third part of this background section, considers the creation of the #RMF Oxford movement, and highlights some of the key moments in its development.

This background section of the chapter forms the basis for a detailed analysis of the #RMF movements at UCT and Oxford in subsequent chapters. The next section offers a timeline of some of the key moments at UCT and Oxford, and begins to introduce the revolutionary grammar developed by student activists that played an important role in shaping the movement. There are significant similarities but also important differences between the Oxford and UCT movements that are revealed in this chapter and considered in further detail in Chapter VII. This
analysis of the Oxford movement is preceded by a consideration of the decolonial framework adopted by #RMF UCT in Chapter V, and reflections on the idea of Fallism in Chapter VI.

**Historical Context**

South Africa’s earliest engagement with colonial power is characterized by sustained resistance to Dutch colonial occupation of the Cape Colony in 1652 and the subsequent colonization by the British in 1795 and then again in 1815 (Ross 1999). Resistance to colonial occupation is similarly evident among the slaves brought to the Cape Colony located at the Southern tip of the country in 1658 until the abolition of slavery in 1834 (Ross 1999).

Cecil John Rhodes inserts himself into this history of resistance in 1870. After graduating from Oxford, he established the De Beers Consolidated Mining Company, and was later appointed Prime Minister of the Cape Colony from 1890 to 1896 (Riches & Palmowski 2016). Rhodes is infamous for stating: “I prefer land to niggers” (Maylam 2005, p. 145). In March 1934, a bronze statue of Rhodes depicting him in a contemplative pose, was unveiled at the University of Cape Town (Maylam 2005). The one and a half times life size statue of Rhodes was unveiled to honor his donation of land to the university and subsequently became the center of the #RMF movement 21 years after the end of apartheid in March 2015.

The apartheid regime which came into effect with the rise of the Nationalist Party in 1948 was the very antithesis of the democratic “human rights state” (Mutua 2004, p. 126), that was ushered into existence by the African National Congress in 1994. Mbembe (2017) summarizes the history of South Africa from its first encounter with colonialism to the end of apartheid as “[t]he most extreme application of the differentiation of species, of the idea that races are locked in a biological struggle for life in which the strongest triumphs” (p. 56). Mbembe (2015) however also finds that after the end of apartheid, South Africa “is the only country on Earth in
which a revolution took place which resulted in not one single former oppressor losing anything” (no page number).

This deep sense of injustice continues to permeate the South African landscape where poverty and inequality remain at extraordinarily high levels among the majority black African population (Ballard et al 2005, McKinley 2004). According to a joint report on *Overcoming Poverty and Inequality in South Africa* developed by the South African government and the World Bank (2018, p. xv), “by any measure, South Africa is one of the most unequal countries in the world”. The report concludes that the highest poverty levels are among individuals living in female headed households and that black people exhibit the highest poverty rates. In order to address the extreme levels of poverty and inequality, the report unsurprisingly calls for the creation of more jobs and better educational opportunities.

In some ways, the race based analysis offered by the South African government/World Bank (2018) is made possible by the fact that after the end of apartheid, the democratic government maintained the apartheid racial categories in which the population was divided into four groups: white, Indian/Asian, coloured, and African/black. The primary motivation for doing so was to ensure that the government could monitor progress in addressing historical inequalities between racial groups (Christopher 2009). One mechanism established to address racial inequality was the Employment Equity Act (1998) which regulates affirmative action measures. The Act defines “black people” (recognized as a designated group that may benefit from affirmative action) as “a generic term which means Africans, Coloureds and Indians” (p. 6).

According to Posel (2001), “[w]hat made the apartheid system of racial classification notoriously distinctive was its panoptic scope: Every single South African citizen was now compelled to register as a member of an officially designated race, on the understanding that this
classification would then inform every aspect of that person's life” (p. 89). These racial categories were based on “socio-legal” constructs rather than scientific distinctions between races (Posel 2001, p. 88) creating a hierarchy that placed whites at the top, followed by Indians/Asians, coloureds, and Africans/blacks at the bottom. While the Employment Equity Act (1998) recognizes black people as anyone who is not white, the racial hierarchy between Indians, coloureds and Africans remain present in South Africa today, but is complicated by a shift in socio-economic status that has resulted in an emerging African/black middle class. Despite this shift, poverty and inequality rates in South Africa continue to fuel racial tensions between the majority impoverished African/black population and the wealthy white minority population. While political power may have shifted to the majority African/black population through the ruling African National Congress (ANC), economic power largely rests with white South Africans who continue to benefit from the significant structural advantages gained during apartheid. According to Orthofer (2016), ten percent of South Africa’s majority white population own “at least 90-95 percent of all wealth…” (p. 1).

Because of this growing inequality compounded by the lack of political representation for impoverished constituencies, Ballard et al (2005) argue that “[g]iven the failure of the post-apartheid party political system to generate opposition to the left of the African National Congress (ANC), social movements provide a vital counterbalance to promote the needs of the poor in political agendas” (p. 615). South Africa has a long history of community mobilization and trade union organizing that played an important role in shaping the political landscape both during and after the end of apartheid (Madlingozi 2007). The ANC itself was a resistance movement during apartheid that transitioned to the ruling political party after the first democratic elections in 1994. This transitional period also resulted in the demobilization of social
movements that played a fundamental role in challenging the anti-apartheid government (McKinley 2004).

Social movements centered around educational activism in South Africa emerged around two major historical periods according to Hefferman and Nieftagodien (2016): first, the Soweto uprisings of 1976 which challenged the apartheid government’s decision to institute Afrikaans as the language of instruction; second, the post-apartheid period which centered on the struggle for access to education led by Equal Education since 2008, as well as the #RMF and #FMF movements that erupted in 2015, calling for decolonized education. While Naidoo (2016) suggests that there may be a link between the 1976 Soweto uprising and the recent wave of post-apartheid educational activism, there are also significant differences between the political opportunities, mobilizing structure and framing processes (McAdam et al 1996) during the two periods.

In a report developed by the South African Human Sciences Research Council (Swartz, Mahali & Chiumbe (2016) comparing the student uprising in 1976 with the 2015 student protests, one of the greatest differences between the two periods was the political context within which these events occurred. The 1976 moment took place during apartheid; a period of intense oppression, racism, and political violence in which the torture and murder of student activists was authorized by the state. The 2015 protests unfolded 21 years after the end of apartheid under a system of constitutional democracy that embraced universal human rights.

In addition to the differences in the political environment in which these moments took place, there were also marked differences in the communication environment. According to Castells’ (2015), meaning making for social movements is conditioned by the communication environment, suggesting a tangible variation between the 1976 and 2015 protests due to the
significant influence of social media such as Facebook and Twitter on the 2015 uprisings. For student activist, Kgotsi Chikane whose views are reflected in the Human Sciences Research Council Report (Swartz, Mahali & Chiumbe 2016), “[s]ocial media is probably the most fundamental aspect of how youth activism has changed since 1976” (p. 28).

But there are also common ideologies that shaped the 1976 student uprising and the 2015 student protests, namely, Black Consciousness and Pan Africanism (Pheko 2016, South African History Archive, no date). The Black Consciousness philosophy developed by Steve Biko and the active involvement of various Pan African student leaders in the 1976 protests, suggest a common thread between the ideas that shaped the #RMF movement and the formation of the 1976 movement. While the role of women in the 1976 movement has largely been erased in dominant narratives about the Soweto uprising (Sipuye 2017), Black radical feminists involved in the #RMF movement who were acutely aware of this erasure, took deliberate steps to ensure that the same thing did not take place in the 2015 student movement (Matandela 2015).

In addition to the historical erasure of women in shaping student movements, it is also essential to recall some of the debates preceding #RMF that have not received sufficient attention in academic literature. These debates include student protests on the unaffordable cost of education at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in 2007 and 2009 (Booysen 2016), and a conference series on “Thinking Africa” at Rhodes University (referred to by student activists as “the university currently known as Rhodes”) that started in Grahamstown in 2011 (Pithouse 2012). The Thinking Africa conference emerged from a reading group on Frantz Fanon jointly organized by students, academics and activists and was followed by a semester long course on “Theory from the Global South” taught by Professor Lewis Gordon at Rhodes university in 2014. This suggests that students, academics and grassroots activists at institutions such as
Rhodes university, were already engaged with decolonial scholarship some time before the emergence of the #RhodesMustFall movement in 2015. This leads #RMF activist and author, Kgotsi Chikane (2018) to assert that, “Where a university such as Stellenbosch was never able to incubate its own conception of Fallism, students from the University Currently Known as Rhodes found themselves further along in their development of Fallism than any other university” (location 2267 Kindle Edition).

Furthermore, there were several protests at the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) that centered on the cost of higher education which date back to 2008, with more recent protests having taken place prior to the formation of #RMF in early 2014 (M&G 2014). It should be noted that none of the #RMF student activists I spoke to suggested that protests at other universities across South Africa, including historically black universities, inspired the formation of #RMF. Interviewees who referred to these student uprisings did so only to point out the disparity in media attention given to protests at historically black institutions. They noted that it was only when students at former white institutions such as UCT started protesting, that greater local and international interest began to develop.

This was also true in earlier student protests at UCT led by the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) in August 1968, when they occupied the Bremner administration building for ten days. The student occupation followed the university’s decision to rescind its offer to African anthropologist, Archie Mafeje, due to political pressure from the apartheid government (Maqueen 2018). The NUSAS occupation received global attention including messages of support from students in Paris and London who congratulated UCT students for having “discovered mental liberation” (Maqueen 2018, no page number). However, black students who were critical of NUSAS for not being militant enough, formed the South African
Students Organisation (SASO) in 1968, following which, Black Consciousness leader, Steve Biko, who was a medical student at the time, was elected as the first SASO president in 1969 (SAHO 2011). Biko’s Black Consciousness philosophy shaped SASO from 1969 until Biko was murdered by the South African government in 1977. SASO remerged as the Azania Students Organisation (AZASO) in 1979, and later became the South African National Student Congress (SANSCO) which merged with NUSAS in 1991, to form the South African Students Congress (SASCO).

Biko’s Black Consciousness philosophy similarly influenced the #RMF student movement and became one of the pillars of its decolonial framework. The #RMF movement in turn, served as a catalyst in the formation of the national #FeesMustFall (#FMF) movement; a student movement that spread to universities across South Africa demanding free, quality, decolonized education (Hefferman and Nieftagodien 2016, Motala et al. 2016, Luescher et al. 2016, Booysen 2016). According to Booysen (2016) “there is consensus” that the #FMF movement “found their major antecedent in the #RhodesMustFall (#RMF) movement” (p. 2). The ideological strands that connect the #RMF and #FMF movements are very similar according to UCT student activists Wanelisa Xaba (2017), Sandy Ndelu (2017) and Mbali Matandela (2017), who published articles on their involvement with the #FMF movement at UCT. For Xaba (2017), #FMF adopted the same “ideological banners” (p. 96) of Pan-Africanism, Black Consciousness, and Black radical feminism, as #RMF.

But these ideological banners were also contentious. According to Chikane (2018) who was actively involved in #RMF, Pan-Africanism’s rise in the movement stemmed from a growing dissatisfaction with the politics of #RMF activists affiliated with the South African Students Congress (SASCO) who was strongly aligned to the African National Congress (ANC).
For Chikane, “Racialisation of the space was at odds with SASCO’s stance of non-racialism. At the beginning of the occupation, it was common currency to allow SASCO a platform to speak, but by the third week, these opportunities came few and far between. What hamstrung SASCO was its focus on creating a delineation between race and class in the movement” (location 2249 Kindle Edition).

In addition to shaping the ideological framework adopted by the #FeesMustFall movement, #RMF Cape Town also inspired the formation of #RMF Oxford in the U.K. The 19 student activists from #RMF Oxford interviewed for this study, consistently acknowledged the inspirational role that #RMF Cape Town played in the formation of the Oxford movement. Furthermore, a student movement called “Royall Must Fall” was started at Harvard University in October 2015 calling for the removal of Massachusetts slave owner, Isaac Royall Jr., from the crest of Harvard law school (Johnson, Clayborne and Cuddihy 2015). And on June 22, 2017, the RhodesMustFall Caribbean movement, which is also referred to as the “Cross Rhodes Freedom Project”, was launched in Port of Spain in Trinidad and Tobago (Cross Rhodes, no date). While the global influence of the #RMF student movement cannot be fully explored within the limitations of this dissertation, the formation of #RMF Oxford will be briefly considered later in this chapter and explored more fully in Chapter VII. The next section offers a timeline of the #RMF Cape Town movement and considers the emergence of the #FNF movement within this timeline.

A Timeline of the #RMF Movement in Cape Town

During interviews with a range of students who played an important role in the days leading up to the release of the #RMF mission statement on March 25, 2015, a reasonably cohesive timeline of events can be constructed (see Annexure 1). Based on this timeline, the
events of March 12 appear to be significant in the formation of the student movement following Maxwele’s protest on March 9, 2015. An outdoor mass gathering of about 1,000 students was arranged on Jameson Plaza at UCT chaired by Kgotsi Chikane, a student and the son of prominent African National Congress member, Reverend Frank Chikane. Maxwele addressed the event wearing a pink hard hat that he wore on March 9, chanting, “down Rhodes down!” He ended his short four minute speech with “give us a date when Cecil John Rhodes will fall” and then chants “we want the date!” (YouTube March 12, 2015).

During interviews with #RMF activists, some students expressed unhappiness with the manner in which the mass meeting unfolded stating that it was taking on a liberal, “rainbow nation” tone that conflicted with the radicality of the protest action on March 9. The idea of South Africa as a “rainbow nation” was first proposed by Nobel Peace Prize recipient, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and later popularized by Nelson Mandela to describe South Africa’s cultural and linguistic diversity. The rainbow nation idea tends to be associated with peace-building, transformation, and dialogue—values that #RMF activists suggested, entrenched rather than addressed structural racism and inequality.

Ideological differences and contestations about leadership were already beginning to emerge within the first few days following Maxwele’s protest. However, March 12 was also the date on which a small group of students aligned to Black student groups on campus, gathered in the Leslie Social Sciences building after the mass meeting on Jameson Plaza and agreed to set aside their long-standing political differences. The student contingents representing the Pan-Africanists and Black radical feminists agreed to work as a collective despite the feminists concerns about deeply rooted patriarchal values embedded within Pan-Africanism. Some students who were present at this gathering told me that it was clear that the three strands of the
movement namely, Pan-Africanism, Black Consciousness, and Black radical feminism were already beginning to emerge at this early stage. The smaller March 12 meeting was also where the name and hashtag “#RhodesMustFall” was created.

In order to develop a better understanding of the nuances of the #RMF movement in Cape Town, five moments that take place at various points throughout the one year lifespan of the movement will be discussed. These moments offer insights into the complexities of the movement and will be considered in the following chronological order: (i) the occupation of Bremner administration building and its renaming as “Azania House”, (ii) the campaign against the outsourcing of university workers to private contractors; (iii) the emergence of the #FeesMustFall movement demanding free, decolonized higher education; (iv) protests related to the lack of student accommodation which become known as the #Shackville protests; and (v) the disruption of an #RMF photographic exhibition by trans students referred to as the Trans Collective. These five moments that started in March 2015 and concluded in March 2016 aim to offer a descriptive timeline of the #RMF movement.

The Occupation of Azania House

Dr. Max Price, the Vice-Chancellor of UCT at the time of the #RMF protests provided the following insight into the movement in his interview with the former Vice-Chancellor of the University of the Free State, Jonathan Jansen (2017):

I think it was not a group that was interested in violence and I don’t think that any of the [original] RMF group was interested in disruption to the point of stopping the university from functioning. We didn’t have any lectures missed; the occupations that happened, and mostly they were without permission, were of admin facilities far away from the academic project (p. 59).

through interviews with the heads of these institutions including Price. His book is largely critical of the violent tactics employed by certain elements within the Fallist movements and concludes by suggesting that the violent responses by students “attacked the very humanity of academic leaders charged with ensuring the sustainability of the public university as a national asset” (p. 251).

In my email communication with Price requesting an interview, he indicated that he was unable to meet but that “[m]uch of what I have to say on the matter has already been published – see for example Jonathan Jansen’s book titled ‘As By Fire’…” (email communication, June 9, 2017). During his interview with Jansen (2017), Price pointed out that there was nothing inherently violent about the #RMF’s occupation of administrative buildings. This understanding was confirmed by prominent student leader and engineering student, Brian Kamanzi, who indicated during an interview that “we didn’t think of ourselves as a non-violent movement but we had used largely non-violent means of protesting” (interview, June 27, 2017). It was only once the police became involved that things turned violent according to Kamanzi. He also stated that: “You know it’s so funny how things play out in hindsight. From about, March to October, that is six months, we had been having this debate on violence… for six months before a tire gets burnt at UCT. So, things have to be put into perspective” (interview, June 27, 2017).

In addition to recognizing the non-violent nature of the occupations, Price also notes in his interview with Jansen (2017) that the occupations “were of admin facilities far away from the academic project” (p. 59). Price’s distinction between the administrative buildings and the academic project reflect the intellectual and architectural delineations that shape the way universities are constructed and conceptualized. However, for #RMF, the occupation of the Bremner administration building was deliberate and was intrinsically connected to what Price
referred to as the “academic project.” In the #RMF statement released in the first few days of the occupation it stated that: “We have chosen to occupy the Bremner building, and the Archie Mafeje room specifically, because of its strategic and historical significance – it is the place where management carries out its activities, and these are precisely the activities we seek to subvert” (#RMF 2015b).

Shortly after entering the Bremner administration building, students changed the name of the building to “Azania House”; Azania is a name first used by the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) to refer to South Africa, “that was also adopted by the Black Consciousness movement as a protest name for South Africa” (Biko 2017, p. xxvii). The PAC was a prominent anti-apartheid organization that later became a political party in 1994, and is the parent body of the Pan-Africanist Student Movement of Azania (PASMA). The renaming of UCT’s administration building is therefore deeply symbolic in that it also changed the nature and function of the space that students occupied. The building, which usually housed the Vice Chancellor and his senior staff and functioned as the epicenter of bureaucracy, took on characteristics during the occupation that one student described as a “fantasy world” (Sebambo 2015, p. 108). During interviews, students used words such as “magical”, “creative” and “pedagogical” to characterize their experiences during the occupation.

Ameera Conrad (interview, December 20, 2017), a former drama student at UCT and one of the creators of a play about the #RMF movement called The Fall, told me about the music, spoken word and poetry that she and other students performed which became a feature of the occupation. Alex Hotz, a member of the Students’ Representative Council, Palestinian Solidarity Forum, and founder of Aluta (a beak away movement from the ANC-aligned South African Students Congress), indicated that, “the occupation was really important for the development of
the movement; the politics of it, how we engaged with each other and also, it was very important for political education and political consciousness. Some people called it the university of Azania house where we had lectures every single day…” (interview, July 13, 2017).

Lindiwe Dhlamini, a queer student activist who campaigned for the rights of gay and lesbian students at UCT, described the occupation as, “Yoh! That was the moment that actually changed my life forever” (interview, July 27, 2017). When Dhlamini first arrived at UCT as a student, she said that in order to fit in, she needed to assimilate and therefore introduced herself as “Pam Dhlamini”. She adopted a new first name so that it would be easier for white people to pronounce. After the occupation, she reemerged from Azania House as “Lindiwe Dhlamini”. Her rebirth suggests that the contested space within which the #RMF’s decolonial framework emerged, is perhaps just as important to consider as the substantive dimensions reflected in the framework.

During an interview with PASMA student leader, Masixole Mlandu, he described in more general terms why UCT had become such a contested space (interview, June 30, 2017):

[s]o Rhodes Must Fall was… at the heart of it was a critique of how the university is structured. And of course, part of our beliefs is that the university is both a space of conquest and a space of political struggle… The reason why it is a site of conquest is simply because the university is founded out of conquest, you know, dispossession of the African people…

The university as a site of struggle and conquest is also reflected in its design and architecture; UCT is perched condescendingly on the slopes of a mountain called Devil’s Peak, overlooking Cape Town (field notes, June 28, 2017). The university is simultaneously part of but also separated from the city, and is divided into upper, middle and lower campus connected through a series of walkways and roads. The Bremner administration building is located on lower campus and is separated from upper campus by the law school on middle campus. The
Rhodes statue was located on upper campus where most classes are held. UCT also consists of satellite campuses that house the medical school, the school of fine arts, and the business school which are slightly further removed from the main campus but connected through a bus transportation service referred to as the Jamie Shuttle.

The moments leading up to the occupation of UCT’s main administration building on Friday, March 20, 2015, started on the upper campus as students gathered to march to the Bremner building on lower campus. It had been eleven days since Maxwele threw feces onto the Rhodes statute and just over one week since the #RMF hashtag and Facebook page were created on March 12. The minutes of a meeting of a group of Black led student organizations on March 13 that was provided to me, show no indication of a discussion or plan to occupy the administration building. In fact, students I interviewed appeared to be unaware of a planned occupation but felt compelled in that moment to join the occupation. Lindiwe Dhlamini (interview, July 27, 2017), described the moment she became part of the occupation, speaking quickly and excitedly as she recalled her feelings and thoughts at the time:

While he was still talking, the Vice-Chancellor… Max Price at that time was not with us… it was a matter of, okay, this man is talking nonsense, we’re going to go, we’re just going to walk past him and occupy this space… At that time, I don’t think like anyone had the idea of like occupying. I don’t know about the students who were like already part of the protests two days prior, maybe they had the plan to say this is what we’d want to do… I didn’t know. But like, based on what I was seeing, no one was like sure what was happening when we go in. But as soon as we got inside, we started singing and in that very moment, like there’s that first video where we are still at the foyer in the front, where like everyone is singing, and like we’re sweating and like crying. Some of us were crying because like it became such an emotional space. And right there and then, nobody told anyone what, everyone just started going up and finding a spot for
them to sleep for tonight. Literally, everyone, we just like walked up and we’re like okay, (bangs the table) we’re just taking over this office, this is our office now, until you talk to us, then we’ll talk. Got everybody out of those offices and we started occupying the space. It became our space.

In the YouTube video that Dhlamini refers to, Ramabina Mahapa, the SRC president at the time, gave a stirring speech to a crowd of about 300 protesters outside the Bremner building. During his speech, he called on students to read Biko and Fanon so that they can “fully interrogate[d] the meaning of Blackness and what it means to be Black at UCT” (YouTube 2015). Mahapa then went on to state: “This is not an ordinary march. This is not an ordinary gathering. We are not just going to come here and talk. What we’re going to be doing is we need to sit down; we need to educate ourselves. We need to read Biko. We need to read Fanon. And those materials are coming. We’ve printed them out. The whole night, we’ll be studying in Bremner” (YouTube 2015).

At that point Mahapa, wearing a white t-shirt with the letters “SRC” printed in large red font on his chest, holds a microphone in his right hand, and points to the entrance of the Bremner building behind him with his left. The crowd shouts and applauds in agreement. “We are occupying Bremner!” he cries out in a raspy voice. “Yes!” come the responses from the crowd. Mahapa continues, “at the seat, at the seat of white supremacy, we shall learn, we shall engage, and we shall transform this place” (YouTube 2015).

It is evident from conversations with students who played a leadership role in the movement that a decision was taken to occupy Bremner prior to the occupation. However, the original intention was to do so for a short period, possibly the weekend following the Friday occupation. In an interview with Mahapa (interview, July 5, 2017), he stated that:

On the first day of the occupation, about ten or so of us had a meeting. We said we need to have a close knit of people that will form the leadership of the movement. And these are the
people that must control what the movement does and so forth. Although, our meaning around a leaderless movement was that you don’t have one leader, it’s a horizontal structure. And so what used to happen, we had what was called the strategy and tactics committee. That is the committee that decided everything, you know. We would decide on the strategy and tactics and then take that to plenary.

He explained that the strategy and tactics committee was the “main committee” but that there were other smaller committees dealing with various issues including fundraising, artistic performances during protests, communications and social media, food, cleaning up Bremner, and so on. But “if there was something important” according to Mahapa, “it had to go to the strategy and tactics committee first” (interview, July 5, 2017). Consequently, it was this committee that decided on the length of the occupation after students entered the Bremner building. The composition of the strategy and tactics committee included various student activists, most of whom were interviewed for this study, and Patricia Bevey from the National Education Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU) who served as a representative of the workers.

Mahapa recalled the factionalism within the strategy and tactics committee which he asserted was not centered on ideological differences, but on “dominant personalities” (interview, July 5, 2017). This factionalism played out in some of the plenary meetings that were held twice a day; once at 9am, and the other at 3pm or 4pm every day during the occupation. The plenary meetings decided on protest action, public statements, and responses to the university management among others. As a result of the factionalism, as well as the rotating chairpersonship of the plenary, and given that the composition of the morning and afternoon plenaries were often different, Mahapa indicated that sometimes, the afternoon plenary would overturn a decision made by a morning plenary causing significant confusion. However, he
stated that even though there were disagreements, the statements issued by #RMF were usually drafted by the strategy and tactics committee and submitted to plenary for approval.

However, Dr. Zethu Matebeni, a lecturer in sociology who convenes the Queer in Africa series at UCT, acknowledged that the occupation was “difficult” given that everyone was living, eating and sleeping in an open space designed for offices rather than accommodation (interview, July 21, 2017). Dr. Matebeni was one of a handful of academics who lived with the students during the occupation. Alex Hotz, a prominent #RMF leader and law school student, also noted that while there were some students who took up intellectual roles in the movement, “there were a lot us doing the grunt work, like the kitchen, the cleaning, and the radical action…” (interview, July 13, 2017).

The contestations between students during the occupation only surfaced much later in the movement. At that time, the #RMF movement attempted to offer a united front in their press statements and their engagements with the public. In the April 13, 2015 press statement following the eviction of all students from Bremner, #RMF stated that:

Continuing to occupy would have forced our movement into an environment where some members were protected, while others remained vulnerable to external disciplinary measures. However, following the university’s indictment, we are forced, more than ever, to acknowledge that Azania House is not a geographical location, but a commitment to black humanity. It is with that firmly in mind that we have chosen to end our occupation of Azania House… We as the Rhodes Must Fall Movement are fighting not for abstract concepts or easy victories. We are fighting for our right to exist” (#RMF 2015c).

#EndOutsourcing

Patricia Bevie, who served as the chairperson of UCT’s National Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU) branch during the #RMF’s occupation of Azania House, indicated
that she was a reluctant activist. Bevie first joined UCT in 2008 where she worked in the central finance department and told me that (interview, July 26, 2017):

> when I came to UCT, strangely enough, I became political… because I think there was so much injustice that I noticed… they basically just made me loud, they raised my voice because I was forced to stand up for people… and grew into a person that I myself didn’t know I was.”

When the #RMF movement started in 2015, Bevie indicated that “I got very much involved in it, because here were students that could stand up, that could hopefully stand up for things. You could identify with them, you could identity with their anger… everybody was too scared to get involved with #RMF because you were going to be labeled.” Despite this potential risk, Bevie joined the occupation of Bremner and was respectfully referred to as “aunty” by the students. Bevie recalled how she guided the young students with “basic living principles” that included keeping Bremner “clean and tidy” (interview, July 26, 2017).

But Bevie was also frank about the reasons for her involvement with #RMF. She explained that workers struggled for many years prior to #RMF’s formation to try and get the university to abandon its outsourcing policy in which services such as cleaning, gardening, catering and security were contracted to private companies. NEHAWU, on behalf of the workers, launched court applications and attempted to negotiate with the university and its consultants who were brought in to assess the financial feasibility of in-sourcing workers. All of these efforts failed to move UCT to in-source workers. NEHAWU’s decision to support #RMF was therefore strategic; it was an attempt to add worker concerns onto what had become a very public agenda. At the same time, the student struggle benefitted significantly from their collaboration with workers because it increased their numbers but also added a level of working class legitimacy to what may otherwise have been perceived as elitist intellectual concerns.
The #RMF mission statement released on March 25, 2015, indicated in its opening sentence that: “We are an independent collective of students, workers and staff who have come together to end institutionalised racism and patriarchy at UCT” (#RMF 2015). Workers were therefore already an integral part of the movement at its early conceptual stages. This is clearly reflected in the list of demands made at the end of the mission statement in which 10 out of the 28 demands pertain to the rights of workers. The demands include calls to end outsourcing, to institute a basic minimum pay for all workers, and “[e]ducation for workers and their families must be free” (#RMF 2015).

As a result of this collaborative approach, workers at UCT were eventually in-sourced when a historic agreement was reached between the university and NEHAWU on October 29, 2015. Bevie argued that it was as a result of the workers’ collaboration with #RMF that the in-sourcing agreement was reached, “but the union would not give them credit… I said to the union, give the students the credit. The students achieved what you couldn’t achieve” (interview, July 26, 2017). NEHAWU, which is affiliated to the African National Congress (ANC) through the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), believed that the in-sourcing agreement with UCT was made possible due to their political maneuvering and therefore did not engage the student activists prior to signing the in-sourcing agreement, according to Bevie. Shortly after this incident, Bevie decided to leave NEHAWU: “I withdrew from the union because the union was not serving the people” (interview, July 26, 2017).

Before these tensions emerged between NEHAWU and #RMF, the students arranged an #EndOutsourcing campaign on October 6, 2015, twenty-two days before the in-sourcing agreement was signed. The #RMF’s Facebook page announced “a day of collective radical action” indicating that it was part of a national campaign at Wits university and the university of
Johannesburg to “end to outsourcing” and to call for “a dignified living wage at all public institutions” (#RMF #EndOutsourcing October 6, 2015). As an act of solidarity with workers, #RMF called “on all students employed by their respective universities to ‘Down Tools’ on the 6th of October 2015 as we band together to demand that insourcing become a principled commitment of the 34ognizant34t African public university.”

In many ways, the #EndOutsourcing campaign appeared to be an important turning point in that it placed pressure on the university to agree to worker demands through the signing of an in-sourcing agreement just over three weeks later. Nozizwe Beya, one of the former outsourced worker representatives at UCT, who was also respectfully referred to as Mam Nozi by student activists, agreed that #RMF played a critical role in realizing the workers’ demands. She started her involvement in the #RMF movement as a member of NEHAWU and participated in the UCT Workers Forum and Left Students Forum. Mam Nozi described what motivated her to participate in the #RMF movement as an older person: “we are your parents” she told the student activists (interview, July 19, 2017).

Similar to Patricia Bevie, she expressed her disappointment with the way students were excluded from the agreement that was reached between NEHAWU and UCT. Mam Nozi who was a NEHAWU shop steward at the time but was not present on the day the agreement with UCT was signed, confronted her NEHAWU colleagues upon her return: “when I asked why the students were outside, UCT said they want to deal with the union, not the students… I noticed they signed things we didn’t discuss with the workers… But I said to them, I’m not fighting with you, but you know that we take the mandate from the workers but you signed things that we did not even discuss” (interview, July 19, 2017). After she confronted her NEHAWU colleagues, Mam Nozi told me that she was expelled from the union. She became disillusioned with the
union’s politics but appreciated the role students played in developing her understanding of concepts such as decolonization: “I used to work in the library. I asked them, what does this mean… Like, you know, workers are not educated… Decolonization is about, it’s about someone, a white person who comes and take your things as a Black person…” (interview, July 19, 2017).

The relationship between workers and students was therefore not only mutually beneficial at a political level. As both Bevie and Mam Nozi indicated, there was also a process of learning and understanding that took place. Workers were able to engage with new ideas and developed a vocabulary to explain their oppression and struggle. Students on the other hand received much needed emotional support and guidance from workers, many of whom were old enough to be their parents. These relationships that started in March 2015 were still very strong just over three years later in April 2018, when former #RMF student activists shared videos on Facebook of workers laying down their blue aprons on the floor for students to walk across as they proceeded to their graduation ceremony (Masixole Mlandu, Facebook page).

For Patricia Bevie, “I still give the #RMF the victory for the in-sourcing… And to me, if we acknowledge that, then it goes hand in hand with understanding, that that’s still the only language that can be spoken, because how long did NEHAWU try and fight and go through all the channels to get these workers in-sourced. It took two weeks when the students acted” (interview, July 26, 2017).

In an interview with senior sociology lecturer Dr. Jonathan Grossman, who was consistently referred to by Patricia Bevie and Mam Nozi as playing an incredibly important role in supporting worker struggles at UCT, he indicated that prior to 2015, “the workers were smashed in the struggle against outsourcing… workers were demoralized, they had been
defeated, their organization which was meant to defend them against outsourcing was unable to defend them” (interview, July 26, 2018). Grossman, a member of the UCT Workers Forum, quipped, “UCT was not a workers’ paradise.” When I asked Grossman whether he believed that #RMF played a critical role in pushing UCT toward an in-sourcing agreement, he responded “I think that’s completely accurate.” He went on to relate how UCT had initially responded to worker demands in a non-committal manner during the early stages of the #EndOutsourcing campaign. However, as the campaign progressed, Grossman (interview, July 26, 2018) indicated that there was

an encounter between some students, some workers, with some sections of the UCT council at the graduate school of business where the council was having a meeting. And during the course of that encounter, it became clear to some of us that were there, that UCT had changed its position. And, I think on the Monday, UCT declared its commitment to in-sourcing. And then UCT was forced to make the commitment to move quite rapidly. But that’s when it went and got a quick signed agreement from NEHAWU behind the backs of [Grossman pauses], actually, behind the backs of the workers. I know some students think it was behind the backs of the students, which it was. The first problem is that it was behind the backs of the workers.

#FeesMustFall

In an edited volume entitled *Fees Must Fall: Student Revolt, Decolonisation and Governance in South Africa*, which reflects on the emergence of the #FeesMustFall (#FMF) movement, Booysen (2016) argues that “there is consensus that the events found their major antecedent in the #RhodesMustFall (#RMF) movement” (p. 2). The suggestion that the #FMF movement—which called for free, decolonized higher education—emerged out of the #RMF movement, is strongly supported by student activists such as Alex Hotz (interview, July 13, 2017) who stated that, “we took the pillars of #RhodesMustFall and made it the pillars of
"#FeesMustFall…” and Wandile Kasibe who asserted that, “#FeesMustFall was an offspring of #RMF” (interview, June 28, 2017). While Wanelisa Xaba (2017) agreed that “RMF, in establishing decoloniality as an ideological framework… influenced the national movement FMF”, she cautions against overstating #RMF’s influence on “FMF and Fallism as an ideology” (p. 98).

The links between the movements is traced back to October 6, 2015, when a joint campaign to end outsourcing of workers was held at the university of Witwatersrand (Wits), the university of Johannesburg (UJ) and UCT (Naidoo 2016). On October 14, about a week after the #EndOutsourcing campaign was launched, students orchestrated “the shutdown of universities across the country” (Naidoo 2016, p. 183) giving rise to the #FMF movement. The #FMF movement “registered the demands for no fee increases, decommodified education, decolonization and an end to outsourcing” (Booysen 2016, p. 8). According to Naidoo (2016), there were three important moments that shaped the #FMF movement that took place across the country over three days: first, on Wednesday, October 21, 2015, students from universities based in Cape Town including #RMF activists from UCT, marched to parliament and entered the gates as the minister of higher education, Dr. Blade Nzimande, was attempting to table his budget report. During the march to parliament, white students were asked to form a human shield around the black students as a way of protecting the most vulnerable protestors from violence or arrest. The greater involvement of white students in #FMF, despite the movement remaining Black-led, is also something that distinguishes #FMF from the #RMF movement.

In addition to the march to parliament in Cape Town on October 21, 2015, a second event highlighted by Naidoo (2016) took place on October 22, when thousands of students from the universities of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and Johannesburg (UJ), marched to the headquarters of
the African National Congress (ANC) in Johannesburg. The students submitted a memorandum to the secretary general of the ANC demanding a 0% fee increase, a government led plan to realize free higher education, and the insourcing of workers (Naidoo 2016, Booysen 2016).

The third event mentioned by Naidoo (2016) unfolded on October 23, 2015, when thousands of students marched to the union buildings in South Africa’s capital city, Pretoria, demanding a 0% fee increase from the government. Instead of addressing the crowd directly, President Jacob Zuma announced a 0% fee increase on television. Wits SRC president Shaerea Kalla indicated that “The government has addressed 0%. Let it be known that we are not satisfied with it. We are still waiting to be addressed on ending outsourcing at universities and on free education” (Booysen 2016, p. 322).

The rapid succession of protests over three days across the country forced the government to give in to at least one of the student demands. It would take only a few more days before UCT insourced its workers at the end of October 2015, and just over two years for President Zuma to announce free higher education in December 2017 just before the ANC forced him to resign as president because of ongoing corruption allegations in February 2018.

During my interview with Black radical feminist, Wanelisa Xaba (interview, July 13, 2017), she indicated her deep distrust of the ANC’s politics and argued that because many of the #RMF activists were aligned to the ANC, she was less involved in #RMF but decided to play a more active role in the #FMF movement. Xaba told me, “it’s kind of like people protesting against themselves,” referring to the ANC aligned students in #RMF who were challenging the ANC government (interview, July 13, 2017). When she was asked to speak at the #RMF event on April 9, 2015 as the Rhodes statue was being removed, Xaba indicated that she criticized the
ANC and the microphone was taken away from her. She described “being humiliated” by the ANC aligned #RMF members in front of hundreds of people. She later became involved with #FMF and played a prominent role in the movement. Xaba, like many of the leading Black radical feminists involved with #RMF, was also a member of the South African Young Feminists (Say-f) and remained in close contact with her comrades throughout the #RMF movement. At the same time, Xaba offered a scathing critique of the support for patriarchy that she observed in the #RMF movement, indicating that “I blame the black women in the movement and the queer people in the movement who continuously, continuously, continuously stand with these men, rally around them; they let them get away with whatever…” (interview, July 13, 2017). She ascribed their behavior to “this deep psyche of black women” who firstly, have a “fear of erasure that make them stay with these men,” and second, cannot fathom that a woman or a queer person could play a leadership role because they have been conditioned to believe that leaders must be cis gendered heterosexual men.

Xaba’s critique of the #RMF movement is cutting and unrepentant. But her reflection on the “fear of erasure” is considered from a very different perspective by fellow Black radical feminists. In an article written by Simamkele Dlakavu from Wits University, together with Sandy Ndelu and Mbali Matandela from UCT, Dlakavu et al. (2017) consider “the ways in which writing, for black womxn Fallists, can be a way of inscribing womxn’s presence into history to prevent erasures that are all too common when masculinist, patriarchal versions of history become the master-narrative” (p. 105). At the same time, their article acknowledges that they do not reflect the range of experiences black women encountered during the #RMF and #FMF movements. For Dlakavu et al. (2017) “writing women and rioting women can occupy the same body” (p. 105). In fact, they argue that it is imperative that women should both write and
riot “because black women’s political activism, labor and ideas have been erased from public memory” (p. 105).

**#Shackville: Homeless at UCT**

In the Supreme Court of Appeal case of *Hotz v University of Cape Town*, involving Alex Hotz (full name cited as Alexandria Gabriella Hotz), Masixole Mlandu, and Chumani Maxwele, among others, the court held on October 20, 2016 (p. 2), that the applicants “are interdicted and restrained from -

1.1 erecting any structures on the applicant’s premises;
1.2 destroying, damaging or defacing any of the applicant’s premises;
1.3 participating in, or inciting others to participate in any unlawful conduct and/or unlawful protest action at any of the applicant’s premises; and
1.4 inciting violence.

The facts of the case are set out in the judgment and describe how on Monday, February 15, 2016, at the start of a new academic year, student activists erected a shack on UCT’s upper campus to draw attention to the lack of student housing for incoming students. About 20 to 30 students gathered at 6.40am waiting for the arrival of building materials including wood and corrugated iron that arrived and was unloaded on Jameson steps around 8.15am. A shack was erected in Residence Road located just below the Jameson steps blocking traffic and pedestrians. The court judgment noted that the shack “was of a type commonly encountered in informal residential areas. Alongside it was a portable toilet…” (p. 5). A “Rhodes Must Fall” sign was placed on the ground in front of the shack, and the words “UCT housing crisis” appeared on the back of the shack. The judgment drew on affidavits submitted to the court to describe the aim of the protest action as: “to thoughtfully create an artistic form of protest with the idea to showcase the experience of hardship of black students and their daily pains and struggles” (p. 7).
Following various attempts by university authorities to ask students to move the shack to a space that would not cause disruption of traffic, the students refused. At about 2.15pm, Masixole Mlandu climbed onto the roof of a student residential building near the shack and spray painted a bust of Jan Smuts after whom the residence was named, and who previously served as the prime minister of the Union of South Africa. Another bust was spray painted at the Fuller residence hall located directly opposite Smuts Hall. About ten students spent the night sleeping in the shack while the remainder dispersed.

The following day, disruption of the traffic continued and began impacting surrounding highways that ran past UCT. Fire was set to rubbish bins to block access to the area, and some students, staff and parents who attempted to access the area were “physically assaulted and verbally abused by the protestors” (p. 9). Slogans such as “fuck white people” and “fuck black exclusion” were painted on various places across the campus. A letter drafted by UCT’s management asking the students to relocate the shack was torn up by the protestors. Around 6pm, some students entered Fuller Hall, took food meant for student residents, and removed various paintings and photographs from the walls, placing them on a pile in Residence Road behind the shack. More paintings were collected from Smuts Hall and surrounding buildings, placed on the pile and set alight.

The university authorities contacted the police who arrived at about 7.30pm to disperse the protestors. A car belonging to the university was set alight, together with a university shuttle bus. The judgement described how at 11pm, “an incendiary device” (p. 13) was thrown into the Vice Chancellor’s office causing a fire in the Bremner building. The identity of the perpetrators was unknown. Following these events on February 15 and 16, the university applied for an urgent interdict on February 17, 2016 against various students involved in the #Shackville
protests. The original interdict that was granted included a provision that only allowed the affected students onto campus once “prior written consent” (p. 16) was granted by the Vice Chancellor. On appeal to the Supreme Court, the requirement of written consent was deemed to “infringe[d] their right of freedom of movement guaranteed in s 21(1) of the Constitution” (p. 45) and therefore removed from the final interdict.

The facts of the #Shackville case described in the court judgment seem to suggest a coordinated series of disruptive events that were carefully planned by the student protestors. However, many of the students I spoke to about their involvement in #Shackville, reiterated the fact that there was never an intention to burn paintings. Sandy Ndelu a trans activist and law student who was suspended from UCT for her involvement in the protests stated: “I remember quite clearly after #Shackville, saying, ‘what the fuck just happened?’…And one minute people are inside Fuller, the other minute, people are up in Fuller taking down paintings, and really, the rest is history... What I can recall, was that wasn’t part of the plan” (interview, July 17, 2017). Similarly, Brian Kamanzi, who was one of the original sixteen students interdicted by UCT for his involvement in #Shackville, stated that the burning of the paintings was “spontaneous”, and “I don’t think it was really that well thought out” (interview, June 27, 2017). For Alex Hotz (interview, July 13, 2017), the first appellant listed in the Supreme Court of Appeal judgment, “there was no plan like in terms of burning the paintings or any of the things that happened that night… we have to be really reflective of like what the… there was no purpose, really, I guess, in burning the paintings. I guess there is a politics talking about how these paintings are representative of colonialism, but also of an institutional culture… of the university.”

Later, Hotz (interview, July 13, 2017) adds, “When I say it wasn’t planned… I could never say like I disagree, [or] like I think it was stupid. I don’t think it was tactical [huh], because
we weren’t able to recover from it. And I think it was a buildup of rage, and justified rage, because I think the university had been dishonest for a long time and playing us against each other.” Hotz blamed the escalation of disruptive activities on UCT’s management and their decision to bring the police onto campus. She was surprised by the university’s heavy handed response to the #Shackville protest which she described as “one of the most powerful things we ever did. And where it was erected was particularly powerful because it was an inconvenience and was meant to be an inconvenience. And so when the university kind of said, ‘move the shack’, it was like, what the fuck…” (interview, July 13, 2017).

In an analysis of the #Shackville protests, Jansen (2017) who quotes extensively from his interview with UCT’s Vice Chancellor, Dr. Max Price, on the protest concludes that “under the guise of addressing black poverty alleviation… Residences were now under pressure to become exclusively black…” (p. 185). Jansen’s reading of the protest suggests that the issue was limited to the question of accommodation for black students and that UCT’s response to what he refers to as “race baiting” was correct. However, Masixole Mlandu, who was also one of the students interdicted by UCT, stated that “when we burnt the paintings, we started with putting [up] the shack out of an accommodation crisis… Immediately when we did that accommodation crisis, we surely realized that this is not just an issue of people not having a place to sleep but we have to ask deeper, why did we not have a space to sleep. And that took us to the question of land in South Africa” (interview, June 30, 2017).

While Mlandu was directly involved in burning the paintings and regarded this as a direct message to the university, Hotz was not on campus at the time. She explained that she went home because it was her mother’s birthday. When Hotz left UCT, she was not particularly concerned about the way the #Shackville protests had unfolded thus far: “I felt like we had done
worse. I didn’t have a grasp of how deep it was” (interview, July 13, 2017). It was only when she was called back to campus by fellow student activists that Hotz developed a sense of the magnitude of what had occurred: “I did not expect the shack to be destroyed. People were distraught.” Hotz agreed with Mlandu’s characterization of #Shackville as an attempt to juxtapose how poor, black South Africans lived in relation to the relative luxury of the university. She described the space where the shack was erected as “a compound of colonialism” referring to the physical structure of the university and the buildings surrounding the shack.

The disruption caused by #Shackville continued the #RMF’s tradition of performative and pedagogical protest action. As noted in the court judgment interdicting students from UCT, the aim of #Shackville was “to thoughtfully create an artistic form of protest with the idea to showcase the experience of hardship of black students and their daily pains and struggles” (p. 7). Brian Kamanzi indicated that “this kind of creativity, this is what we did, especially when we were small in numbers…” He linked the emergence of #Shackville to the broader land issue, as well as the question of who belonged at UCT, stating that “the shack becomes this context, it becomes, I don’t know, the site of something” (interview, June 27, 2017).

Sandy Ndelu described the erection of the shack as “an installation” and as “protest art” (interview, July 17, 2017). At the same time, when I asked Ndelu to what extent the decolonial framework adopted by #RMF influenced the manner in which the #Shackville protests unfolded, she responded: “Not directly. Definitely not directly. And not all the time”. Ndelu explained that “the way we actualized some of our politics or our demands through quote unquote violence, was something that was across the board, but I also do think that people who align themselves to these pillars, you know Black radical feminists, or women and queer people, in the movement were reflective of that.” referring to #RMF’s decolonial framework.
Ndelu went on to explain: “And sometimes you would get the sense that not everyone was doing that type of reflecting, which I think, you know, perhaps is an important kind of counter to the dangers of following one’s anger, body... I don’t also want to say that only black cis men were violent. I did violent things. I was suspended, you know, for 2016 because of what I did during #Shackville...” (interview, July 17, 2017). As a result of her increasing disillusionment with #RMF, Ndelu distanced herself from the movement just before #Shackville, but felt compelled to show support during the university’s attempt to move the shack. However, like Hotz, Ndleu believed that burning the paintings “damaged the movement, particularly at UCT, in ways that are, maybe even irreparable. I don’t think the movement can ever go back to the day before then because it’s been damaged so much…” (interview, July 17, 2017). Kamanzi agreed: “After #Shackville, for all intents and purposes there is no more #RhodesMustFall” (interview, June 27, 2017).

The Trans Collective

One year after the formation of #RMF, a photographic exhibition commemorating and reflecting on the movement was arranged by Wandile Kasibe at the Centre for African Studies (CAS) gallery at UCT. The exhibition entitled, Echoing Voices from Within, was held from March 9 to May 9, 2016, and curated by Kasibe (CAS website). On the opening day of the exhibition exactly one year after Maxwele threw feces onto the Rhodes statue, members of the Trans Collective stripped naked and covered their bodies and the photographs being exhibited, with red paint. The entrance to the exhibition was blocked and eventually resulted in its shut down (Hendricks 2016). According to news reports of the disruption of the exhibition, the Trans Collective placed sheets of paper over some of the photographs which read, “The Trans people who built RMF are not a part of this exhibition” (Peterson 2016, no page number), and “We will not have our bodies, faces, names, and voices used as bait for public applause” (Hendricks 2016,
The word “rapist” was written in red paint across a photograph of Maxwele throwing feces onto the Rhodes statue (Hendricks 2016).

In a statement published by the Trans Collective on March 10, 2016, it traced the organization’s formation to April 2015, one month after the creation of #RMF, as a response to “a rigid loyalty to patriarchy, cisnormativity, heteronormativity and the gender binary within the space” (Trans Collective 2016). While the Trans Collective (2016) appeared to have engaged with these concerns within the #RMF movement from the very beginning, their decision to publicly challenge the #RMF at the one year anniversary exhibition is explained as follows: “Our role has now evolved into speaking back to RMF and keeping it accountable to its commitment to intersectionality precisely because it is positioned as a black decolonial space” (no page number). The Trans Collective (2016) stated that it wanted to give expression to the idea of “radical black feminist militancy” by challenging the “erasure” of trans people who were only featured in “3 out of the more than 1000 images that ended up making it onto the exhibition roll…” (no page number).

The statement expresses its disillusionment with the appropriation of intersectionality by the #RMF and explains how “a small group of us… naked and decorated in red paint grabbed the microphone from the cisgender man who was addressing the crowd outside. We proceeded to enter the exhibition venue and blocked all entrances with our naked and adorned bodies.” The Trans Collective (2016) statement explained the symbolism of blocking the entrances with their naked bodies and how it made “reference to how trans people in RMF and other Fallist movements have been walked over during the last year.” The red paint used to cover the photographs symbolized “a display of our presence. We may not have been included in the exhibition role in a meaningful way, but it must be clear to all viewers of the exhibition that
raging trans people had been in that space.” While the Trans Collective’s disruption of the #RMF
exhibition is a direct challenge to patriarchy, they also stated that, “[w]e will no longer tolerate
the complicity of black cis womxn in our erasure.”

However, despite their critique of the #RMF, the Trans Collective (2016) indicated that:

We must, however, state unequivocally that our disruptive intervention at the RMF
exhibition should not under any circumstances be construed as a rejection of RMF or a departure
away from 47ognizant47tion. We maintain that 47ognizant47tion is necessary for a reclamation
of our humanity as Black queer trans people. Our intervention is an act of Black love. It is a
commitment towards making RMF the Fallist space of our dreams.

In my interview with Sandy Ndelu (interview, July 17, 2017) who co-founded the Trans
Collective together with Thato Pule, and participated in the disruption of the exhibition space,
she reiterated the connections and continuities between the #RMF movement and the Trans
Collective:

And that’s why we had to establish the Trans Collective... we had a directive that was
twofold: on the one hand, you know, it was doing something similar to what #RMF was doing
with the university, which is lobbying the university in quite an uncompromising way to
mainstream gender diversity. But it was also doing the same to the movement, right. Holding the
movement accountable to its own commitments to intersectionality.

The Trans Collective is described by Ndelu (interview, July 17, 2017) as “a decolonial
movement which is centered on trans feminism, which is allied to the Fallist movement, but also
is deliberately separate from it.”

Dr. Zethu Matebeni, a faculty member at UCT who lived with the students at Azania
House during the March 20 to April 9, 2015 occupation, indicated in a published interview that,
“…I was involved in the Trans Collective Intervention, and it’s been difficult” (Davids &
Matebeni (2017, p. 166) also related the details of an intervention that took place moments before the Trans Collective’s disruption of the March 9, 2016 photo exhibition:

…there were two interventions, actually, which is why I don’t understand when people only focus on the Trans Collective… So the cisgender women on the same day of the exhibition had their own intervention. Yes! Nobody paid attention to that, because… I don’t know why, actually. They came all dressed in black, with black lipstick, carrying sjamboks. Sjamboks, rods, and sticks… it was a procession, straight from Bremner (UCT management offices), going through the tunnel and up… And it was the first time they brought sjamboks openly to campus. And they were very clear that if you come our way, we’re going to beat you up…

Matebeni’s (2017) assertion that the intervention of cisgender women has “been written out” (p. 166) seems to be supported by the fact that none of the news reports covering the disruption of the photo exhibition appear to mention this. However, her description of these two disruptive moments that managed not to “overstep each other’s interventions” (p. 167) does not necessarily reflect the Trans Collective’s (2016) assertion that “[w]e will no longer tolerate the complicity of black cis womxn in our erasure.”

The Trans Collective intervention caused significant tension in the movement that was captured in exchanges on Facebook (March 14, 2016) between Sandy Ndelu and Wandile Kasibe, the curator of the photographic exhibition. Kasibe challenges the accusation that he is an “erasionist” and states that “they have made the political personal and I will respond to them in that fashion…” Ndelu responds to Kasibe stating that, “Wandile you are not the sum of RMF. I will say this again: stop centering yourself in an issue that is not about your individual person. Sure you are part of the problem, but so is everyone else. So am I” (Facebook March 14, 2016).
One year after the start of #RMF, the movement started splintering and unravelling. The fault lines that emerged at the very start of movement, eventually culminated in a spectacular performative moment of disruption orchestrated by the Trans Collective. While the #RMF’s disruption of UCT was an attempt to decolonize the institution, the Trans Collective’s disruption of #RMF was considered an “act of black love” (Trans Collective 2016). It was an attempt to hold the #RMF accountable for its commitment to intersectionality. After quoting the entire paragraph on intersectionality contained in the #RMF’s mission statement, the Trans Collective (2016) powerfully concludes its March 10, 2016 public statement by recalling the sacrifices its members made on behalf of the movement:

We are the trans people who have given Rhodes Must Fall the revolutionary language of ‘womxn’, ‘non-binary’, and ‘trans*’… We are the trans people who lobbied tirelessly for the inclusion of Black radical feminism as one of the three pillars of the movement, alongside Pan Afrikanism and Black Consciousness… We are the trans people who have loved RMF even when it did not love us. Aluta Continua

A Timeline of the #RMF Oxford Movement

On March 19, 2015, a small group of Oxford students organized a protest outside Oriel College, and stood below the Rhodes statue located on the upper façade of the College (Facebook, March 19, 2015). The aim of the protest was to show solidarity with the #RMF movement at UCT. The eight protestors held up a banner that read, “decolonize education, Rhodes Must Fall.” The #RMF Oxford mission statement was however, only developed during May 2015, several weeks after the solidarity protest took place on outside Oriel College. According to Mpofu-Walsh (2016), it was only after the Rhodes statue was removed at UCT on April 9, 2015, that “about fifteen students decided to formally establish RhodesMustFall in Oxford (RMFO)” (p. 80).
During my conversation with Mpofu-Walsh (interview, July 31, 2017), the son of a prominent South African politician, Dali Mpofu, and author of a book entitled, *Democracy and Delusion: 10 Myths in South African Politics* (2017), he indicated that students “met in secret” for several months between March and May 2015 to discuss whether they should form their own movement at Oxford. But the movement only gained significant prominence following its protest at the Oxford Union on May 29, 2015. The Oxford Union is a debating society that invites world renowned leaders and media figures to share their opinions with Union members, following which, “[r]esults are determined by how many students walk out the door marked ‘Ayes’, and the door marked ‘Noes’…” (Oxford Union webpage).

The #RMF activists decided to protest by holding up various signs and placards just before a debate on the question of whether Britain should pay reparations to its former colonies. When I visited the Oxford Union, which is located down a narrow alleyway, a short six minute walk from Oriel College off the High Street, I noticed a homeless man lying on the ground close to the entrance of the Union. A strong urine odor filled the air (field notes, November 22, 2017). Since the Oxford Union only allows members to attend its events, I obtained special permission from the President of the Union to listen to conservative English philosopher, Sir Roger Scruton’s talk on November 22, 2017. To get to the debating hall, where Scruton characterized conservatism as “an act of love”, I had to pass through the Union Bar.

It was this same Union Bar where members gathered for drinks before and after Union events, that #RMF activists noticed a poster advertising “the colonial comeback” cocktail as they entered the Union on May 29, 2015. The poster advertising the drink was developed by the Union in anticipation of the debate on reparations and had a picture of black hands in shackles reminiscent of images associated with slavery. The #RMF activists lodged an objection with the
Union and shared photographs of the poster on Twitter using the hashtag "#RhodesMustFallOxford.” Ntokozo Qwabe, a South African Rhodes Scholar who was completing his law degree at Oxford, indicated that while their protest at the Oxford Union was focused on the reparations debate, “in a completely coincidental turn of events, which was totally unexpected, we then encounter what would be the first news breaking #RhodesMustFall event” (interview, August 1, 2017). The #RMF protest at the Oxford Union gained considerable national media coverage and led to the Union issuing a statement on June 1, 2015, acknowledging that it was “institutionally racist” (Waygood 2017).

During my interview with JanaLee Cherneski (interview May 31, 2017) in New York City, she provided further insights into the #RMF’s formation and her involvement in the movement while she served as a lecturer in Oxford’s Department of Politics and International Relations. As a former Rhodes Scholar from Canada and an Oxford graduate, Cherneski indicated that in addition to the solidarity protest in March 2015, it was important to note that Rhodes’ legacy was also raised by Nathaniel Adam Tobias Coleman during the Oxford Graduate Political Theory Conference on May 8, 2015 which she participated in. Coleman spells his last name with a line through it as a way of signaling its connection to his slave ancestry.

Cherneski recalled that Coleman arranged a lunch with various student activists on May 9, 2015. Annie Olaloku (interview November 23, 2017), who worked on establishing a Black Students Union at Oxford in 2014, as well as Brian Kwoba (interview, September 21, 2017), who founded the Oxford Pan-African Forum in early 2014, were two of the key figures involved in #RMF Oxford that participated in the lunch meeting. In my discussion with Kwoba, he stated that Coleman “really pushed for us in a pretty decisive way to start our own version of
#RhodesMustFall... which gave us a real boost and confidence… saying, ‘go for it!’” (interview, September 21, 2017).

Based on a timeline developed of #RMF Oxford (see Annexure 2), its staggered trajectory includes several weeks of inactivity at the start of the movement following the solidarity action outside Oriel on March 19 and the lunch meeting with Coleman on May 9, 2015. While many of the events or general assemblies hosted by #RMF Oxford are not captured in the timeline, the movement’s Facebook page indicates that six assemblies were held, the first of which took place on October 23, 2015 and the final assembly on November 25, 2016. Chi Chi Shi, who attended the first general assembly while completing her Mphil in political theory, stated that, “it just felt like a really exciting space” (interview, November 23, 2017) in which black and ethnic minority students had an opportunity to share their experiences of being on the margins of the university.

Throughout the #RMF Oxford movement, the #RMF UCT movement continued to be a source of inspiration. In one of #RMF’s Oxford’s petitions, it stated that: “[w]e, the undersigned, call upon Oriel College to take down the statue of Cecil Rhodes that sits overlooking the High Street” (#RMF Oxford Change.org 2015). The petition has a picture of the original solidarity protest held outside Oriel College on March 19, 2015 and states that the #RMF Oxford movement “supports and continues” the decolonial work started by #RMF Cape Town. Reflecting on the fall of the Rhodes statue at UCT, the petition asserts: “[w]e see no reason why here, at the heart of the High Street, at the heart of Oxford, Rhodes cannot also fall” (#RMF Oxford Change.org 2015).

The petition highlighted the three aims of the #RMF Oxford movement reflected on its website, namely, the removal of colonial iconography, replacing the Eurocentric curriculum, and
addressing the lack of diversity at the university. The petition was preceded by a press statement released on November 4, 2015, alerting the media to a protest action on Friday, November 6, 2015 at which “hundreds of students will gather in front of Oriel College in Oxford to call for the statue of Cecil John Rhodes to fall” (#RMF Press Release, November 4, 2015). Toward the end of the press release, a section entitled, “What inspired the movement?” states that:

Rhodes Must Fall Oxford started in solidarity with the Rhodes Must Fall movement at the University of Cape Town (UCT), which has encouraged students across the world to fight institutional racism and call for the 53ognizant53tion of education. We believe that despite his statue being pulled down at UCT, Rhodes – and more importantly the culture that inculcated his imperialism in the first place – remains unscathed. Indeed, his culture is alive and well in Oxford. During the protest action on November 6, 2015, approximately two hundred students and supporters gathered in the rain outside Oriel College. In video footage of the event captured by Cherwell, an Oxford student publication, it shows students of various racial and ethnic backgrounds gathered outside Oriel chanting slogans led by Sizwe Mpofu-Walsh, Brian Kwoba and Ntokozo Qwabe among others. The video captures students with umbrellas seated on the ground listening to Qwabe reading out some of the points reflected in the petition. Seated next to him is Oriel’s Vice-Provost, Professor Annette Volfing, and another official from the College. Qwabe, wearing his blue and white UCT sweatshirt, can be seen handing over the petition to Volfing while holding a megaphone in one hand. As he gives her the petition Qwabe states: “And I want this to be captured that I am not looking at them. And I’m not interested in looking at them, because they have no interest in looking at me.” The crowd cheers following his statement as Volfing smiles awkwardly while receiving the petition. The College officials are then asked by Qwabe to leave: “until they make that commitment [to remove the Rhodes statue], we refuse to give them a platform to speak” (Cherwell Video, November 7, 2015).
Following the protest, Oriel’s Provost issued a statement on December 17, 2015, in which Oriel distanced itself from “Cecil Rhodes’s values” and “his racist views or actions.” The statement also indicated that the “College has decided to launch a structured six-month listening exercise on the statue, running from early February 2016…” (Oriel College, December 17, 2015). The #RMF activists I spoke to felt victorious after reading the press statement and believed that Oriel was seriously considering removing the Rhodes statue.

However, in January 2016, British newspaper, The Telegraph, revealed that it had copies of “leaked documents” indicating that Oriel College decided to keep the Rhodes statue in place “after furious donors threatened to withdraw gifts and bequests worth more than £100 million if it was taken down…” (Espinoza & Rayner, 2016). The Telegraph article indicated that wealthy alumni were “angered by the ‘shame and embarrassment’ brought on the 690-year-old college by its own actions.” As a result, Oriel decided to cancel its six month listening exercise on the Rhodes statue. In response to Oriel College’s change in approach, the #RMF activists arranged another protest on March 9, 2016. The #RMF Facebook page (March 9, 2016) detailing the event notes that:

Oriel College sold out to big money. Oxford’s Chancellor said students who don’t like Rhodes should “think about studying elsewhere.” A dictatorship of donors and administrators have shown no regard for the student voice, or for black life. Oxford has revealed its hand, which has only made us stronger and more determined.

The protest comprised of a march to “five sites in Oxford, linked to colonialism and racism” including Oriel College, All Souls College where the Codrington library, named after a slave owner, is located, and Rhodes House, which houses the Rhodes Trust that is responsible for overseeing the Rhodes Scholarship. The protest appeared to have little impact on Oriel’s position. As a result, further actions were organized by #RMF including disrupting a meeting
arranged by Oriel on “contextualising the Rhodes statue” on June 3, 2016. A video of the event posted on the #RMF Oxford Facebook page shows students reading out a statement and chanting while the Vice Provost listens attentively. A few weeks later, on June 30, 2016, Femi Nylander and Ntokozo Qwabe stood shirtless outside Oriel during its open day for new students. “I prefer land to niggers – Cecil Rhodes” was written in red paint across Nylander’s chest, while “All Slaves College” was written in red on Qwabe’s chest (Peirson-Hagger 2016).

The last protest action arranged by the movement took place on December 2, 2016 outside Oriel. The event entitled “Oriel: Name Your Price? – Rhodes Must Fall Protest Action” included the submission of a public letter to the College in which #RMF stated that, “[y]our actions reflect a broader context of embedded prejudice, white supremacy and institutional indifference at the University of Oxford” (#RMF Facebook page, December 2, 2016). The protest aimed to highlight the one year anniversary since Oriel’s press statement indicating that it would initiate a six month listening exercise. In photographs of the event, approximately 50 protestors can be seen gathered in a circle.

In 2017, Oriel continued with its attempts to contextualize the Rhodes statue arranging meetings with its alumni, staff and students. In a report of the meetings by The Poor Print: Oriel College Newspaper, it states that, “All four guest speakers present could be classed as ‘pro-contextualisation’, and the event was exclusively for Oriel members. The resultant demographic of the room was uncomfortable: a nearly entirely white audience” (Waygood 2017).

In addition to targeting Oriel, #RMF also participated in an Oxford Union debate on January 19, 2016, entitled, “Must Rhodes Fall?” Following the debate, 245 to 212 voted in favor of removing the Rhodes statue. The results of the debate were widely covered by local and international press including the Wall Street Journal (Flynn 2016).
Following the local and international attention received by #RMF Oxford in 2015 and 2016, the movement appeared to dissipate in early 2017. The #RMF Facebook page lists three organizing events during February and March 2017 including a “#launchparty” (#RMF Oxford Facebook, February 18, 2017) and a “Video Workshop and Action Discussion” (#RMF Oxford Facebook, March 9, 2017). None of these events appeared to garner significant support and signaled the final moments of the #RMF Oxford movement.

The timeline of events set out in this chapter is meant to offer a flavor of the #RMF movements, and should be read as a precursor to a more in-depth analysis of #RMF’s emergence in Cape Town and Oxford in Chapters V, VI, and VII. The primary aim of the timeline therefore, is to orient the reader in anticipation of the analytical dimensions of the dissertation.
III – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

Literature on social movements in South Africa have historically drawn on a range of theories including new social movements theory (Ballard, Habib and Valodia 2006), a hybrid of new social movements and resource mobilization theories (Ballard at al 2005), and post-colonial theory (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999). More recently, literature on the #RMF and #FMF movements, appear to adopt a range of conceptual frameworks including Marxism (Pithouse 2015), a combination of political economy and social movements theory (Badat 2016), citizenship frameworks (Nyamnjoh 2016), governance models (Booysen 2016), and decolonization theory (Mbembe 2016, Gibson 2016, Naicker 2016, O’Halloran 2016).

Mbembe (2015) and Gibson (2016) draw on decolonial and Marxist theory respectively and both characterize the student protests as South Africa’s “Fanonian moment” because Fanon’s ideas of decolonization are infused throughout the student movement. They define this moment as a replacement of the “old politics of waiting” with “a new politics of impatience, and if necessary, of disruption” (Mbembe 2015 cited in Gibson 2016, 8). At the same time, Pithouse (2015) has warned that Fanon’s name is often used as authority, “sometimes theological or prophetic rather than philosophical or political, that can be deployed to end rather than to enrich a debate” (p. 9). In the context of the #RMF movement, where factionalism and divisions emerged shortly after its inception (Nyamnjoh 2016), invoking Fanon was not only a way of determining strategy and tactics, but was also a mechanism to demonstrate allegiance to certain factions within the movement.

Cloete (2015), on the other hand, argues that the #RMF student protests resemble the exact description of a social movement described by Castells (2015): “[t]he strategy of a non-
party-aligned, no-formal-leadership mobilisation through social media is remarkably similar to how Manuel Castells, in *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social movements in the internet age*, describes new forms of social movements...” (no page number). Cloete (2015) “imagines that some student leaders must have been reading Castells” but that, “[u]nfortunately, it does not seem that the students have been reading Thomas Piketty’s 2014 book on inequality and wealth...” (no page number).

Most scholars however, are reluctant to offer a specific theoretical framework to explain the Fallist movement. Mbembe (2016b) for instance states that “we have to find for ourselves the vocabulary to name the ongoing student turmoil in South Africa...” (no page number). Furthermore, Badat (2016) proposes a cautious approach when making claims about what inspired the student protests: “We should also be careful to not pigeon hole and explain the student protest movement in terms of existing frameworks and theorizations, or to view them as simply replicas and mimicry of protest movements elsewhere” (p. 14).

Badat (2016) and Mbembe’s (2016) approach recognize that the #RMF movement may offer something new and innovative that cannot necessarily be explained using existing social movement theory. At the same time, Smith (1999) argues that “[i]ndigenous people have, in many ways, been oppressed by theory”, but acknowledges that theories can serve as a basis for organizing and action, and can assist colonized peoples to “interpret” and “predict” as well as offer tools for “new ideas and ways of looking at things...” (p. 38). Mignolo and Walsh (2018) similarly seek to further disrupt the blurry line between theory and practice suggesting that “[f]or us, theory is doing, and doing is thinking” (p. 7). Recognizing the potential limitations and benefits of theorizing the #RMF movement, this dissertation adopts four theoretical frameworks to offer multiple perspectives and new ways of interpreting the #RMF movement.
Mignolo’s (2009) concept of epistemic disobedience forms the overarching theoretical framework for all three dimensions of this dissertation research, and will also be supplemented by social movements theory (Chapter V), public pedagogy (Chapter VI), and theory from the South (Chapter VII). This dissertation acknowledges the limitations of adopting a single theoretical narrative to explain the formation of the #RMF movement, since every theory used in this dissertation has limitations. By placing these theories in conversation with each other, as well as in conversation with the empirical data collected for this study, I believe that deeper insights can be gained in examining the three dimensions of this dissertation, namely, #RMF’s adoption of a decolonial framework, the development of Fallism, and the creation of the #RMF Oxford movement.

**Epistemic Disobedience**

To engage in epistemic disobedience is to delink from dominant Western thought and ideology. Mignolo (2013) argues that the Bandung Conference of 1955 is an example of delinking geopolitically, in that conference participants chose to delink from capitalism and communism in favor of decolonization. The Bandung Conference which was convened in Bandung, Indonesia, comprised 29 newly independent African and Asian states. Mignolo (2013) recognizes this conference as a precursor to the establishment of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961 where various Latin American countries joined African and Asian states in the process of “delinking from two major Western macro-narratives” (p. 130).

In Mignolo’s later work jointly written with Catherine E. Walsh (2018), they move away from discussions on political independence such as Bandung, toward an understanding of “the habits that modernity/coloniality implanted in all of us…” (p. 4). In developing this understanding, Mignolo and Walsh (2018) construct their ideas separately and write these up as
two parts of their book, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*. For Walsh (2018), decoloniality comprises several dimensions: first, it denotes ways of knowing that precede or coincide with colonization. Second, it seeks to undo structural racism, patriarchy and class that are linked to capitalism and Western modernity. Third, decoloniality is reflective of social struggles operating on the margins that seek to give effect to the very ideas that coloniality aims to suppress.

Maldonado-Torres (2007) draws an important distinction between “coloniality” and “colonialism” suggesting that colonialism reflects a political and economic relationship between an empire and the sovereignty of another nation, whereas coloniality, “refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism” (p. 243).

Walsh (2018) suggests that the response to coloniality is “decoloniality [which] seeks to make visible, open up, and advance radically distinct perspectives and possibilities that displace Western rationality as the only framework and possibility of existence, analysis and thought” (p. 17). Epistemic disobedience operates within this broader framework of decoloniality, and takes two forms according to Mignolo (2009): the first form is “de-westernization” (p. 3); a process of shifting power within capitalist economies to replace the dominant influence of western rules of engagement with locally inspired rules. The second form of epistemic disobedience is the “de-colonial option” (p. 3); a path that connects people and places that have been “classified as underdeveloped economically and mentally” (p. 3). It is this decolonial option dimension of epistemic disobedience that will be used as the primary conceptual framework for understanding the complexities and contradictions of the #RMF movement.
Epistemic disobedience raises questions about who generates knowledge and where this knowledge is generated. At the same time, this type of disobedience is not just about changing the content, it is also about changing the “terms of the conversation” (Mignolo 2011, p. 224). In doing so, Mignolo (2009, p. 2) challenges the conflation of Eurocentric knowledge with universal knowledge, arguing “that it is a racially marked body in a geo-historical marked space that feels the urge or get the call to speak, to articulate, in whatever semiotic system, the urge that makes of living organisms ‘human’ beings.”

Mignolo (2011) traces the emergence of epistemic disobedience to meetings he attended with Arturo Escobar and Nelson Maldonado-Torres in May 2004 and April 2005 respectively. Furthermore, he acknowledges that the scholarship of Anibal Quijano (1991, 2007), who developed the notion of decolonial delinking, was an important precursor to his own work. Epistemic disobedience, according to Mignolo (2011), is a process of de-linking from dominant Western thought “rather than the constant search for ‘newness’” (p. 45). Mignolo (2011) suggests that newer theorizations of power are not necessarily better and calls for a shift toward “a different ‘beginning’” (p. 45) that de-links from traditional Greek and Latin “beginnings” to recognize that “decolonial thinking emerged at the very foundation of modernity/coloniality, as its counterpoint” (p. 46).

For Quijano (2007), in order to move toward “the destruction of the coloniality of world power” (p. 177), it is necessary to sever the connections between modernity and coloniality, and to extricate oneself from coercive power. Consequently, “epistemological decolonization” (Quijano 2007, p. 177) is required to create the necessary conditions for new forms of communication, experiences and meaning-making. Drawing on Mignolo (2009) and his critique of “Cartesian epistemology and Heideggerian ontology”, Maldonado-Torres (2007) considers
what he refers to as “the coloniality of knowledge (others do not think) and the coloniality of Being (others are not)” (p. 252). He uses these constructs to analyze Fanon’s work and concludes that, “[f]or Fanon, the black is not a being or simply nothingness. The Black is something else. The enigma of blackness appears as the very radical starting point to think about the coloniality of Being” (p. 253).

Consequently, while Maldonado-Torres (2007) acknowledges that he owes the idea of coloniality of Being to Mignolo’s early work, he distinguishes Mignolo’s (2009) work from his own, by not only engaging with the epistemic dimensions of coloniality, but also with the notion of being. This notion enunciates “an ontological dynamic” (p. 258) that produces “a non-human or rather an inhuman world” (p. 257). Mignolo’s (2009) idea of epistemic disobedience is therefore prefaced by Quijano’s (2007) formulation of “epistemological decolonization” and buttressed by Maldonado-Torres’ (2007) development of the “coloniality of Being”.

In Mignolo’s (2018) later work, he continues to build on the concept of the coloniality of being by drawing on Sylvia Wynter’s arguments that those who constructed the idea of the human, did so in order to distinguish themselves from “entities that were lesser than or nonhuman” (p. 157). Mignolo (2018) engages with the question of what it means to be human to demonstrate how decolonial thinking facilitates the deconstruction of the concept to reveal its meaning. Once the meaning of human is revealed, Mignolo (2018) asserts “…I do not want to be human. But instead of rejecting its content and simply adding a prefix (posthuman), decolonial thinkers start by asking how these concepts came into being: when, why, who and what for?” (p. 171).

The coloniality of being is derived from the coloniality of knowledge to invent the idea of the human according to Mignolo (2018). He elaborates on the coloniality of knowledge,
including “schooling and training from elementary to higher education” (2018, p. 177), by considering the relationship between Europe and its colonies in the global South. Mignolo (2011) asserts that “the colonial history is the non-acknowledged center in the making of modern Europe” (p. 140). For Mignolo (2011), Foucault’s notion of “bio-politics” which is essentially a critique of European modernity using a postmodern lens, is only “half the story” (p. 140). Consequently, Mignolo (2011) draws on coloniality to develop the idea of “body-politics” as the “missing half” of bio-politics in attempting to understand the relationship between Europe and the global South (p. 140). This notion of body-politics is employed by Mignolo (2011) to describe “decolonial technologies ratified by bodies who realized, first, that they were considered less human, and second, that the very act of describing them as less human was a radical un-human consideration” (p. 140).

In trying to make sense of the relationship between Europe and the global South, Mignolo (2011) requires an acknowledgement that European theorizations of power are incomplete, but that they can be completed through epistemic disobedience. Disobedience however, demands recognition of a body-politics in which those who are considered less human, become central actors in theorizing their existence. It is through these acts of epistemic disobedience that decolonial options can be developed to create opportunities that “link (instead of delinking) with knowers who are dealing with conditions of coloniality and projects of decoloniality… to link with all those who are delinking from truths without parenthesis” (p. 62).

Mignolo’s work has however been sharply critiqued by Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2012, p. 98) who argues that “Walter Mignolo and company have built a small empire within an empire...” Her critique of Mignolo centers around his selective appropriation of ideas from marginalized communities (including from Rivera Cusicanqui herself) and “entang[ling] them in
a discourse of alterity that [is] profoundly depoliticized” (p. 102). Rivera Cusicanqui (2012) therefore argues for a “political economy’ of knowledge” in order to problematize the “economic strategies and material mechanisms that operate behind discourses” (p. 102).

As part of her critique of Mignolo’s work, Rivera Cusicanqui (2012) also recognizes how knowledge and ideas developed by intellectuals in the south are exported like “raw materials” to the north, where they are “regurgitated and jumbled in the final product” (p. 104). The northern academy, she argues, is largely responsible for enabling the “neutralization” of the practice of decolonization by marginalizing indigenous intellectuals. To counter this neutralization process, Rivera Cusicanqui (2012) suggests “constructing South-South links” that will circumvent the northern academy creating the space for dialogue and knowledge production “among ourselves” in order “to confront the hegemonic projects of the North” (p. 107).

However, Rivera Cusicanqui’s (2012) critique can in some ways be mitigated by Mignolo and Walsh’s (2018) latest work that includes several references to Rivera Cusicanqui and a direct response to her critique. Walsh (2018) in particular, recognizes the dangers associated with the “commodification of decoloniality” and the creation of a “new canon” that erases political projects of struggle (p. 82). In the joint introduction written by Walsh and Mignolo, they construct decoloniality as an endeavor “to delink from the theoretical tenets and conceptual instruments of Western thought” (p. 7). They also draw on Lewis Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon’s (2006) approach of “transcending rather than dismantling Western ideas through building our own houses of thought” (p. ix). In building these houses of thought, Walsh (2018) wants to think with and not simply about those on the margins. Her interest is with the “knowledges resurging and insurgling from below…[that] continually generate and regenerate knowledge and theory” (p. 19).
Walsh’s (2018) arguments are contextualized through Abya Yala; the name used by the Kuna-Tule people to describe the Americas prior to colonization. She recognizes the value and importance of naming by drawing on Kichwa and Native American intellectuals. Naming and renaming invokes “a re-existence-based politics that is decolonial in attitude” and forms part of the decolonial option that Mignolo (2018) develops in the second part of *On Decoloniality*. Walsh’s (2018) aim is to give attention to ways those on the margins “theorize their own practice” (p. 28). She sites examples of Afro-Colombian decolonial feminist, Betty Ruth Lozano from the Network of Butterflies with New Wings Constructing Future, who develops the idea of *blackwomen*; her term for denoting the impossibility of separating her blackness from her gender. Furthermore, Walsh (2018) recognizes the work of Vilma Almendra from the Weave of Communication for Truth and Life collective, who refers to the practices of *palabrandar* or walking words. Palabrandar names and constructs multiple processes of collective action developed communally from the margins. Walsh (2018) describes the concept as deriving “from the action itself, from giving word to the path of struggle and walking these words, weaving relations of communication, dialogue and critical thought…” (p. 37).

Drawing on these examples along with many others, Walsh (2018) concludes by asserting that “decoloniality is not a condition to be achieved in a linear sense, since coloniality as we know it will probably never disappear” (p. 81). As a result, she recognizes that while bringing down the wall of coloniality may be the ultimate goal, the Insurgent Subcomandante Galeano suggests that “[it is] enough to make a crack in it” (p. 82). The idea of something new emerging in the cracks of the wall of coloniality resonates with Walsh (2018), who sees its articulation in the work of Frantz Fanon and Gloria Anzaldúa among others. Working within the cracks to extend the fissures of resistance requires “disobeying the dominant domain” (Walsh
2018, p. 84) in which academic theory is elevated above practice. Walsh (2018) offers the example of the Latin American doctoral program she started in Quito in 2001 which aims to “build dialogues and conversations with knowledges produced elsewhere… the doctoral program-project disobey, interrupts, and counters the individuality and competition characteristic of academia…” (p. 84).

Acknowledging Rivera Cusicanqui’s (2012) critique as well as Mignolo and Walsh’s (2018) response, this dissertation attempts to grapple with some of the challenges of academic theories reflected in decolonial scholarship. While I maintain the standard format of first setting out a theoretical framework and then applying this framework to the research data, I also attempt to mitigate some of the critiques that flow from this approach in three ways: first, in the 98 interviews conducted for this dissertation, I deliberately privilege the voices of the 63 students who form a subset of the overall interview pool. Second, I attempt to construct Fallism—a concept generated through the student movement—into a decolonial option that seeks to create a crack in the university’s wall of epistemic coloniality. And third, instead of using a single theoretical lens, I apply multiple lenses to try and understand the #RMF movement while simultaneously adopting a critical approach to all the theories I employ. As a consequence, this dissertation supplements the overarching theoretical framework centered on epistemic disobedience with an additional theory in each of the three substantive chapters. Social movements theory is therefore introduced next, and applied in conjunction with epistemic disobedience in Chapter V, to consider what led #RMF to adopt a decolonial framework comprised of Pan-Africanism, Black Consciousness, and Black radical feminism.
Social Movements Theory

Edelman (2001) distinguishes between two dominant social movement theories: the first theory, which is often referred to as *new social movements*, is influenced by a European perspective and is “identity oriented” (p. 288). The second theory adopts an American centered approach and is referred to as the *resource mobilization* framework (Edelman 2001, p. 288). The new social movements approach comprises two dimensions, namely, a “central conflict” in society, and “the actor” as the instigator of social action (Salman and Assies 2010). Social movements have three dimensions, namely, (i) the actors’ acknowledgement of shared identities; (ii) the existence of adversaries; and (iii) actions that challenge the system forcing it to change (Edelman 2001). New social movements, as distinguished from the ‘old’ Marxist labor movements, had little to do with transforming society, but were instead located in civil society outside politics and the state (Edelman 2001, Salman and Assies 2010). Based on their analysis, Salman and Assies (2010) conclude that new social movement theory ignores movements in developing countries because these movements are dominated by politics.

Recognizing new social movement theory’s limitations, Castells (1983) adapts the theory by considering “statism and capitalism” as modes of production while “industrialism and informationalism” are seen as modes of development. In his later work, Castells (1996) finds that, “people increasingly organize their meaning not around what they do but on the basis of what they are, or believe they are” (p. 3). He distinguishes between resistance identity, legitimizing identity, and project identity. *Resistance identity* represents a reaction to globalization, resulting in a crisis of *legitimizing identity* that is reliant on traditional constructions of identity formation bound to the nation-state. *Project identity*, emerges from
resistance and the ensuing crisis of legitimizing identity, serving as a basis for social change in what Castells (1996) refers to as the “network society”.

In Castells’ (2015) latest work on social movements, he argues that “power relationships are constitutive of society” (p. 5) since those who possess power have the ability to shape society based on their values. At the same time, he finds that “wherever there is power there is also counterpower” (p. 5). Counterpower is the ability of actors to challenge institutional power in order to make particular claims. While Castells’ (2015) arguments appear rather similar to Foucault’s (1991) notion of governmentality, he adds that not only do humans construct meaning, the process of meaning making is conditioned by the technological environment so that communication networks possess the capacity to influence power. Networks tend to form around specific issues with a common aim: “to control the capacity of defining the rules and norms of society through a political system that primarily responds to their interests and values” (p. 8). At the same time, Castells (2015) argues that the state plays a central role offering a template for the way in which networks should function.

Castells’ (2015) theoretical framework is helpful when he describes how social movements produce alternative beliefs that shift societal values through counterpower. Social movements exercise counterpower outside existing institutional power through the Internet, and by creating alternative public spaces. This, according to Castells (2015), is why social movements occupy symbolic spaces and buildings. Based on the various features of social movements that Castells (2015) sets out, these movements can be defined as a network “made up of individuals” who “connect[ing] mentally” to other individuals based on an “emotional” response to a “fundamental injustice” resulting in “collective action” (pp. 9-10).
In addition to new social movements theory advanced by Castells (2015), resource mobilization theory can be considered as an alternative approach that focuses on resources such as changing economic or political conditions (Salman and Assies 2015). Employing resource mobilization theory, Tarrow (1994), defines social movements as “collective challenges by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interaction with elites, opponents and authorities” (p. 3). McAdam et al (1996) build on this definition and suggest that the emergence of social movements is a collective response to levels of dissatisfaction that reach a certain point in society. This collective action can only be sustained, according to McAdam et al (1996), through a formal organizational structure that employs disruptive tactics.

Resource mobilization theory views protest as a reaction to changing economic or political conditions and is seen as an alternative to the new social movements theory (Salman and Assies 2015). While new social movements theory considers the rise of social movements in new contexts as new responses, the theory tends to ignore challenges associated with resource mobilization and strategy. New social movements theory centers on why individuals and groups of actors mobilize, while paying little attention to how this mobilization occurs (Foweraker 1995). Tarrow (1994) suggests that social movements are formed when political opportunities become available for actors who usually lack these opportunities. Political opportunity, according to McAdam et al (1996) center on (i) access to the institutions associated with the political system; (ii) the level of stability that underlies the political system; (iii) the existence of allies within the political system; and (iv) the level of state repression. Changes to any of these four dimensions could result in mobilization. However, political opportunity must be considered in relation to the resources available to mobilizing structures.
For the social movement to gain momentum and to sustain its collective action, McAdam et al (1996) argue that a more formal organizational structure is required that is dependent on various factors including disruptive tactics. These tactics operate outside “respect for ‘proper channels’” (p. 13) and include occupying spaces and disrupting public order. Gamson (1990) for instance finds that social actors who use violence as a tactic are more likely to succeed. In addition to political opportunity and tactics, the “framing process” plays a significant role in how the movement emerges as well as how the central message that the movement espouses is shaped (McAdam et al 1996; Salman and Assies 2010). The framing process tends to evolve as the movement becomes a more coherent entity, but Moore (1993 cited in McAdam et al 1996) finds that later framings are largely shaped by ideas and collective identities developed during the earlier phases of the movement.

McAdam et al (1996) proceed to build on the original formulation of resource mobilization theory by introducing three central concepts that they believe are essential in considering social movements across national differences: first, political opportunities have traditionally been used to show how social movements emerge as a result of changes to the political system. However, McAdam et al (1996) expand on the notion of political opportunities using differences in institutionalized political power to explain variations in the formation and evolution of social movements. Second, mobilizing structures are used to understand cross-national differences in the location of the movement, the influence of the political system in shaping the movement, and the impact of the movement’s structure in its evolution. Third, framing processes introduced by Moore (1993) is further refined by McAdam et al (1996, p. 19) to consider the (i) “cultural tool kits” available to social actors; (ii) “strategic framing efforts” of social movements; (iii) “frame contests” between the social movement and the state; (iv)
“structure and role of the media” in shaping the contests; and (v) “cultural impact” of the social movement in altering the available cultural tool kit.

While some of the approaches adopted by the #RMF movement resonate with resource mobilization theory as articulated by McAdam et al (1996), it also reflects the idea of counterpower developed by Castells (2015) who advances new social movements theory. This is precisely why Salman and Assies (2010) conclude that while new social movements theory and resource mobilization theory are often presented as competing theoretical frameworks, they could also be considered as complementary paradigms. On the one hand, new social movements theory focusses on the factors that facilitate the emergence of movements influenced by identity and culture. On the other, resource mobilization theory considers the challenges associated with mobilizing and strategizing centered on political opportunities.

At the same time, Foweraker (1995) argues that “social movement theory should be approached with caution, even skepticism” (p. 3). She finds that new social movement theory makes assumptions about historical or societal shifts that cannot be empirically proven. Furthermore, resource mobilization theory offers “bold methodological assumptions” (p. 3) that do not fully account for cultural context. Foweraker (1995) believes that both theories assume understandings of conventional politics that form the basis of subsequent analysis and that both theoretical frameworks are susceptible to a level of analysis that distances scholars from the “sources and lived experience of social struggle” (p. 3). The limitations of social movements theory as a framework for understanding the #RMF movement therefore warrant a cautious approach. At the same time, this theoretical framework offers important insights that partially explain the evolution of the student movement.
Public Pedagogy

The second theoretical framework that I use to supplement epistemic disobedience as the overarching framework for this dissertation, is public pedagogy. This complementary theory is specifically employed in Chapter VI where I consider the emergence of Fallism. In their review of public pedagogy as a conceptual framework, Sandlin, O’Malley, and Burdick (2011) suggest that the term was first used in 1894, but that it has taken on a divergent range of meanings since then. They conduct a helpful literature review to develop five categories of public pedagogy: (i) citizenship within and beyond schools focus on education as a public good; (ii) popular culture and everyday life draw on feminist critiques of representations of women in the media (Dentith & Brady 1998, 1999) to consider public pedagogy as a mechanism for “subverting dominant ideologies” (Sandlin et al. 2011, p. 344). This typology is also heavily influenced by H. A. Giroux’s (1998, 2000) work which centers on popular culture as a “pedagogical site of struggle” (Sandlin et al. 2011, p. 344). (iii) Informal institutions and public spaces, consider how museums, monuments, and public parks can become spaces of learning; (iv) dominant cultural discourses consider how public policy comprises pedagogical dimensions; and (v) public intellectualism and performative social activism, includes subcategories of the academic as public intellectual (Said 1994), and student protestors as public pedagogues (O’Malley 2009; O’Malley & Roseboro 2010) “who create a social space within which they engage the larger society in learning about equity, accountability, and democracy” (Sandlin et al. 2011, p. 358).

According to Burdick, Sandlin and O’Malley (2013), “[p]ublic pedagogy has been largely constructed as a concept focusing on various forms, processes, and sites of education and learning occurring beyond or outside of formal schooling” (p. 2). This broad definition has also given rise to a range of “totalizing” interpretations (Savage 2010, p. 103) of public pedagogy that
limit its usefulness as a framework. Recognizing the critique centered around the proliferation of the concept of public pedagogy, Burdick and Sandlin (2013) recommend that researchers engage in further empirical work on the process of public pedagogy, while Sandlin, O’Malley, and Burdick (2011) recognize the value of focusing on the learner experience.

In terms of the process of public pedagogy, authors such Biesta (2013) focus on a “specific ‘form’ of pedagogy” (p. 16) and develop three modes of public pedagogy, namely “a pedagogy for the public; a pedagogy of the public; and a pedagogy for publicness” (p. 16). A pedagogy for the public are forms of learning aimed at convincing the public of a particular set of beliefs, whereas a pedagogy of the public, is a public-driven learning process. A pedagogy for publicness is a pedagogy constructed as a “concern for the public quality of human togetherness… in which action is possible and freedom can appear” (p. 23). Biesta (2013) considers what constitutes the public in public pedagogy and distinguishes the public from the private. Drawing on Arendt’s (1955) work, she concludes that the public is not a physical space, but rather it “denotes a particular quality of human interaction” (p. 20).

Public pedagogy has also been approached from various ideological perspectives. Dentith, O’Malley and Brady (2013) consider public pedagogy’s emergence as a feminist discourse in the United States, whereas for Dyson (2013), the Black Panther movement adopted a form of pedagogy that he describes as “transformational” in that it was aimed at getting its members to act, as well as “inform[ing] the public on social matters” (p. 92). The Zapatista movement is also considered to have adopted a public pedagogical approach in its non-hierarchical educational initiatives (Anderson & Springer 2018). But public pedagogy can sometimes take on counter-revolutionary forms: Low (2016) argues that “the rhetoric of ISIS can
be seen as a form of public pedagogy that seeks to educate Muslims who experience oppression in various contexts on both the causes of their suffering, and the solutions to it” (p. 298).

One of the most helpful case studies on public pedagogy center around the protests led by secondary school students in Chile during 2006 that are characterized as “new forms of protest; playful and out of place” (Aitken, 2015, p. 143). Dubbed the “Penguin Revolution” because of the black and white school uniforms students wore during the protests, this social movement challenged Chile’s neoliberal education policies and the resulting inequalities that flowed from the increased privatization of the education system (Salinas and Fraser, 2012).

In their analysis of the Penguin Revolution, O’Malley and Nelson (2013) argue that “social movements are inherently pedagogical events…” (p. 41). Employing public pedagogy as a theoretical framework, O’Malley and Nelson (2013) find that secondary school students involved in the Penguin Revolution served as “pedagogues” (p. 44). Drawing on feminist theory, curriculum theorists Dentith and Brady (1999; Brady 2006) characterize public pedagogy as an anti-hegemonic curricular practice that deliberately contests dominant power structures. Public pedagogy aims to build alliances across different groups as opposed to organizing around shared identities (Brady 2006) resulting in a movement “from positions of social inequality to ones of informed activism” (Dentith & Brady 1998, p. 2). The empirical study conducted by O’Malley and Nelson (2013) centered on one secondary school that was involved in the Penguin Revolution five years after the 2006 events occurred. Their employment of public pedagogy centered around the intentionality of Chilean student protestors to publicize the problem of increased privatization and to deliberately avoid confrontation.

There also appear to be important overlaps between public pedagogy and critical pedagogy, both of which, draw on the work of Giroux (1983) and Freire (1970) among others.
Giroux (2006) argues that “public pedagogy can be used as a powerful resource for engaging people in robust forms of dialogue and activism” (p. 4), while critical pedagogy requires “a public philosophy that addresses how to construct ideological and institutional conditions in which the lived experience of empowerment for the majority of students becomes the defining feature of schooling” (p. 5). While the activist and empowerment dimensions of public pedagogy and critical pedagogy seem to overlap, critical pedagogy appears to be centered around formal schooling whereas public pedagogy largely occurs outside the classroom space.

For Giroux (2006), critical pedagogy contributes to the creation of new forms of knowledge by adopting an interdisciplinary approach to knowledge production that challenges the power relationships which are constitutive of schooling structures. This type of pedagogical practice can be seen as forming part of “a larger project of reclaiming power and identity… so as to make curriculum knowledge responsive to the everyday knowledge that constitutes people’s lived histories...” (p. 5). Linking public pedagogy to the fight against racism, Giroux (2006) recognizes the need to engage with questions of racism “in a wide variety of dominant public spheres and alternative counterpublics” (p. 169). Public pedagogy can then be understood as a “tool of antiracist struggle” (p. 169) by developing an understanding of racial politics that facilitates activist mobilization while simultaneously challenging power hierarchies and injustices.

**Theory from the South**

The third supplementary theory employed in this dissertation as part of an ongoing dialogue with the overarching theoretical framework of epistemic disobedience, is Comaroff and Comaroff’s (2010) *Theory from the South*. Chapter VII employs the Comaroffs’ (2010) theory as a framework to consider to what degree the #RMF movement in Oxford was shaped by
#RMF in Cape Town. In developing a *Theory from the South*, Comaroff and Comaroff (2012) aim to do more than just prove that knowledge flows from South to North; they also assert that “the history of the present may be more acutely grasped, alike empirically and theoretically, from the vantage of what have been dubbed the antipodes” (p. 117). The Comaroffs (2012) develop two arguments to support their claim: first, that African modernity cannot entirely be understood as deriving from a “Euro-American ‘original’” (p. 117). They suggest that a combination of the Euro-American and African has resulted in the creation of something new: “a vernacular—just as Euromodernity is a vernacular…” (p. 118). Second, while it is often assumed that the global South is “always playing catch up” (p. 121) with Euro-America, the Comaroffs (2012) assert that more recently, the opposite is true. It is those spaces on the margins that have become the “new frontiers” resulting in the global North “‘evolving’ southward” (p. 121).

In the examples offered by the Comaroffs (2012) to support their theory from the South, they include, “the emergence of South Africa, a major force in the international mineral economy, as the America of Africa, eager to experiment with constitutional law, populist politics, and, if hesitantly, post-neoliberal forms of redistribution” (p. 123). They suggest that Euro-America is increasingly adopting approaches developed in countries such as South Africa, as well as India and Brazil. These former “zones of occupation” (p. 123) that have become spaces with limited regulation and corrupt governments, are ideal in deriving “optimal profit at minimal cost” (p. 124).

Drawing on the Comaroffs *Theory from the South* (2010), Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Zondi (2016) argue that “African struggles have now entered a phase of serious epistemological battles” being waged between the global South and Euro-America. Consequently, they develop the notion of “deimperialization” which they describe as “a process through which Europeans
decolonize their minds” (p. 10). They argue that this process must occur simultaneously as Africans work toward decolonizing their minds. In the context of the African university, Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Zondi (2016) assert that this process does not entail a rejection of European ideas but rather, requires a critical examination of how colonialism shaped the university. Consequently, they find that deimperialization and decolonization cannot take place without each other.

While the deimperialization/decolonization binary flows from the Euro-America/global South binary, the Comaroffs (2012) recognize that it is increasingly difficult to draw a solid line between these two zones. Many of the countries they use as examples to support their theory “seem to straddle the cleavage between hemispheres” (p. 127). As a result, it becomes tricky to talk about a theory from the South, when the South is an evolving entity that cannot be clearly delineated. Furthermore, the Comaroffs (2012) acknowledge that economies are so interconnected that it would be disingenuous to insist that the outsourced worker in the global South who produces goods for Euro-American consumption is an entirely Southern construct. As a result, they suggest that the Global South should be seen as “a relation, not a thing in or for itself” (p. 127).

But the Comaroff’s (2010) are not alone in making these assertions. Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014) develops the notion of epistemologies of the south, which he describes as: “sets of inquiries into the construction and validation of knowledge born in struggle, of ways of knowing developed by social groups as part of their resistance against the systematic injustices and oppressions caused by capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy” (p. x). Santos (2014) asserts that the aim of his epistemologies of the South is to develop a strong and cohesive “anti-imperial
“South” that emerges through three moments, namely, “rebellion, human suffering, and victim-aggressor continuity” (p. 224).

Similarly, Connell (2014, p. 212) advances the idea of *southern theory* which aims to dispel the negative assumptions about the global South embedded in Euro-American theory. She applies this idea to her work as a professor at the University of Sydney in Australia to argue that the ranking of universities and the homogenous model of knowledge production is deeply flawed. According to Connell (2014), “[w]e travel to Berkeley for advanced training, take our sabbatical in Cambridge, invite a Yale professor to give our keynote address, visit a Berlin laboratory, teach from US textbooks, read theory from Paris and try to publish our papers in *Nature* or the *American Economic Review*” (p. 211).

In addition, Edward Said (1983) develops the concept of a “traveling theory” (p. 226), to describe how ideas travel between East and West. He finds that there is a discernable pattern for the traveling of ideas: first, there is a “point of origin” (p. 226) of a particular idea; second, there is the distance traveled across space or time between the point of origin and its destination; third, there are “conditions of acceptance” (p. 227) for determining the extent to which an idea will be accepted or rejected at its destination; and finally, the idea is shaped by the way in which it is employed at its new destination point.

Said (1983) does not distinguish between a static and a traveling theory; he seems to suggest that all theories travel. Furthermore, while he differentiates between the traveling theory’s point of origin and the destination, he recognizes the historical dimensions of theory development and the fact that theory is in a constant state of transformation. This makes it difficult to locate a theory’s beginning and end points. In his reflection on Said’s (1983) traveling theory and Connell’s (2014) Southern theory, Burawoy (2015) notes that, “[w]hen theories
travel… their meaning can be transformed in a radical or conservative direction, depending not only on the theory but also on the context of reception. Indeed, when Southern theories travel north they often lose their radical edge, becoming domesticated in the jaws of the metropolitan university” (no page number).

Comaroff and Comaroff’s (2012) theory from the South is a deliberate attempt to “disrupt[ing] received geographies of core and periphery, relocating Southward…” (p. 7). They argue that the Global South is the driving force of theoretical and social trends today by reversing the flow of power/knowledge from local to global offering a new way of interpreting the impact, uptake, and critique of world-historical forces. In the linear teleology of history, the South has always been depicted as a late arrival to modernity. This is an inadequate way of understanding modernity in the South according to Táiwò (2010), who also questions the belief that colonialism preempted modernity in Africa.

Comaroff and Comaroff (2012) therefore argue that while the West is often thought to drive historical trends, it is the South that increasingly appears to prefigure these trends and export them to the global North. They assert that it is the South that first feels the effects of world-historical forces and the South that first decodes them theoretically and innovates political responses to them—all of which then migrate to the global North. Consequently, instead of arguing that the colonies were the first laboratory of modernity, Comaroff and Comaroff (2012) are asserting that the South is anticipating, even driving, the political, economic, and cultural modalities of the Euro-American future.
IV – RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

In his analysis of the Fallist movements in South Africa, Badat (2016) calls for more empirical evidence and “thick descriptions” (p. 14) before attempting to theorize the student uprisings. Furthermore, Salman and Assies (2010) argue that “the actors that make the movements need to be studied much more intensively” (p. 258). While Salman and Assies (2010) also propose that “[m]uch more ethnographic research… is therefore needed” (p. 258), Edelman (2001) finds that “[a]s a collection of methods… ethnography alone – as traditionally conceived – is hardly sufficient for studying the deep historical roots or wide geographical connections of most contemporary mobilizations” (p. 310). Therefore, not only should caution be applied when deciding on theories to explain emerging social movements in South Africa, the same care should be exercised when adopting research methods to gather empirical data on these movements.

Given the differences of opinion on the methodological approaches employed to study social movements, this dissertation adopts a relatively traditional approach by collecting evidence through (i) in-depth semi-structured interviews, (ii) observations (including participant observations), and (iii) document analysis. Furthermore, as a result of the subject matter of my dissertation, the methodological approaches employed take into account the inherent challenges in conducting research noted by Smith (1999) who finds that “methodologies and methods of research, the theories that inform them, the questions which they generate and the writing styles they employ, all become significant acts which need to be considered carefully and critically before being applied. In other words, they need to be ‘decolonized’” (p. 34).
Decolonizing methodologies centers indigenous knowledge and perspectives without totally rejecting Western thought and ideas. Consequently, the methodological approaches employed in this dissertation deliberately center the voices of student activists in the #RMF movement. This approach to collecting empirical evidence does not preclude a critique of student voices. Instead, their voices and their descriptions of how the #RMF movement unfolded preface and shape the narrative developed in this dissertation. Their theorization of the movement is valued and placed in conversation with various academic theories. Furthermore, coding of the evidence collected, which is described in more detail below, employs *In Vivo* coding or “indigenous coding” (Saldaña 2016, p. 105) to analyze the data, since it uses words or phrases taken directly from interviews, field notes, and documents.

The research data for this study was collected intermittently between 2016 and 2018 during which time, I spent approximately ten months at the University of Cape Town and about two months at the University of Oxford. These periods usually coincided with the U.S. university summer vacation between May and September, the Thanksgiving holidays in November, and winter vacation in December and January. While most interviews and observations took place in Cape Town and Oxford between 2016 and 2018, a handful of interviews were conducted remotely via phone and Skype. Based on comparative research that considers the advantages and challenges of in-person and telephone interviews, there appears to be no significant differences between the two interview approaches (Novick 2008, Vogl 2013, Block & Erskine 2013, Rahman 2015). While this was certainly my experience in conducting interviews remotely, I found that meeting with interviewees in person allowed for the establishment of stronger relationships, which in turn, provided further access to information that may not have been as forthcoming if the interview was conducted telephonically.
Prior to undertaking this research, I was a full-time student at UCT between 1994 and 2001 where I completed my B.A. (Hons) and LL.B degrees and returned as a part-time student between 2008 and 2010 to complete a post-graduate diploma in trade law. I also spent time studying international human rights law as a part-time masters degree (M.St.) student at Oxford between 2014 and 2016. My research therefore benefitted from an acute awareness and understanding of the institutional structures, pedagogical approaches, and cultures of both universities developed while I was a student at these institutions.

Part of my research involves comparing how the #RMF movement unfolded at the universities of Cape Town and Oxford. This dimension includes an analysis and comparison of the ideologies and tactics employed by #RMF activists at both institutions. The horizontal comparison of the #RMF movements are considered across “homologous” (Bartlett and Vavrus 2016, p. 60) sites, namely, sites that share similar features. Homologous studies allow for comparison of similar phenomenon in distinct settings that are connected in complex ways. The #RMF movements at Oxford and UCT are compared by examining how the institutional context influenced the evolution and manifestation of the respective movements.

Ethical approval for this study was granted by three separate ethics committees or institutional review boards at Teachers College (Columbia University), the University of Cape Town, and the University of Oxford. In all three cases the committees granting ethical approval required a formal application, a copy of the dissertation outline, a copy of the semi-structured interview questions, an informed consent form, as well as specific documents unique to each institution. Specific approval was requested to audio record the interviews and to give interviewees the option of having their name included in the study.
The remainder of this chapter offers an outline of the three methodological approaches employed in this dissertation. These three approaches were used as a way of triangulating the data to ensure greater validity of the information gathered, but also to capture varying perspectives on the same data. Furthermore, an overview of the coding profiles employed to analyze the data collected through interviews, observation field notes, and documents are explained. Two cycles of coding were conducted using coding software called Nvivo. The data was then interpreted and categorized to detect emerging patterns. Lastly, this chapter sets out the limitations of this study.

**Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews of students and academics with varying degrees of involvement in #RMF were conducted at the universities of Cape Town and Oxford. Interview questions centered on the level of engagement with the #RMF movement, their motivations for becoming involved and their understanding of the main theoretical frameworks that informed the strategies employed by #RMF (see Appendix 3 for the interview protocol). A total of 98 semi-structured interviews were conducted with interviewees who were identified through purposive sampling.

Josselson and Lieblich (2003) suggest that data collection should conclude once the results become redundant or reach a point of saturation. At the same time, they find that real saturation is unlikely because each new participant adds a different dimension to the study. They recommend that the longer the interview, the fewer the number of participants and suggest a range of between 5 and 30 participants. After interviewing 30 participants, I continued to find new perspectives that were not previously shared. In my preliminary research, it became apparent that three major ideological pillars had emerged in the #RMF movement centered on
Pan-Africanism, Black Consciousness and Black radical feminism. A deliberate attempt was therefore made to interview individuals that identified with all three pillars. During the interviews, I also recorded how participants self-identified in terms of race, sexual orientation and gender (without necessarily asking them directly), recognizing that these three dimensions played a particularly important role in the #RMF movement and was partly responsible for the factionalism that emerged shortly after the movement’s formation. In addition, I noted the class distinctions between interviewees based on various pieces of information provided, such as their parents occupation or where they grew up.

I therefore interviewed students that identified with one or more of the three pillars of the #RMF movement, and ensured that I included respondents who were black and white, male, female and gender non-conforming, as well as queer, trans, and cis gendered. In the South African context, black included Indian and coloured students, whereas in the U.K. context, black denoted black and minority ethnic students. I also wanted to interview students who were at the center of the movement and those who operated on the periphery. After including all these categories of students as well as faculty, administrators, workers (such as cleaning and catering staff), and external commentators, I completed 98 interviews. Furthermore, it is also important to note that limited funding as well as the amount of time available to conduct research, played a fundamental role in determining the amount of data that was collected.

Most of the interviews (72) were conducted with students, faculty, and workers involved with #RMF in Cape Town, while the remainder (26) were conducted with students and faculty at Oxford. The difference in numbers are firstly, relative to the size of the movements in Cape Town and Oxford, second, the additional involvement of and collaboration with workers in the Cape Town movement, and third, the emphasis of this dissertation on #RMF UCT. Potential
Interviewees were identified through my initial analysis of the #RMF’s Facebook and Twitter pages, as well as media interviews, opinion pieces, press statements, academic articles, and media reports that mentioned specific individuals. Interviewees were contacted through Facebook Messenger, via email, and text message, or through recommendations made by other interviewees. In addition, I often approached individuals directly that I would meet at events or discussions as part of my observations in Cape Town and Oxford.

At UCT, interviews were also conducted with university administrators and workers due to the critical role played by these actors in the movement. Unfortunately, university administrators such as the Chancellor and Vice Chancellor of Oxford, as well as every Senior Officer at Oriel College, refused to be interviewed for this study. They refused to be interviewed despite the fact that I was granted ethical approval by the university and approached administrators several weeks before the suggested interview dates. The Provost’s personal assistant at Oriel College for instance wrote a polite response to my interview request via email: “Unfortunately, the Provost won’t be able to be involved with this” (October 10, 2017). All the Senior Officers I contacted at Oriel, with the exception of the Provost, failed to acknowledge receipt of my email.

In addition, a few interviews were also conducted with individuals who were involved with the #RMF movements in Oxford and Cape Town, but were not students or staff. For instance, Eusebius Mckaiser, a prominent radio talk show host and author, was invited to speak at an event hosted by the #RMF movement in Oxford. He also wrote a New York Times article about #RMF and provided important observations about both the Cape Town and Oxford movements. In addition, Noor Nieftagodien, a professor of history at the University of Witwatersrand and the co-editor of a book entitled, The Students Will Rise, offered important
insights into the history of the student movements. These interviews were used as a barometer to test various assumptions about #RMF and to gain an understanding of the broader impact of the movement and its connection to historical and political developments in South Africa and the United Kingdom. The following table synthesizes the number and range of interviews conducted:

Table 1: Interviews conducted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Workers</th>
<th>Administrators</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cape Town</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxford</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interview length ranged from a minimum of one hour up to four hours. On average, interviews lasted between one and a half to two hours, most of which, were recorded on my iPhone and later transcribed. In some cases, I met with interviewees such as Chumani Maxwele on multiple occasions over several months. In most instances, I conducted once-off interviews in person with individuals I had not met before. However, I met with some of the prominent members of the #RMF movements such as Chumani Maxwele, Ntokozo Qwabe, Brian Kamanzi, Wandile Kasibe and Wanelisa Xaba on more than one occasion. While a large number of interviewees consented to being recorded and granted permission to use their real names for this study, some chose not to be recorded or identified. During the interview, or at the conclusion of some interviews, certain individuals indicated they changed their minds about being named directly despite consenting to being recorded and named prior to the start of the interview. In
these instances, as well as in cases where interviewees were unwilling to be recorded or named from the outset, pseudonyms will be used instead.

The interviews were utilized to understand how the #RMF movement was formed, how it evolved, and what impact it had on the university and on individuals involved in it. Questions varied based on the level of involvement in #RMF. Interviews with students who initiated the movement were asked about what influenced them to employ decolonial theories, while those at the peripheries of the movement were asked what motivated them to participate in protest action organized by #RMF and what they made of the disruptive tactics employed by the movement. Interviews with university faculty also varied depending on their involvement in, or distance from, the movement. Many of them who were based at Oxford or UCT prior to 2015, were asked about their institutional experiences before and after the formation of #RMF, and how, if at all, the content of their curricula may have been affected by the demands made by students. At both UCT and Oxford, I was fortunate to interview faculty who were strongly opposed as well as deeply supportive of #RMF. This offered the opportunity to obtain a range of views on the movement.

University administrators at UCT were also interviewed as part of this study. UCT’s Vice Chancellor, Dr. Max Price, was approached to participate in this study, but indicated that: “I regret I am now being very selective in granting interview requests regarding #RhodesMustFall for two reasons…” (June 9, 2017). The reasons he offered were first, that he had conducted many interviews and could not be available for all interview requests, and second, that “Much of what I have to say on the matter has already been published – see for example Jonathan Jansen’s book titled “As By Fire”…” As a result, I relied on Jansen’s (2017) book to develop a better sense of Dr. Price’s thoughts on the movement. I was however granted an interview by the
Deputy Vice Chancellor for Transformation, Professor Loretta Feris, as well as the former Deputy Vice Chancellor, Professor Crain Soudien, who was at UCT when #RMF started. In addition, I interviewed representatives from worker unions at UCT who were intimately involved with #RMF from the outset. Two union factions emerged during the #RMF movement and were both interviewed for this study.

Observations

The interviews conducted for this research were supplemented with observations (including participant observation) of students and university staff. Observation is a helpful tool for collecting data in qualitative research studies since the methodology underpinning observation allows one to develop an understanding and offer a description of a situation from the perspective of insiders (Spradley 1980, Jorgensen 1989). Participant observation seeks to “uncover, make accessible, and reveal the meanings (realities) people use to make sense out of their daily lives. In placing the meaning of everyday life first, the methodology of participant observation differs from approaches that begin with concepts defined by way of existing theories and hypotheses” (Jorgensen 1989, p. 4).

Observations of meetings, speeches, theatre productions, book launches, and social events assisted in developing a more holistic understanding of the #RMF movement and its tactics. Spending time within the university setting and getting to know students and staff allowed me to further delve into the research questions through less formal means that were captured in my field notes. According to Kawulich (2005, p. 1), observations enable the researcher to offer vivid descriptions of situations, providing a “written photograph” of what is unfolding.
For instance, I took comprehensive field notes during and after watching a performance of a play called *The Fall* at the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town. The production was written and directed by UCT students who were involved in the #RMF movement. Some of my field notes relating to *The Fall* are provided as an example below:

*The young black woman sitting next to me responds to the student activists’ call for a decolonized university by snapping her fingers approvingly. It’s the final day of *The Fall*’s second run at the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town, not too far from where the Rhodes statue was eventually removed... The cast emerges from back stage after the show to warm embraces and requests for selfies from audience members.*

I watched *The Fall* a second time at St. Anne’s Warehouse theatre in Brooklyn in the U.S. during their three week performance of the play in March 2018. After the performance, I spent a few hours with the cast at a restaurant across the theatre where we spoke about the differences between performing for a South African and a U.S. audience, and the emotional impact of reliving their experiences as former students and #RMF activists.

Furthermore, after interviewing Chumani Maxwele on two separate occasions, he invited me to accompany him to the site in Khayelitsha where he collected the feces that he threw onto the Rhodes statue. My field notes describe the “overwhelming stench of human waste piercing the icy Cape winter air.” There are also field notes that describe the “chaotic and emotional” scene that unfolded following Maxwele’s vocal, and at times, personal critique of Prof. Crain Soudien, the former Vice Chancellor of UCT, during a public lecture that I attended with Maxwele.

In addition to attending a UCT alumni meeting, a protest meeting at UCT, a free education outreach event arranged at a high school by UCT students and staff, a gathering at
Rhodes House in Oxford, as well as a speech at the Oxford Union, I also attended and participated in a few events arranged by student activist, Brian Kamanzi, a leading figure in the #RMF movement. Kamanzi started a winter school called *Pathways to Free Education* that met in Khayelitsha. The winter school included UCT students as well as community members involved in affordable housing activism. Kamanzi was attempting to build a coalition between community and student activists by reading literature and watching films about social justice movements from various parts of the world.

At the *Pathways* meetings, I engaged in a form of participant observation that Kawulich (2005, p. 3) describes as “the process of establishing rapport within a community and learning to act in such a way as to blend into the community so that its members will act naturally, then removing oneself from the setting or community to immerse oneself in the data to understand what is going on and be able to write about it.” I applied this approach because of the nature of the *Pathways* meetings which necessitated participation and engagement.

I estimate that I conducted approximately 90 hours of observations of specific events and continued to make hundreds of hours of informal observations during my field work in Cape Town and Oxford between 2016 and 2018. The informal observations were slightly harder to make at the University of Oxford because the campus is spread out across the city whereas the UCT campus is more contained. Since I had access to some of the ornate dining halls as an Oxford graduate, I made general observations about the décor, paintings, student demographics, clothing, hairstyles, and the kind of food that Oxford students were fed. At UCT, the main cafeteria is publicly accessible allowing me to sit and observe interactions between cleaning staff and students for example. I also moved between faculties, and between upper, middle and lower campus, observing the differences and similarities between students, faculty and staff passing
through these spaces while sampling the variety of fast food and bad coffee on offer. During that time, I made intermittent observations about what was taking place around me. I also worked from various libraries in Oxford and at UCT, and would conduct similar observations of student and staff interactions, demographics, and behavior. In addition, I spent a fair amount of time looking at posters and flyers on departmental notice boards to assess the kinds of events and discussions that were taking place. While I saw the word “decolonization” on several UCT notice boards usually in the context of events and discussion seminars, I only noticed the word once on a departmental notice board in Oxford.

My general and more specific observations combined to offer a rich and deep understanding of the spaces I was collecting data from and conducting interviews in. Inevitably, I also benefitted greatly from having been a student at both institutions, thereby significantly reducing the time it took to navigate these spaces. At the same time, I am acutely aware of the limitations of this methodological approach which will be discussed in more detail under the limitations section below.

**Document Analysis**

The #RMF movement used various social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to articulate their ideas. In addition, several student leaders published opinion pieces and were interviewed by the press throughout the student uprisings. Consequently, an analysis of these documents and texts provided rich insights into the ideas being articulated at the start of the #RMF movements in Cape Town and Oxford, and how these ideas deepened and developed over time. Document analysis offers “a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents” (Bowen 2009, p. 27) in order to extract meaning and develop an understanding of the subject
matter. Documents can be considered as “social facts” (Atkinson & Coffey 1997, p. 47) that are created and shared across platforms to articulate specific ideas.

While my analysis includes several opinion pieces by students and faculty, as well as media reports and interviews, I also relied heavily on the official #RMF Facebook pages and Twitter accounts developed by the Oxford and Cape Town movements. I considered 3,819 tweets and 541 Facebook posts from #RMF UCT, as well as 2,146 tweets and 274 Facebook posts from #RMF Oxford. The social media pages of both movements were converted into pdf documents and analyzed using Nvivo. For instance, 3,819 tweets from #RMF UCT constituted 176 pages of text, and 541 Facebook posts amounted to 377 pages of text.

The #RMF UCT Facebook page was created in March 2015, whereas the #RMF Oxford Facebook page started in May 2015. Both Facebook pages include a range of information such as a list of demands, press statements, and event invitations. My primary analysis centered on tweets and Facebook posts from the start of the social media pages for both movements to the end of March 2016. The social media activity for the #RMF UCT and Oxford movements appear to end completely in December 2017 with no new activity in 2018. There were some tweets and posts between March 2016 and December 2017 which I considered but did not include as part of my primary analysis. I took a deliberate decision to limit the scope of my dissertation to the period between March 2015 and March 2016 since this was the most active period of the movement at UCT.

In addition to considering the opinions of students, I also analyzed the responses from both the universities of Cape Town and Oxford. The UCT website made this process significantly easier by dedicating a specific webpage to UCT news articles and statements related to #RMF. For purposes of this analysis, I included all 55 statements and articles on the UCT
It was slightly more challenging to locate statements issued by the University of Oxford, but since #RMF Oxford responded directly to some of the university statements, I included all of Oxford’s official responses in my analysis. In addition, I also incorporated 93 media reports, as well as opinion pieces written by Oxford students and faculty on both sides of the debate.

The documents were also helpful in constructing interview questions. For example, I read through both the #RMF Cape Town and Oxford mission statements several times prior to interviewing students. This allowed me to ask clarifying questions about how the mission statements were formulated and what informed some of the language used in constructing the list of demands. Similarly, when students or faculty published opinion pieces, I used these documents to frame my questions. For instance, Brian Kamanzi and Wanelisa Xaba from UCT, and Nigel Biggar from Oxford, wrote opinion pieces about the #RMF movements that were discussed during our interviews. At the same time, interviewees often led me to new documents that were unpublished or that I was unaware of. Crain Soudien, the former Deputy Vice Chancellor at UCT, shared an unpublished paper he wrote about the student movements, while Charles Conn, the CEO and Warden of the Rhodes Trust in Oxford, shared his working paper on historical legacies following our interview.

Initially, I tried to conduct a separate analysis and to distinguish between newspaper reports dealing with #RMF UCT and #RMF Oxford. But it became increasingly difficult to do so since several articles referred to both movements. Consequently, I chose to combine all the media reports since articles on #RMF Oxford inevitably referenced and expressed an opinion on #RMF UCT. The primary media reports used for my analysis in South Africa were taken from Independent Media (IOL) which includes a stable of 20 newspapers, as well as the Mail &
Guardian, Daily Vox, News24, GroundUp, and the Daily Maverick. The earliest coverage focused almost exclusively on Chumani Maxwele throwing feces onto the Rhodes statue. Most opinion pieces written by students appear in online publications such as the Daily Maverick and the Daily Vox. In Oxford, my document analysis included 23 articles published by the Guardian, Independent, Telegraph, and BBC News. Links to opinion pieces written by #RMF members and supporters were posted on the RMF Oxford’s website providing convenient access to these documents. The documents that were analyzed were used to inform, support, contrast or refute the information gathered through semi-structured interviews and observations, and supplemented the other sources of data collection.

**Coding Research Data**

**Coding Software**

The coding software used for this analysis is called *Nvivo* and should not be confused with the first cycle coding profile referred to as *In Vivo*. The coding software allows the user to develop nodes and sub-nodes which become the codes and sub-codes used in the analysis. The data which informs this study that was collected through interviews, observations and documents, was analyzed using Nvivo version 11.4.3. The software enabled me to code the interviews, observation field notes and documents by placing them into the various codes and sub-codes I developed.

I analyzed thousands of pages of documents and field notes, and hundreds of hours of interviews to reveal that codes such as “decolonization” and “statues and iconography”, as well as “violence” and “whiteness” were dominant codes in my analysis. Furthermore, when I compared references to the three pillars of the #RMF UCT movement namely, Black Consciousness, Black radical feminism, and Pan-Africanism, I discovered that “Black radical
feminism” was the dominant code. This led me to conclude that black feminist thinking which includes intersectionality and challenging patriarchy, played a particularly instrumental role in shaping the #RMF movement. This finding is supported by evidence collected from interviews, but not necessarily from media reports which primarily focuses on the removal of the Rhodes statue.

**The Coding Process**

A code is a “researcher generated construct” (Saldaña 2016, p. 4) that “translates” (Vogt, Vogt, Gardner, & Haeffele 2014, p. 13) research data such as interview transcripts, participant observation field notes, and documents, and then “attributes interpreted meaning” (Saldaña 2016, p. 4) to the data to categorize it and determine whether there are any emerging patterns. These patterns reflect consistent or regular occurrences in the data and serve to confirm descriptions of events or ideas articulated by multiple actors. Saldaña (2016) suggests that patterns do not only reflect similarities but could also be used to describe differences.

While coding has been described by Basit (2003, p. 145) as “a crucial aspect of analysis”, Saldaña (2016) argues that “coding is analysis” (p. 9) and that this process of analysis is cyclical. Saldaña (2016) therefore finds that there should be at least two cycles of coding data in order to capture the essence of the research story, thereby revealing various patterns, categories and connections. At the same time, Alvesson and Kärreman (2011) warn against analytical oversimplification due to a narrow codification process. Saldaña (2016) however counters this critique by developing 33 coding profiles some of which he acknowledges is more basic and perhaps reductionist, while others offer “multidimensional facets about the people we study” (p. 40).
This dissertation employed two of the 33 coding profiles developed by Saldaña (2016) during the first cycle of coding, and one coding profile during the second coding cycle. For the first coding cycle, I used In Vivo coding, which has also been referred to as “indigenous coding” (Saldaña 2016, p. 105), since it takes the actual words or phrases extracted from the interview transcripts, participant observation field notes, or documents to characterize the data. This approach uses “participant-generated words” to “prioritize and honor the participant’s voice” (Saldaña 2016, pp. 105-106). This form of coding was primarily applied to interview transcripts so that words or phrases employed consistently by interview participants, were used to determine patterns and emerging themes. For instance, codes such as “weapon of protest” or “black pain” are taken directly from interviews to reflect the language and ideas of participants.

While Saldaña (2016) finds that In Vivo coding could be employed independently from other coding profiles, he suggests that it be used in conjunction with another coding profile because it “may limit the researcher’s perspective on the data” (p. 109). Consequently, in addition to In Vivo coding, I also used Concept coding or “analytic coding” (Saldaña 2016, p. 119) during the first coding cycle. Concept coding assigns “levels of meaning to data” and is used to extract a broader meaning from a concept or phrase. For instance, throwing feces onto statues or participating in protest marches could be coded as “protest action.” At the same time, if these forms of resistance have intended purposes such as drawing attention to a problem or educating the public about this problem, then they are also coded as “public pedagogy.”

The two coding profiles used in the first coding cycle allow for both interpretive analysis and reflect the unfiltered ideas that emanate from interview participants. For the second cycle of coding, I used Focused coding which usually follows In Vivo coding (Saldaña 2016, p. 240). The cycle of Focused coding identified the most frequent or significant codes and then facilitated
“decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense” (Charmz 2014, p. 138).
Consequently, codes such as “black pain” and “protest action” which were coded during the first cycle, became sub-codes under the broader Focused code of “building collective resistance” during the second cycle. Similarly, “public pedagogy” became a sub-code of “advancing epistemic disobedience” in the second cycle of coding.

At the same time, it should be noted that certain words or phrases may be coded as both “building collective resistance” as well as “advancing epistemic disobedience” since there is clearly an overlap between these Focused codes. For example, in the introduction to a publication written by #RMF, it poses the following fundamental question: “How do we, as radical intellectuals, write and publish our writing if dominant practices of intellectual writing, and most channels for publishing/disseminating that writing, are colonised/colonial constructs?” (JWTC 2015, p. 1). This sentence was coded as both “building collective resistance” and “advancing epistemic disobedience” since it develops the collective category of “radical intellectuals” and calls on this collective to resist and question dominant intellectual practices, thereby evoking the notion of epistemic disobedience.

After completing the second cycle of coding, three major themes or nodes emerged: “advancing epistemic disobedience” was the first major code which included sub-codes such as “decolonization” and “fallism.” These sub-codes sometimes contained further sub-categories. The “decolonization” sub-code included “disruption” and “violence” as sub-categories, whereas the “fallism” sub-code had “fallist” and “must fall” as sub-categories. The second major code was “building collective resistance” which included sub-codes such as “black pain”, “public pedagogy” and “power”. The third major code was “challenging erasure and non-existence” which included “blackness and black bodies” and “humanity and dehumanization” as sub-codes.
Many sub-codes have more nuanced sub-categories that were created during the first cycle of coding and subsequently became part of major themes during the second cycle of coding. For instance, the word “revolution” was taken directly from #RMF publications and interviews and became an In Vivo code during the first cycle of coding. During the second cycle, “revolution” was placed under the “social movement” code which is a sub-code under the major theme of “building collective resistance.”

While the coding process can be tedious and result in a complex labyrinth of codes, sub-codes, and sub-sub-codes, it was a helpful methodological tool for analyzing three intersecting types of data. Nvivo also offered a platform for placing all my research comprising thousands of pages of documents and hundreds of hours of interviews in one space, thereby simplifying the coding process.

**Validity and Trustworthiness**

Creswell and Clark (2007) define validity as “the ability of the research to draw meaningful and accurate conclusions from all of the data in the study” (p. 146). It is important to recognize that this study does not involve a randomized control trial and that the universities were not randomly selected. I therefore acknowledge questions around the external validity of this research in that it may not be generalizable outside this particular study. Maintaining internal validity was at the forefront of my research design and considered at every stage. For each research question, more than one data collection method was included to assist in answering the question, thereby enabling data triangulation within each research question. The study is also designed to include perspectives from multiple levels to avoid a single version of events.

To address issues of internal validity, this research has been informed by significant on-site preparation including a pilot study during which, I piloted individual student and staff
interviews. I adjusted the interview protocol based on the pilot study results to ensure reliability and to address wording and questions that elicited confusion. During the analysis of the interview data, I adjusted questions that were confusing or demonstrated results that seemed skewed due to a leading question or poor wording.

The Researcher

The RMF movement started a few days after I ended my five year term from 2010 to 2015, as Chief Executive Officer of the South African Human Rights Commission. I was travelling with my wife across the African continent from Cairo to Cape Town over 100 days when I received news of the protests at the UCT. In my previous role as CEO, I led an investigation into racism at universities across South Africa and interacted with the Vice Chancellors as well as senior administrators and academics at these institutions. While the investigation into racism at universities raised some difficult questions, it strengthened my relationships with university administrators and academics. These relationships assisted in obtaining access to faculty and administrators at UCT where I spent several years as a student, and served as Deputy President of the Students’ Representative Council from 1998 to 1999. My knowledge of UCT is therefore extensive, based on the time I spent at the university, and is supplemented by my subsequent work at the Human Rights Commission.

Having also completed a master’s degree in international human rights law at the University of Oxford, my knowledge of the Oxford campus is comprehensive, but certainly not as extensive as my understanding of the culture and environment at UCT. Despite this, as an Oxford alumnus, access to the university was more easily negotiated for the purposes of this study.
After completing my five-year term at the Human Rights Commission and taking some time out to travel across Africa, I started my Ph.D. in international and comparative education at Teachers College, Columbia University in the Fall of 2015. Following the emergence of the #FeesMustFall movement and the realization that the cost of education in the U.S. was exorbitant, I drafted a resolution that was adopted by Teachers College Student Senate to support the student movement in South Africa. However, it was only during my preliminary Ph.D. research in 2016 when I met #RMF student leaders in Cape Town and Oxford, that I fully realized the extent of what was happening. Using my time in Oxford and Cape Town, I met with six prominent student leaders and three academics to establish relationships that I actively maintained through social media and e-mail. In October 2016, I worked alongside fellow South African students studying in the U.S. as well as U.S. students in New York, to arrange a protest outside the South African consulate in Manhattan to support students involved in the #FeesMustFall movement. Surprisingly, the small protest drew significant attention in South Africa and expanded my connections with student activists at the University of Cape Town. At the same time, I am acutely aware of my potential bias as an active supporter of the student movement and discuss this in more detail under the limitations section below.

**Limitations**

When I conducted my pilot study in 2016, I encountered two significant challenges: first, the #RMF movements in Cape Town and Oxford became fractured resulting in the formation of various sub-groups that developed competing narratives about the formation of the movement. Second, students are transient beings who move through the university every few years making it difficult to track their whereabouts after they leave the institution. This was a particular challenge at the University of Oxford where a large number of students are foreign nationals.
During the final phase of my research study, I mitigated the challenges identified during the pilot phase by engaging a wide range of students from various factions within #RMF. At both UCT and Oxford, I struggled initially to make connections with student activists who self-identified as Black radical feminists. Queer and trans black women at UCT and women of color at Oxford were initially reluctant to meet with me. After eventually agreeing to be interviewed, many Black radical feminists indicated that because they were traumatized by cis gendered men in their respective movements, they were reluctant to share their thoughts on #RMF with a cis gendered man like me.

Despite these initial difficulties, I conducted interviews with representatives from each of the factions within the #RMF movements at UCT and Oxford, as well as with white students at UCT who formed the White Privilege Project mentioned in #RMF’s mission statement. At the same time, these competing perspectives may affect my ability to discern key moments in the respective movements and could potentially obfuscate my understanding of the #RMF’s approach to decolonizing the university. Even though I collected a wealth of data, it is highly likely that students involved in the #RMF movements may not agree entirely with the way this research captures their perspectives. Furthermore, the narrow scope of the research questions fail to fully consider important dimensions of the #RMF movements including the use of technology and social media, or the life histories of student activists.

The second limitation relating to the spread of international students was mitigated to some extent by conducting interviews remotely. Most interviews were conducted in Cape Town and Oxford, but I also interviewed students in London and met with several students who were passing through New York City. Facebook and Google were particularly helpful in tracking down students. Engaging with university staff was less complicated given that many of them
were still based at their respective institutions. As mentioned earlier, the only major challenge I encountered was trying to interview university administrators from Oxford and from Oriel College who refused to meet with me despite having obtained ethical approval from Oxford to conduct the research.

More general limitations pertain to the research methods employed in this study. There is a great deal of uncertainty about what constitutes a sufficient number of interviews before reaching saturation. In a study conducted by Guest et al (2006), researchers found that saturation occurred within the first 12 interviews. However, in a U.K. study by Baker and Edwards (2012) on behalf of the National Center for Research Methods, they found that saturation is reached at 14 interviews. Josselson and Lieblich (2003) suggest a range of between 5 and 30 participants depending on the length of the interviews. In Mason’s (2010) analysis of sample size and saturation in 560 Ph.D. studies, he finds that the mean sample size was 31. However, Mason (2010) notes that Ph.D. studies are often influenced by financial and time constraints and that sample sizes are more reflective of these factors rather than qualitative research guidelines. Having conducted 98 interviews with a diverse range of participants, I believe that this study far exceeds the contested minimum number of interviews.

According to Kawulich (2005), there are several limitations to observation and participant observation as a research method including misinterpreting events and being perceived by respondents as an outsider. Dewalt and Dewalt (2002) find that the gender of the researcher influences their ability to access information or to attend certain events. This was a problem I encountered initially when trying to connect with Black radical feminists and women of color in the #RMF movements. As someone who identifies as a Black, ethnically Indian, heterosexual man, Black queer women were understandably wary of my requests to interview
Many queer women were marginalized in the #RMF movement and were unwilling to trust me because of my positionality. However, this challenge was mitigated after I eventually established personal contact with black women activists at conferences and meetings. For instance, Wanelisa Xaba and I presented papers at Columbia University’s Middle Eastern and African Studies (MESAS) Conference in 2016 where we became better acquainted. Despite successfully connecting with some black women and queer activists, I remained conscious of my inherent patriarchy throughout these engagements, trying as far as possible to ensure that their thoughts and ideas were captured and understood.

Document analysis also posed certain limitations since many documents contained insufficient detail. According to Bowen (2009), documents are not usually produced with the expectation that they will be researched in future and therefore “do not provide sufficient detail to answer a research question” (p. 32). Biased selectivity due to a limited collection of documents may further constrain research results. For this research study, thousands of pages of documents were analyzed from multiple perspectives to limit bias. These documents were collected by employing a convenience sampling approach due to the availability and ease of accessibility of Facebook and Twitter pages, as well as media reports and statements.

Lastly, as mentioned above, I participated in certain activities at Columbia University and in New York that offered support to the student movements in South Africa. While these activities suggest a bias toward the student movements, I believe that this research study contains sufficient safeguards to mitigate against this bias. My work as CEO of the South African Human Rights Commission, particularly in relation to racism and the right to education, may also create potential bias in both how I interpret events and how participants responded to me. For instance, the #RMF activists had a particularly negative view of the Commission that may have led me to
temper their critique in my analysis. However, I believe that the range of participants and depth of analysis, as well as my critique of the #RMF movements in Cape Town and Oxford reflected in the following chapters, constitute sufficient evidence of my attempts to meet the ethical standards required in qualitative research studies.
V – BLACK PAIN/BLACK LIBERATION

Introduction

I developed some sense of the overwhelming smell of the feces Maxwele used in the Rhodes statue protest, when he took me to the spot in Khayelitsha that he collected it from (field notes July 20, 2017). We parked our car on the side of the road where Maxwele stopped to collect the containers of feces and transport them back to UCT in a taxi on March 9, 2015. The containers were usually left on the side of the road for collection by a city of Cape Town sanitation service, after residents removed the storage buckets from the communal portable toilets themselves. There were no plastic containers lining the road when we arrived in Khayelitsha since they were only collected twice a week. But some containers were left outside the rows of houses that were constructed from zinc sheets, discarded wood and reused plastic. As Maxwele and I walked on the sandy pathways that connected the houses to the main tarred road, the smell of human waste cut through the cold, crisp winter’s day. I wondered what it must have been like transporting the feces in the trunk of a car for 25 kilometers or the 30 minutes it took to drive from Khayelitsha to UCT. All the interviewees I spoke to who were at UCT at the time of the Rhodes statue protest, remembered the lingering smell of feces for days after the incident.

This chapter considers how Maxwele’s protest sparked the formation of #RMF at UCT, how the movement quickly evolved immediately afterwards, and why student activists chose to adopt a decolonial framework to make sense of what #RMF diagnosed as “black pain” which they described as “the dehumanisation of black people” (#RMF Mission Statement 2015). In order to disentangle the complex factors that coalesced in the formation of #RMF, this chapter examines what led #RMF activists to adopt a decolonial framework centered on Pan-Africanism, Black Consciousness and Black radical feminism. To answer this research question, I employ
social movements theory while simultaneously drawing on epistemic disobedience as an overarching theoretical framework.

While addressing this research question, I discovered that the university represents a paradox for black bodies in that it “is the only space”, according to #RMF activist Masixole Mlandu (interview, June 30, 2017), “that we, as black people, have to think…” (Black liberation). At the same time, the university engages in acts of “epistemic coloniality” (Mbembe 2016) that black students experience as dehumanizing (Black pain). I also find that Cloete’s (2015) assertion that the #RMF student protests can be explained using Castells (2015) new social movements theory, is not entirely supported by my analysis. While new social movements theory is helpful in clarifying the influence of black identity on the emergence of #RMF, it does not fully account for the complex factors that gave rise to the student movement.

The Birth of a Movement

Since the #RMF mission statement specifically acknowledges Maxwele’s “radical protest” of throwing feces onto the Rhodes statue as the moment that “sparked” the formation of the movement, I thought it necessary to revisit that moment in a more deliberate manner. It is also important to note that Maxwele was and remains a controversial figure in #RMF. He was for instance, accused of physically attacking a black queer woman protestor at Wits University in Johannesburg (News24 April 5, 2016), and faced disciplinary charges for shouting “whites should be killed” at a white woman lecturer at UCT (News24 June 8, 2015).

But he also stirred controversy five years before throwing feces onto the Rhodes statue when he showed his middle finger to former president, Jacob Zuma, in 2010 (Ray 2016). Maxwele told me that he enjoyed running, and was exercising when the president’s motorcade drove past him in Rondebosch near UCT. He stopped running when he saw the row of black cars
with blue flashing lights race toward him and raised his middle finger. Police officers traveling in the president’s motorcade arrested Maxwele when they saw him gesturing, placed a bag over his head, and forced him to write a letter of apology. Maxwele submitted a complaint via the former apartheid president F. W. De Klerk’s foundation, to the South African Human Rights Commission where I was based as CEO at the time.

The Human Rights Commission dealt with approximately 10,000 cases each year during the 2010 to 2015 period that I worked there, but I specifically remembered this case because of the lack of cooperation from the Minister of Police and the media attention it attracted. While delivering a public lecture at UCT a few months after Maxwele’s middle finger incident, I reflected on the case because it involved a UCT student. I had no idea that Maxwele was in the audience at the time. After my lecture, Maxwele introduced himself and we spoke briefly about his case and how the matter was slowly progressing at the Human Rights Commission.

It was not until August 2016 that I saw Maxwele again at the Woodstock coffee shop. He was wearing a suit with a tie that had been slightly loosened at the neck. Maxwele had just attended a court hearing in which UCT sought an interdict preventing him and other student protestors from entering the university because of his involvement in the #Shackville protest in which various pieces of art work was set alight. During email exchanges prior to our meeting in August 2016, Maxwele asked: “Please, can you donate two books to the #RMF and #FMF Students Movement. A) The Birth of Bio-politics by Michel Foucault b) Society Must Be Defended by Michel Foucault. I am sure you will get these two books in New York. It will be great if you can donate them to the Movement” (e-mail correspondence, June 22, 2016). As I handed the books to Maxwele at our meeting in Woodstock, he confessed to being an avid reader and spent significant amounts of time in the library at UCT. I was interested in how the #RMF’s
reliance on Biko, Fanon, and Crenshaw shaped the strategies employed by the #RMF movement, and curious about why he specifically asked for books by Foucault—a white European man.

Maxwele explained that the negation of Western scholarship was “disingenuous” because Biko and Fanon developed their ideas by drawing on Euro-American knowledge (interview, August 31, 2016). By reading Foucault, Maxwele suggested that Western scholarship could be “used as a weapon.” During our second interview nearly one year later, Maxwele again used the word “weapon” to suggest that “poo is a weapon of protest…” (interview, June 27, 2017).

Maxwele informed me that he drew inspiration from earlier protests led by former African National Congress (ANC) councilor, Andile Lile, who in June 2013, dumped feces from portable toilets in Khayelitsha on the steps of the Western Cape provincial legislature in the center of Cape Town. More feces were dumped at Cape Town international airport that same month by Lile and fellow Khayelitsha residents to protest the City of Cape Town’s failure to provide decent sanitation to poor, black families living on the outskirts of the city (Davis 2013).

My sense of Maxwele was that he was willing to use a range of “weapons” depending on the circumstances. In his legal battle with the minister of police where he showed president Zuma his middle finger, Maxwele sought the assistance of an apartheid president. When challenging UCT, Maxwele drew inspiration from an ANC councilor. Furthermore, in an article he published one year after the Rhodes statue protest, Maxwele (2016) indicated that he was inspired by Biko’s Black Consciousness philosophy, but was also interested in reading Foucault. While some #RMF activists considered Maxwele’s behavior as ideologically inconsistent or contradictory, I recognized that Maxwele was simply being tactical; he was using whatever weapons he could find to fight his battles.
Maxwele and three UCT students, including Ph.D. student and prominent #RMF activist, Wandile Kasibe, met for several months before the Rhodes statue was defaced, talking about how they could draw attention to the violence the statue represented. They considered hiring a truck to pull down the statue, but the idea of using feces suggested by Wandile Kasibe eventually prevailed. Maxwele told me how he persuaded a sedan taxi driver he knew, to drive him to Khayelitsha where he picked up two plastic containers filled with human feces that was left on the side of the road for collection by Cape Town sanitation services. Khayelitsha residents were still using the portable toilets that Lile’s protest drew attention to in 2013.

Maxwele exited the taxi and walked toward the Rhodes statue with the containers of feces. He started attracting the attention of passersby standing topless, wearing a pink miner’s hat, and blowing a whistle. He also contacted the press to witness his protest. Some of the students he planned the action with joined him at the statue while curious onlookers stopped to see what was happening. The students’ representative council (SRC) president at the time, Ramabina Mahapa, was informed about “a naked black man throwing poo at the statue of Cecil John Rhodes” (interview, July 5, 2017) and ran over to the statue to assess the situation. Many students and faculty I spoke to about that moment were unaware of what was happening. Some thought that the use of feces was “disgusting” or “unhygienic”, while others thought it was “brilliant” and “powerful.” The university itself described the protest as “reprehensible” (Klopper 2015). Everyone remembered the smell.

In thinking about how Maxwele’s use of feces evoked a very different response from its use in the sanitation protests, I recognized that even though the feces in both cases emanated from Khayelitsha, its destination (both geographically and ideologically) was fundamentally different. Maxwele threw the feces onto a statute of a white, British imperialist located at UCT,
whereas the sanitation protestors dumped the feces onto the steps of the Western Cape provincial legislature and Cape Town international airport. Maxwele’s protest therefore took on an academic and artistic disposition, whereas the sanitation protests were perceived as being politically motivated. This distinction is not immediately clear since Maxwele’s public statements at the time of the incident make no reference to the decolonial framework subsequently adopted by the #RMF movement. Rather, an intellectual inference is made because of where the protest occurs and who performs the protest action. It is a UCT student rebelling against the university, rather than a politician from the African National Congress challenging the Western Cape led, Democratic Alliance party.

When I asked Maxwele why he thought there were such different responses to the sanitation protests compared to his own actions, he stated that the activists involved in the sanitation protests “can articulate what they were doing but of course they might not be able to articulate in the scholarly acceptability you know” (interview, June 27, 2017). However, the “scholarly acceptability” Maxwele ascribes to his own protest, is only subsequently developed in the #RMF’s mission statement released 16 days after his protest when the movement adopts a decolonial framework underpinned by Black Consciousness, Pan Africanism and Black radical feminism.

I therefore believe that the location of the protest—the historically white university—is just as important to consider as the form the protest took, as well as the ideological framework that was developed following the protest. It is the location of the protest rather than the “scholarly acceptability” that distinguishes the sanitation protests from Maxwele’s protest in my opinion. Maxwele was however not the first person to question the prominence of the Rhodes statue at UCT. Ramabina Mahapa (interview, 5 July 2017), the former students’ representative
council president, indicated that debates about the Rhodes statue had a long history at UCT. Mahapa wrote an opinion piece questioning the statue’s existence in 2014. In response, Dr. Max Price, the Vice Chancellor of UCT, appointed Prof. Crain Soudien, the Deputy Vice Chancellor, to create a task team on symbolism, signage and heritage, which had its first meeting in January 2015. The task team, which Mahapa formed part of, resolved to host a seminar on March 16, 2015 to discuss the Rhodes statue, as well as several paintings depicting naked black people across campus that Mahapa documented and photographed.

Similarly, Dr. Zethu Matebeni, an academic at UCT, told me about various initiatives to address questions of race at the university that started prior to the #RMF movement. She was a founding member of Transform UCT in 2012 which later changed its name to the Black Academic Caucus after the formation of #RMF. This group of academics came together because they felt “alienated” according to Dr. Matebeni who also stated: “there was something building up and it had to burst” (interview, July 21, 2017). She coincidentally organized a seminar on March 11, 2015 entitled, “What is African about UCT?” Many of the students who attended her seminar subsequently became members of the #RMF movement according to Dr. Matebeni.

Black students were also organizing informal reading groups prior to #RMF’s emergence. Mbali Matandela, a Black radical feminist and a leading voice in the #RMF movement, indicated that she was part of a black feminist reading group called the South African Young Feminist Activists (Say-F) that was meeting for months before the start of the movement. The reading group studied the concept of intersectionality, which was to become a key ideological dimension of the movement. Other initiatives that preceded the formation of #RMF included a Pan-Africanist oriented group called Imbizo that arranged discussions on Pan-Africanism, race and land dispossession at Leo Marquard residence hall.
Furthermore, workers at UCT were also mobilizing prior to March 2015, to challenge the system of outsourcing that cleaning, catering, security and garden staff were subjected to. During interviews with union leaders, as well as former shop stewards, faculty involved with the UCT Workers Forum, and students aligned with the Left Students Forum who supported the workers, it became evident that UCT’s outsourcing policy was being challenged. The system of outsourcing meant that UCT had no direct relationship with workers, but rather with a management company that employed the workers to perform various services at the university. According to Smartdryck Abrahams (interview, July 18, 2017) who represented the National Education Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU), an application to strike was submitted by NEHAWU to the Commission on Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) shortly before Maxwele’s protest action. However, the strike failed to materialize.

Prior to March 9, 2015, a cross-section of UCT revealed that every major group including students, faculty, and workers, were involved in some form of contestation with the university. These contestations all appear to have a strong racial dimension, in that they were led by black students, workers and faculty against an institution that was described by a worker union representative as being “similar to the apartheid system” (Smartdryck Abrahams, interview, July 18, 2017). The student, worker and faculty groups saw the university as an oppressive space for black people—subsequently defined as “black pain” by the #RMF movement. Students, workers and faculty created pockets of resistance through reading groups, worker unions, and student governance structures. Despite the common thread that linked these groups, they appeared to operate in isolation from one another.

Maxwele was in many ways disconnected from the student, worker and academic groups engaged in conversations about the university space. He was not involved with the task team on
symbolism, signage and heritage spurred on by SRC president Ramabina Mahapa. Neither was Maxwele engaged in Imbizo’s Pan-Africanist conversations, or the Say-f Black radical feminist meetings. Maxwele did not participate in the Left Students Forum campaign to support workers, and was not involved with the Black Academic Caucus. Furthermore, Maxwele did not fit the stereotypical description of the black, middle-class UCT student. He was born in 1985, nine years before the end of apartheid, in a village in the Eastern Cape to a mother who was a domestic worker and a father who was a miner.

At the time Maxwele decided to throw feces onto the Rhodes statue, he had no idea what would happen. In my conversations with Maxwele, he suggested that “the whole thing was a fluke” (interview, June 27, 2017). He did not anticipate the impact his protest would have across South Africa and the world. It seemed Maxwele was consumed for several months with whether he should proceed with the protest: “Every time I went for a run… there was a high spirit that pushed me towards that thing…” (interview, June 27, 2017).

On the one hand, Maxwele’s protest is located outside the conversations about the university as an oppressive space for black bodies initiated by black student, worker and faculty groups. On the other hand, his protest powerfully captured the essence of what each of these groups were attempting to articulate. When I asked Maxwele how he responded to critics who argued that he find more suitable forms of protest, he retorted, “what are these better ways?” I agree with Maxwele that it is unlikely that a more traditional approach would have had the same impact as his performative disruption. The #RMF mission statement acknowledges this when it states that #RMF’s formation “was sparked by Chumani Maxwele’s radical protest against the statue of Cecil John Rhodes…” (#RMF 2015).
However, while the formation of #RMF was inspired by Maxwele’s protest, the decolonial framework developed by #RMF reflected in its mission statement took on a distinct ideological and theoretical trajectory that was not present at the time of the feces protest. This assertion is based on an analysis of statements made by Maxwele immediately following the March 9 protest in which he does not directly refer to any theory, nor invoke Biko or Fanon, or the idea of decolonization. Given the mission statement’s centrality as #RMF’s foundational document, an analysis of the key elements reflected in the statement namely, Pan-Africanism, Black Consciousness, and Black radical feminism, will assist in developing a deeper understanding of the transition from Maxwele’s protest to the formation of #RMF as a social movement.

**Constructing a Decolonial Framework**

As Ru Slayen, a student in applied math, read out the draft #RMF mission statement line by line in the occupied Azania House, students started clicking their fingers in approval (interview, July 26, 2017). He described how a small group of students, including him, Leila Khan and Mbali Matandela, wrote the statement prior to it being read out and adopted on March 25: “There was a group of people who basically wrote the statement kind of exclusively in those early days…” (interview, July 26, 2017). Slayen had reservations about how supportive students would be of the radical ideas reflected in the #RMF’s mission statement because of the reconciliatory tone adopted at the mass outdoor gathering on Jameson Plaza just after Maxwele defaced the Rhodes statue. He was therefore surprised when students started clicking their fingers. While some minor changes were made, Slayen indicated that “the statement ended up being adopted as the movement’s politics” (interview, July 26, 2017).
The #RMF’s mission statement which was crafted over five days and adopted by the occupying students on March 25, 2015, starts with the following line: “We are an independent collective of students, workers and staff who have come together to end institutionalised racism and patriarchy at UCT” (#RMF 2015). The statement acknowledges Maxwele’s “radical protest” and how it “brought to the surface the existing and justified rage of black students”. While the statement specifically mentions Black Consciousness and intersectionality, Pan-Africanism is introduced slightly later in official #RMF documents. During interviews with #RMF activists, they refer to Black Consciousness, Pan-Africanism and Black radical feminism (which includes intersectionality), as the three pillars of the movement.

I argue that these three pillars establish the basis for #RMF’s decolonial framework, and that the construction of this framework constitutes an act of epistemic disobedience. The students’ invocation of decolonial theorists such as Fanon and Biko and of concepts such as intersectionality, was symptomatic of this disobedience. Black students on the margins of the white university space, rejected UCT’s privileging of European theorizations of power by developing a framework centered on Black Consciousness, Pan Africanism and Black radical feminism. The #RMF’s disobedience, directed toward the university, was primarily based on student experiences of dehumanization or black pain within the university space. At the same time, their formulation of a decolonial framework that demanded black liberation, took place in the same space, primarily during their occupation of Azania House. The Black pain/Black liberation thesis I advance in this chapter flows from this paradox.

At the same time, the inclusion of intersectionality (as part of Black radical feminism) in the #RMF mission statement, speaks to another form of epistemic disobedience within #RMF itself. It suggests that black women and queer people, who told me they had to fight to ensure the
inclusion of intersectionality in the mission statement, were engaged in an internal act of disobedience. I suggest that this second tier of epistemic disobedience was introduced by Black radical feminists as a way of countering the dominant narrative of Black Consciousness (and later, Pan-Africanism). These dominant narratives, according to the Black radical feminists I spoke to, contributed to the historical erasure of black women in the anti-apartheid struggle, and may have similarly erased the contribution of black women and queer people in the #RMF movement.

The next section considers these two dimensions of epistemic disobedience directed externally, toward the university, and internally, within the #RMF movement, by examining the three pillars of #RMF’s decolonial framework in more detail.

**Black Consciousness**

One of the major themes that run through the #RMF’s mission statement centers on the idea of blackness; on Black Consciousness, what it means to be “black”, and to experience “black pain.” Leila Khan, a law student and member of the Muslim Youth Movement at UCT (interview July 19, 2017), noted during our interview that the very first time the idea of “black pain” was introduced as a concept in the #RMF context, was during a meeting of Black student organizations on March 13, 2015. While the minutes of that meeting fail to clarify what exactly was meant by black pain, it expressed concern about the tone of the mass meeting held on Jameson Plaza the previous day stating that, “[y]esterday was supposed to be about hearing black pain” but instead, the mass meeting was described as a “shapeless bag of activities” (meeting minutes, March 13, 2015).
References to “black pain” are also made in the student theatre production, *The Fall* (Conrad et al 2017, p. 22), where Camilla, played by Ameera Conrad, offered the following description of the occupation of Azania House in the play’s script:

Camilla: We were pushing against each other, sweating and singing, not knowing what would happen next. Fuck, man, it was historic! Finally we were doing something. Finally, black students at UCT felt confident to speak about the traumas we face on this campus. We renamed Bremner building Azania House, a name given to South Africa by the PAC many years ago. It was there, at Azania House, that we began to share in each other’s black pain.

In the #RMF mission statement under a subheading, “centering black pain”, it equates black pain with dehumanization. However, the mission statement also defines “black” as “all people of colour” (2015). This definition reflects Biko’s (1971, 2017) philosophy of Black Consciousness where he states that blacks are “those who are by law or tradition politically, economically and socially discriminated against as a group in South African society and identifying themselves as a unit in the struggle towards the realisation of their aspirations” (p. 52). According to Leila Khan (interview, July 19, 2017):

As far as Black Consciousness… it was a really good way to make sense of all the critiques that we were making about white people being involved and limiting the space. I think we had all been reading Biko by ourselves… and then also… the practical stuff that comes from his writing: so, how do you actually organize and how it’s actually more effective to organize without white people. We used that as a point of departure to explain the idea that black students… And also just this unifying idea of ‘black’ which is also very important because that was not pervasive. You don’t find people just identifying as black like in a non-phenotypical way.

The #RMF mission statement acknowledges that blackness as a “political identity” should not ignore “the huge differences that exist between us”; it aims to build “unity to bring
about our collective liberation” (2015). According to Biko (2017), “being black is a reflection of a mental attitude” rather than pigmentation, and by adopting blackness as an identity, “you have started on a road towards emancipation…” (p. 52). However, in several conversations with student activists, many indicated that when a coloured or Indian person self-identified as black, they were referred to as “Biko black”, whereas those who were black Africans, were referred to as “black black.” This distinction between Biko blacks and black blacks seemed to emerge later in the movement as a way of signaling the significant class differences within the broad category of black.

It is important to note that while Black Consciousness is a concept taken directly from Biko’s work, “black pain” is a new idea developed by the #RMF at its March 13, 2015 meeting. Maxwele acknowledges that the idea of black pain was created after his protest on March 9. He stated in an article written one year after the protest that the “#RhodesMustFall student movement was born out of pain and frustration – what we later called Black Pain” (Maxwele 2016, no page number). In the #RMF’s collation of writing, poetry and statements compiled through the Johannesburg Workshop on Theory and Criticism (JWTC 2015), student activist Khumo Sebambo reflected on the notion of black pain which she described as a “real affliction” invoked during the movement “as an important aspect of identity formation” (p. 108).

The formation of a collective black identity using the notion of Black Consciousness and black pain became a helpful way of articulating the feelings of alienation that black students encountered at UCT. By delinking from Eurocentric knowledge systems and adopting Black Consciousness as one of the pillars of the #RMF’s decolonial framework, students created opportunities to “link (instead of delinking) with knowers who are dealing with conditions of coloniality and projects of decoloniality…” (Mignolo 2011, p. 62). Collective identity within
#RMF therefore appears to be facilitated through acts of epistemic disobedience directed toward the university.

However, in a chapter of his book on the #RMF movement entitled “Black Pain Matters: Down with Rhodes” Nyamnjoh (2016) argues that “Maxwele’s reference to collective black pain was intended as a strategic essentialism…” (p. 83). In his analysis, Nyamnjoh (2016), who is a professor of anthropology at UCT, suggests that while this essentialism was necessary to build collective resistance in the #RMF movement, essentialisms were also deployed during colonialism and apartheid “as a technology of exploitation” (p. 83). Black pain therefore offers a vocabulary for naming what students are experiencing, but runs the risk of essentializing the black student experience. At the same time, Nyamnjoh (2016) acknowledges that the recognition of black pain reflects a level of maturation for South Africans who during apartheid, were forced to repress this pain for the sake of survival.

In an opinion piece written by Dr. Shose Kessi (no date), a senior lecturer in the department of psychology at UCT and a member of the Black Academic Caucus, she considers the idea of black pain by posing the following question: “How can my mind operate separately from the rest of my being?” (no page number). Kessi (no date) critiques the removal of the body from the process of theorizing to maintain a false sense of rationality and neutrality. She asserts that “[b]lack pain tells us about how oppressive power works” and that it facilitates the developments of “a new level of consciousness” (no page number), where student experiences of alienation form the basis for the emergence of new ideas that lead to decolonization.

However, Achille Mbembe (2015) critiques this invocation of pain: “‘I am my pain’ – how many times have I heard this statement in the months since #RhodesMustFall emerged?” (no page number). Mbembe asserts that “the fusion of self and suffering in this astonishing age
of solipsism and narcissism” is a dangerous and self-indulgent argument that detracts from structural analysis. The fact that black pain centers the personal experiences and feelings of black students, is an idea that Mbembe (2015) finds deeply problematic: “Personal feelings now suffice. There is no need to mount a proper argument” (no page number). This trenchant critique of the #RMF’s notion of black pain stems from Mbembe’s (2015) concern that the interpretation of personal experiences can never be challenged.

It is also important to contextualize Mbembe’s critique by recalling his relationship with the #RMF student movement. Mbembe, a highly renowned professor at Wits University, was initially revered by student activists who invited him to speak at one of their education meetings on April 29, 2015. A YouTube video of the event shows Mbembe being very warmly introduced by the #RMF representative. In the video, Mbembe mentions a reading group on Fanon that he facilitated for #RMF activists earlier that day. During his address at the #RMF event, Mbembe (2015b) supports the removal of the Rhodes statue. However, he subsequently became a strong critic of the movement referring to the tactics employed by students at UCT on October 14, 2016 as “look[ing] more and more as a Boko Haram style of violence – intimidation, filibustering, name calling, emotional blackmail, and increasingly, physical assault, the destruction of precious public assets and the use of fire as a sacrificial and pseudo-purificatory weapon” (GroundUp News 2016, no page number).

While conducting field work in Cape Town, I attended Mbembe’s book launch of A Critique of Black Reason on July 20, 2017 where the first question an audience member asked him was whether he still equated the student movement with Boko Haram. Mbembe’s response which I recorded, offers a historical analysis of Boko Haram, followed by his agreement that the way in which he formulated his comment “was somewhat unfortunate and hasty, and I don’t
have a problem retracting it” (field notes, July 20, 2017). He added that “as far as the student movement is concerned I really don’t know what else to say about it. The student movement will define its own cause” (field notes, July 20, 2017). Mbembe ended his response to the question by recognizing that higher education institutions must be transformed in a way that does not destroy the institution.

Mbembe’s (2015, no page number) arguments, largely replicated by Nyamnjoh (2016), also suggest that black pain is derived from a particular obsession with whiteness: “‘Whiteness’, ‘white power’, ‘white supremacy’, ‘white monopoly capital’ is firmly back on the political and cultural agenda, and to be white in South Africa now is to face a new-old kind of trial although with new judges – the so-called ‘born-free’”—a reference to South Africans born after the end of apartheid. Critics of the #RMF movement such as Mbembe (2015) and to a lesser degree Nyamnjoh (2016), assert that students’ obsession with race and more specifically whiteness, has become “a deep fantasmatic object of our unconscious” (no page number). There is a cost, according to Mbembe (2015), of the student movements’ strong focus on whiteness, “this mirror object of our fear and our envy, our hate and our attraction, our repulsion and our aspirations” (no page number).

Whiteness is certainly a central theme that emerges in #RMF statements and in conversations with students. The #RMF’s mission statement calls for a movement that is deliberately black, limiting the participation of white students “so long as that participation takes place on our terms” (#RMF 2015). The mission statement quotes extensively from Biko (1978) to argue for a duality of struggles: first, a black emancipatory struggle led by black people themselves, and second, a struggle led by white people within white society to free themselves from oppression.
During interviews with students who were intimately involved with the development of the mission statement, the role and involvement of white students in #RMF was a significant point of contention that “took a really long time to get some sort of consensus” according to Ru Slayen (interview July 26, 2017). Students such as Slayen, called for limited involvement of white students as reflected in the #RMF mission statement. For Chumani Maxwele on the other hand, there is nothing as “powerful as allowing white people to sit in a room and then tell them to keep quiet” (interview June 27, 2017). The contestations about whiteness and white involvement reflected in the different responses by student leaders, support to some extent, the concerns raised by Mbembe about the movement’s obsession with whiteness. However, white students I spoke to that were intimately involved with the creation of the White Privilege Project that later became Disrupting Whiteness, had a different perspective.

Jessica Breakey who served as the transformation coordinator of UCT’s student representative council in 2014, and was Kgotsi Chikane’s partner when the #RMF movement started, told me that white students were largely directed by black students. She described how “tricky” it was being a “white ally” in a movement led by black students who did not always speak with one voice: “eventually you have to choose which black voice you’re going to ally yourself to… there’s not one homogenous group. And the tricky part then is by doing that, the white ally still assigns power to one voice over the other” (interview August 31, 2017).

The ambiguities of “white allyship” during #RMF was however the basis for a much more effective relationship between black and white students during #FeesMustFall (#FMF) according to Breakey. She indicated that by the time #FMF started toward the end of 2015, many of those initial difficulties had been worked through. Breakey started the White Privilege Project after being approached by Leila Khan, a member of the Muslim Youth Movement at UCT, who
helped draft the #RMF mission statement together with Ru Slayen and others. According to Breakey, Khan was disappointed with the way the mass meeting facilitated by Kgotsi Chikane had unfolded on March 12, because it seemed to privilege the voices of white students. Khan suggested that Breakey arrange a gathering of white students to discuss how best they could support the #RMF movement, given #RMF’s decision to limit white involvement. While the #RMF mission statement supported the White Privilege Project, stating that white students “can contribute through conscientising their own community on campus” (no page number), Breakey described the meeting of white students as “very awkward” (interview August 31, 2017). This awkwardness became particularly pronounced when black students who attended the packed meeting were asked by black #RMF members to leave the room to give white students some space to think through concepts such as white privilege and reverse racism.

The “tricky” and “awkward” nature of the relationship between a black student movement and its white allies does not necessarily support the critique developed by Mbembe (2015), but instead reflects the nuances of engaging with what Steyn (2001) refers to as “the master narrative of whiteness” (p. 3)—the centering of whiteness as a framework for making sense of the world. Consequently, Mbembe’s (2015) assertion that the student movement’s engagement with whiteness will always “start from the assumption that whiteness has become this accursed part of ourselves we are deeply attached to, in spite of it threatening our own very future well-being” (no page number), seems too simplistic. Mbembe’s (2015) analysis may be applicable to the start of the movement as the #RMF grappled with the question of whiteness, but it fails to adequately capture the complexity and messiness of the movement’s evolving struggle with whiteness that took on a different dynamic by the time the #FeesMustFall (#FMF) movement emerged in October 2015.
While Mbembe (2015) problematizes #RMF’s engagement with the university as the inability to “demythologize whiteness” (no page number), I argue that this was only one part of the equation. Adopting Black Consciousness as a pillar of the movement, constituted an act of epistemic disobedience that challenged the white, Eurocentric university. But at the same time, the appropriation of Black Consciousness philosophy also resulted in the establishment of a collective identity centered on blackness. By creating a black-led movement that limited white student involvement, #RMF was simultaneously challenging the rainbow nation idea associated with South Africa’s transition to democracy. Their disobedience toward the university must therefore be considered in conjunction with their disobedience toward the state.

Furthermore, while Mbembe (2015) correctly recognizes #RMF’s engagement with whiteness, he completely misses #RMF’s internal struggle with patriarchy. This second tier of epistemic disobedience that occurs within the movement, is explored in the next section. I find that it is the movement’s inability to respond to this second tier of disobedience centered on challenging patriarchy, that eventually led to #RMF’s collapse.

**Black Radical Feminism**

In an opinion piece written by Mbali Matandela (also known as Mbalinhle Matandela) on her involvement in the #RMF movement, she writes: “After the movement’s first meeting, myself and a small group of black radical feminists decided that we needed to stake our claim in talks about the university and its institutional racism… We were not going to let only men lead the movement” (2015, no page number). The #RMF’s mission statement, which was released five days before Matandela’s article, appears to support her narrative when it states that, “while this movement emerged as a response to racism at UCT, we recognise that experiences of
oppression on this campus are intersectional and we aim to adopt an approach that is cognisant of this going forward” (#RMF 2015).

Crenshaw’s (1989) intersectional framework is a “Black feminist criticism” (p. 139) of treating race and gender as mutually exclusive resulting in the erasure of black women’s experiences. Intersectionality therefore considers how different elements of identity such as race, gender, and sexual orientation, which are often viewed separately, are in fact connected. Her paper analyzes how U.S. courts dealt with black women plaintiffs to reveal the “conceptual limitations of the single-issue analysis that intersectionality challenges” (p. 149). In addition to challenging patriarchy, intersectionality also challenges white feminism, which privileges the experience of white women. Consequently, by recognizing the experiences of “Black women as the starting point” (Crenshaw 1989, p. 140), intersectionality extends beyond a simple merger of identities to recognize how black women can simultaneously belong to more than one category of identity.

The #RMF mission statement distinguishes between the emergence of the movement as a response to racism sparked by Maxwele’s protest on the one hand, and its evolutionary trajectory as an intersectional movement that extends beyond race. Two ideological dimensions can already be discerned at this early stage in the development of the #RMF: the first is the adoption of Black Consciousness as a founding pillar of the movement which incorporates and centers the idea of black pain. The second dimension reflected in the #RMF mission statement, builds on Black Consciousness and develops the idea of black pain by employing intersectionality as a way of “tak[ing] into account that we are not only defined by our blackness, but that some of us are also defined by our gender, our sexuality, our able-bodiedness, our mental health, and our class, among other things” (#RMF 2015).
In the Johannesburg Workshop in Theory and Criticism (JWTC) (2015) publication that compiles various #RMF statements, poetry, art and writing, Gamedze (2015, p. 122) states that, “There is power in collective pain, in collective rage, if only we might see it, recognize it, and acknowledge it within each other. Intersectionality collectivizes.” However, Gamedze (2015, p. 122) also states that, “The intersectional agenda of Azania house is in direct response to the history of patriarchy in Black Consciousness movements. The popular imagination of Black Consciousness resides in black heterosexual maleness.” This analysis points to a tension between Black Consciousness and intersectionality, while simultaneously recognizing intersectionality as a tool for building collective resistance alongside Black Consciousness philosophy.

I suggest that the decision to include intersectionality as the second pillar of the movement constitutes another layer of epistemic disobedience that is directed internally toward the #RMF movement, more so than the university. Black radical feminists within #RMF appear to delink from the patriarchy embedded in Black Consciousness while supporting the overarching philosophy of black liberation and black identity. Their act of epistemic disobedience within the movement therefore complicates Mignolo’s (2009) framework which centers on the margins delinking from dominant Western thought and ideology. While Black radical feminists were engaged in a process of delinking from the university’s Eurocentric knowledge systems, they were also delinking from “black heterosexual maleness” within Black Consciousness (Gamedze 2015, p. 122).

The Black radical feminists nuanced and complex engagement with intersectionality as a process of double delinking, is also considered in an unpublished paper written by the former Deputy Vice Chancellor of UCT, Crain Soudien. He finds that: “Understanding intersectionality gave them the freedom to imagine futures as yet unscripted” (no date, p. 10). Soudien emailed
me a copy of his unpublished paper after our interview in which he argued that the students’ engagement with patriarchy allowed them to develop an awareness of their varied identities, and to “discover[ed] the complexity and intersectionality of power. It was not just whiteness now that they were having to engage but the power both accompanying, interpelating, but also operating outside of whiteness.” (p. 12).

While the #RMF mission statement’s reference to intersectionality is relatively brief, Black radical feminist, Mbali Matandela (2015), indicates that, “[w]hat I hope for is that people will look back at this movement one day and see how a small group of black feminists changed the politics of a Black Consciousness space – a space that has previously excluded these populations” (no page number). During an interview with Matandela in Johannesburg prior to the start of her masters program at Oxford in 2017, she stated that: “#RhodesMustFall was humanizing for me” (interview July 31, 2017). Matandela described her “proximity to whiteness” that she first encountered as the daughter of a domestic worker employed by a white family, and subsequently, as one of a handful of black students at a private school. But it was only upon her arrival in Cape Town at the start of her undergraduate degree at UCT in 2012, that she developed an “identity crisis,” which Matandela says “took me about two years to figure out. And I think the day that I figured it out was the day I walked into the African Gender Institute (at UCT) and I was reading about myself for the first time” (interview July 31, 2017).

Matandela related how she and other black feminists met every Friday in different spaces off campus and “started talking about what it means to be black.” The group of students, many of whom became key figures in the #RMF movement, created the South African Young Feminist Activists (Say-f), which held various campaigns that adopted an intersectional approach. Say-f also experimented with creating theory that characterized the experience of young, black women
feminists. Matandela explained how the Say-f tradition of discussing readings continued through the #RMF movement whose education committee created a shared Drop Box folder on March 15, 2015 containing a plethora of readings that students were encouraged to engage with.

These readings, which included black feminist literature developed by authors such as Audrey Lorde, Patricia Hill Collins, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Amina Mama, Pumla Gqola, Zethu Matabene and Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, formed the basis for arguments developed by Black radical feminists to ensure an intersectional movement. According to Matandela, they took a decision at the very outset of the movement to make Black radical feminism a pillar of the movement together with Black Consciousness and Pan-Africanism: “as Black radical feminists we can't split ourselves in two… we are black and we are also women” (interview July 31, 2017).

Matandela described how the merger of these ideas was “the moment [that] brought us together.” She noted that previous Black Consciousness struggles prior to #RMF, including South Africa’s liberation struggle, failed to recognize that there was more than just one black experience: “As the Black radical feminists we were about being heard. We were not going to keep quiet. We knew this was a place we had to contest” (interview July 31, 2017).

Because of this approach, the Black radical feminists took important leadership positions early in the movement’s formation. The minutes of March 13, 2015 when a meeting of various black-led student groups at UCT was held, resolved that “Mase, Mbali, and Chumani will be our spokespeople.” The names of the three students are highlighted in red in the original minutes and denote the names of Kealeboga Mase Ramaru, Mbali Matandela, and Chumani Maxwele. The inclusion of the first two names as spokespersons reflect the influence of the Black radical feminists in shaping #RMF politics from the start of the movement. The Black radical feminists therefore made a substantial contribution to the #RMF movement through its introduction of new
discourses and frameworks that attempted to weave together Black Consciousness, Pan-Africanism and intersectionality.

At the same time, Matandela is realistic about how effective the intersectional approach was in solving the deeply entrenched system of patriarchy both within and outside the movement. She alluded to these limitations when reflecting on the role of intersectionality in challenging the idea of a single black experience often associated with patriarchy:

“intersectionality allows you to see it. Whether it allows you to solve it, that's a different question.” According to Matandela (interview July 31, 2017):

Black radical feminism is about claiming, it’s about speaking for yourself, and not being spoken for; writing your experience and not being written for. So, black woman is always the subject... So, basically, when we were organizing this was part of the politics that enabled us to implement intersectionality. It mattered who spoke, it mattered who chaired the meetings... we would speak about the dynamics... that’s one thing feminist scholarship allows you to do is to understand power dynamics... so we were always cognizant of the power dynamics in the room... of who is dominating the space...

The centering of Black radical feminist politics in #RMF led to the formation of a movement that Khan (2017) describes as “anti-cisnormative patriarchy in conceptualisation and thought” (p. 119). She finds that “Black queer womxn and nonbinary people are creating both epistemological and material possibilities for expanding liberation and [that this] may be what leads to the attainment of intersectionality in practice” (pp. 119-120). While Khan (2017) does not explain her usage of the word “womxn”, Kealeboga Mase Ramaru (2017), in the same edition of the journal in which Khan’s (2017) article is published, explains that, “Womxn is a more inclusive term than ‘woman’ or ‘women’. It is meant to shed light on the prejudices that
womxn have to face on a daily basis, which include racism, sexism, transphobia and patriarchy, just to name a few” (p. 96).

The introduction of Black radical feminism therefore distinguishes previous student movements in South Africa from the #RMF movement. For Matandela, “It also links back to the history of black struggle. Women were always in supportive roles, so we were very intentional about who was writing about the movement, who was speaking for the movement… we were very intentional about who was leading the process but also constantly being conscious of power dynamics” (interview July 31, 2017). Including Black radical feminist ideas into the #RMF movement is therefore an act of epistemic disobedience. It signals a discontinuity from the 1976 student uprising that #RMF is sometimes considered an extension of (Heffernan and Nieftagodien 2016) in that it recognizes how liberation movements are paradoxically, oppressive, patriarchal formations. According to Ndelu, Dlakavu and Boswell (2017), “Although these current movements/protests are part of a historical continuum of resistance against racism and colonialism on African university campuses, they simultaneously mark a point of departure. They have, unlike earlier student struggles, brought to the fore a clear and powerful feminist challenge to the cisheteronormative patriarchy – in broader society as well as within the student movements.” (p. 2).

Nyamnjoh (2016) acknowledges the contributions of Black radical feminists to the #RMF movement: “Women students and staff have played a major and sustained role in the RMF at UCT” (p. 135). It should however be noted that most academic papers and books written about #RMF by scholars with no involvement in the movement, including Nyamnjoh (2016), offer a limited analysis of Black radical feminism and its profound influence on the ideological orientation of the movement. Mbembe (2015, 2016), Cross (2015), Pithouse (2015), Luescher
Gibson (2016), Mamdani (2016), Pillay (2016), Marschall (2017), Jansen (2017), Fataar (no date), Murris (no date), and many others, make no or limited reference to intersectionality or the role played by Black radical feminists in shaping the intellectual foundations of the movement.

In the academic literature that pays more attention to the role of Black radical feminists such as those developed by Khan (2017), Chikane (2018) and Soudien (no date), there is an uncritical tone toward the employment of intersectionality in the #RMF movement. In Anye Nyamnjoh’s (2017) paper however (not to be confused with Francis Nyamnjoh), he argues that the “essentialisation of a black identity occurs possibly because 'intersectionality', a grounding concept in this social movement, has been interpreted as a hierarchy, rather than a matrix. This point requires delicate attention” (p. 265). Nyamnjoh (2017) offers a critique of the #RMF’s “improper reading of intersectionality” (p. 258) suggesting that the movement “emerge(d) from the contradictions of racial inequality embodied in the experience of alienation” (p. 275). As a result of the alienation experienced by #RMF activists which forms the basis for the movement, Nyamnjoh (2017) makes the argument that activists themselves behave in alienating ways. However, he adds that the contradictions of alienation may offer activists “opportunities for self-discovery” (p. 275).

The critique offered by Nyamnjoh (2017) becomes particularly relevant as the #RMF movement began to struggle with its understanding and implementation of intersectionality both at the start of the movement, but more publicly, during its ongoing development. Students such as Sandy Ndelu, a leading member of the Trans Collective at UCT, indicated that while intersectionality formed part of the movement from its very beginning, “there was a bit of wrestling and convincing” required (interview July 17, 2017). She indicated that certain students
had to “lobby quite directly for Black radical feminism” and that its inclusion was not without contestation.

In a paper written by prominent Black radical feminist, Kealeboga Mase Ramaru (2017), who was one of the spokespeople appointed alongside Mbali Matandela and Chumani Maxwele at the March 13 meeting, she supports Ndelu’s recollection of events stating that:

It is important to note that Black feminists, Black queer people, and Black womxn did not ask to be in the movement. We started the movement and, for that reason, the politics that dictated our lives and radicalised our existence had to be a part of the conversation. Being a Black feminist in South Africa and within the movement was never easy. Very often, we had to deal with being told that we are “Black first” and we should leave our gender issues and feminist politics at the door. We were told that feminism is unAfrican and we needed to stop appropriating Western ideals if we were serious about decolonization. This obviously meant that we constantly had to defend our right to exist within the space, and for Black feminism to be taken seriously in the movement (p. 92).

During my interview with one of the leading #RMF activists, Brian Kamanzi, he suggested that while men attempted to challenge women on questions of intersectionality and feminist discourses more broadly, “it would be a mistake to think that all women in the movement were in agreement about intersectionality” (interview June 27, 2017). Furthermore, he found that questions of class divisions within the movement also impeded conversations about intersectionality: “Embedded within the class question was also epistemology, which is, where is this intersectionality coming from? Does it adequately describe our experiences? I don’t think that’s the case. Is intersectionality an analytical tool or is it a tool that has emancipatory potential?” (interview, June 27, 2017).
As a result of this tension centered around Black radical feminism, the *intersectionality audit committee* was formed according to Ndelu, as “an attempt of mainstreaming intersectionality” by “trying to align what is on paper with the praxis…” (interview July 17, 2017). The aim was to create a committee comprised of a group of people who came together because of “their non-normative positionalities or marginal positionalities” to ensure that intersectionality is implemented in the movement. Ndelu shared the minutes of the first intersectional audit committee meeting with me that took place on March 30, 2015 from 10pm to 11.10pm at Azania House. The minutes indicated that the: “Purpose of the meeting: To decide on a modus operandi, to come up with a code of conduct, to audit the mission statement” (Minutes for IAC 2015, no page number). The minutes also reflect some discussion on whether the intersectionality audit committee is “a personal space and to what degree do we put our personal issues aside.” Furthermore, there is some consideration of how decisions will be made and how to engage with other sub-committees.

Ndelu however informs me that while the intersectionality audit committee “was quite a novel idea” that attempted to filter the work of the movement through an intersectional lens, “it really doesn’t live long… it doesn’t really sustain itself” (interview July 17, 2017). She believes that “this is still something we have to reflect on” but suggests that one possible reason for the committee’s “demise” is that perhaps “there was no buy in” from the larger and more influential strategy and tactics sub-committee. Ndelu also asserts that while the movement comprised of three pillars, “interestingly though, I don’t think there was necessarily though, correllating factions” aligned to each of the pillars. However, once divisions started to emerge, Ndelu states that “it was the Black radical feminists as a caucus, against everybody else” (interview July 17, 2017).
In a paper published by Ndelu together with Dlakavu and Boswell (2017) on the contribution of woman and non-binary activists to the student movement, they argue that “Despite vast differences in the make-up and strategies of these student activist groups, sexism, heterosexism, homophobia and transphobia have emerged as characteristics that marred these movements, albeit unevenly, across various institutions. Cleavages emerged between students who identified as Black, queer and transgender feminists and sections of the movement who identified more explicitly with patriarchy” (p. 2).

These cleavages, according to Ndelu resulted in her forming part of a group of students called the Trans Collective, “a decolonial movement centered on trans-feminism, which is allied to the Fallist movement, but also is deliberately separate from it” (interview July 17, 2017). According to Ndelu, Dlakavu and Boswell (2017), “the UCT Trans Collective disrupted a photographic exhibition hosted by #RMF as a gesture of resisting the erasure of black trans bodies from official narratives of the #RMF movement” (p. 2). While the details of this disruption are discussed in more detail in Chapter II, it is important to note that the Trans Collective’s disruption became an important moment of reflection for student activists in the movement who expressed various degrees of shock and uncertainty on Facebook and questioned the future of #RMF. At the same time, the Trans Collective’s formation in April 2015 and its consistent challenge of patriarchy and cis gendered feminism within #RMF, points to an internal corrective mechanism within the movement. The Trans Collective’s disruption can be seen as an attempt to hold the #RMF accountable for its failure to live up to its decolonial imperative. Through its disruption of the #RMF photographic exhibition, the Trans Collective became a decolonial movement within a decolonial movement seeking to disrupt the #RMF’s disruption of the university space.
Reflecting on the Trans Collective’s disruption during a panel discussion at the Abantu Book Festival in December 2016, Dlakavu, Ndelu and Matandela (2017, p. 106) refer to that moment as “trans capture”. The trans capture of the #RMF exhibition raised a number of reflective questions for Ndelu, including: “How do I think about structuring my protest? Is it simply going to the streets and singing struggle songs and sweating it out? What else can I add to that which is writable, which history would be able to freeze in time and keep as a reference point?” (Dlakavu, Ndelu & Matandela 2017, p. 106).

Trans capture suggests yet another layer of epistemic disobedience within the #RMF movement; it involves delinking from the heteronormativity embedded in dominant interpretations of intersectionality. As these layers of epistemic disobedience emerge, first toward the university, then toward patriarchy within Black Consciousness, and finally, within intersectionality, I am confronted with the limits of epistemic disobedience as a theoretical framework. To what extent is epistemic disobedience a layered process of delinking rather than a declaration to theorize from the margins? Furthermore, while epistemic disobedience is used to denote delinking by the margins from dominant sources of knowledge, can the framework also be considered as a process of delinking by the margins within the margins?

Mignolo and Walsh’s (2018) construction of decoloniality as a process of understanding the colonial habits implanted in all of us, and more specifically, of undoing structural racism, patriarchy and class linked to Western modernity, appear to acknowledge delinking as an ongoing project. This decolonial project within the #RMF movement was complicated through the introduction of Black radical feminist thinking and intersectionality, which simultaneously played a fundamental role in shaping the decolonial framework adopted by the #RMF movement. The next section considers Pan-Africanism as the third pillar of #RMF’s decolonial
framework and highlights similar contestations with Black radical feminism that emerged in relation to Black Consciousness.

**Pan-Africanism**

The term “Pan-Africanism” is not mentioned in the #RMF mission statement released on March 25, 2015. It is however expressly mentioned in an official #RMF document entitled, the “Bremner Occupation Statement” published on the #RMF’s Facebook page two days earlier on March 23, 2015. The statement follows the occupation of UCT’s central administration building and indicates that “We, the Rhodes Must Fall movement, are occupying the Bremner building with the intention to 1) disrupt the normal processes of management and 2) force management to accept our demands” (#RMF 2015b).

The statement revealed that #RMF activists occupied the administration building as the start of their decolonization of the university and began “a programme 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” (#RMF 2015b). As part of this program of political education, the students wanted to discuss how to organize and mobilize, but also, “How do we resolve the tensions between Pan-Africanism and intersectionality, moreover how does that implicate our own movement.”

Professor Amina Mama (2017), who served as the former Director of the Africa Gender Institute at UCT, argues that, “The varied grassroots Pan-African movements of the past have been reduced into a hegemonic Pan-Africanism narrative that has become an institutionalised support for patriarchal values” (p. 1). The tensions between the Pan-Africanists and the Black radical feminists occupied the #RMF activists from the very start of the movement. While Chikane (2018) acknowledges that “Black Radical Feminism wasn’t let into the space; it brought
a crowbar and forced its way through the movement’s male gatekeepers” (location 2245 Kindle Edition), he argues that the rise of Pan-Africanism and the collapse of the #RMF movement is strongly linked to class and particularly, the movement’s inability to deal with class. In my analysis, it is not so much class, but rather the #RMF’s struggle to fully incorporate intersectionality into its decolonial framework that resulted in fractures in the movement.

When I asked Alex Hotz, a former member of the Students’ Representative Council and the founder of Aluta, about how the factionalism within the #RMF was tied to the three pillars of the movement, she corrected me:

I just thought of them as the pillars of #RhodesMustFall. I never thought of them as individual groupings of people because I would say that the politics of Black radical feminism, Black Consciousness and Pan-Africanism are something that I like... I believe in those things. The problem is that... there are different schools of thought around Pan-Africanism and I think you’ll get a different idea of Pan-Africanism from PASMA [Pan-Africanist Student Movement of Azania] than from other people because I found that you know, in some of the verbalizations we did in the national meetings, for people that believe in Pan-Africanism… broadly, there is a lot of afrophobia and xenophobia among students. So when we were talking about free education for all, and we’re like yes, and that means like, people who are here from Zimbabwe etc... And they’re like, but they’re going to take up all the space in the university. And I’m like, Pan-Africanism, what are you talking about, these are colonial borders... so those were some of the real difficulties we faced in some of the meetings we had (interview July 13, 2017).

For Hotz as well as other members of the movement I spoke to, the three pillars of the movement were not reflective of three distinguishable factions. Instead, student activists often identified with all three pillars. This idea is also reflected in a poem published by the #RMF in the JTCW (2015) collection of statements, poetry and reflections: “Bikoism in conversation with
Black feminism. beyond Mbekism and neoliberal imperialism toward a new panAfricanism” (One sTab 2015, p. 48).

However, as Hotz points out, there were “different schools of thought around Pan-Africanism” (interview July 13, 2017) that resulted in the “tensions between Pan-Africanism and intersectionality” (#RMF 2015b) captured in the Bremner occupation statement. Brian Kamanzi who served as a member of the education sub-committee, supports Hotz’s assertion when he poses the following question: “We must begin to ask ourselves, if decolonisation and Pan-Africanism are important contributions to the present struggle then why have we collectively not made more efforts to include the rapidly growing communities of Africans, from outside South Africa, into the debates and conceptualisation around what an inclusive education could look like?” (2016, no page number).

In an interview with Kamanzi in which he described the three pillars of the movement, he indicated that “Pan-Africanism, I think, comes through a lot more shallow than the others. Partly, it comes through PASMA, but also partly it comes through myself; there are a few other people who just sort of… that was our response to the internationalism question and who we consider our peers and all of those things…” (interview June 27, 2017). For Masixole Mlandu, a member of the Pan-Africanist Student Movement of Azania (PASMA) and the UCT SRC in 2017, “the third pillar of the movement was Pan-Africanism, which is also an important one, you know. Because our issues here are not unique to South Africa or the continent; these are issues that affect the entire world” (interview June 30, 2017). Mlandu critiques the notion of South African exceptionalism and argues that “we are all affected by imperialism” which results in a “shared collective experience” (interview June 30, 2017).
While Pan-Africanism is not specifically mentioned in the #RMF’s mission statement, the list of 28 demands at the end of the statement contain strong references to Pan-Africanist ideas. For instance, under a sub-heading entitled “our long-term goals”, the second goal demands that the university rename buildings to “take seriously its African positionality.” Furthermore, the fifth long-term goal listed in the mission statement provides that UCT:

Implement a curriculum which critically centres Africa and the subaltern. By this we mean treating African discourses as the point of departure – through addressing not only content, but languages and methodologies of education and learning - and only examining western traditions in so far as they are relevant to our own experience (#RMF 2015).

This goal epitomizes epistemic disobedience in that it seeks to delink from Western knowledge and theory by privileging African thought and ideas. At the same time, the #RMF recognizes the value of Western ideas “in so far as they are relevant to our own experience” (#RMF 2015). Their approach is not dismissive of Western thought, but recognizes its incompleteness; Western thought has value if it is complemented by or grounded in the black experience.

The Pan-Africanist Student Movement of Azania (PASMA) was launched at UCT on March 20, 2015 in the Leslie Social Sciences building at 5pm – the same day as the start of the Bremner administration building occupation. The Facebook page advertising the launch of the PASMA Philip Kgosana Branch, lists some of the challenges that PASMA wanted to confront at UCT including, “Eurocentric epistemological and pragmatic ways of doing, embedded in westernized pedagogy, research and westernized forms and patterns of teaching and learning” (PASMA 2015). The overall theme for the launch of the PASMA Philip Kgosana Branch is captured as “Birth of a New Revolution: Bringing Pan Afrikanist Ethos in a colonialist education system.”
Masixole Mlandu, who played a leading role in PASMA and #RMF, described his first encounter with UCT as “Europe in Africa” and indicated that “all that is here... is nothing but an extension of the past that continues to position black people or non-white people as subjects of non-being, you know, people who are first, incapable of theorizing, and thinking and producing their own knowledge, and secondly, people who are not capable of entering these ivory towers...” (interview June 30, 2017). I hang onto every word as Masixole Mlandu articulates his ideas of Pan-Africanism. Having only met him by chance in the SRC offices when another student failed to turn up for a scheduled interview, he agrees to talk to me immediately. We sit in the bland SRC meeting space; muted tones, colorless generic furniture, and talk over the hum of the heater blowing warm air into the room. Mlandu’s office is across the hallway, his door covered with pictures and quotes from James Baldwin, Frantz Fanon, and the PASMA logo.

Five days after our interview, Mlandu is suspended from the university for allegations of sexual harassment on July 5, 2017. Following an investigation by UCT, Mlandu’s suspension is eventually lifted on August 3, 2017 due to insufficient evidence. According to UCT’s spokesperson Elijah Moholola, no statement was submitted by the complainant in the charges brought against Mlandu: “The investigator will continue attempting to obtain the statement. If and when such a statement is received, the legal counsellor will evaluate the evidence and consider whether there is a prima facie case to pursue” (IOL 2017). It is hard to reconcile the deeply reflective and intelligent Mlandu with the charges of sexual harassment brought against him. I am uncertain whether it is necessary to mention the sexual harassment charges in this analysis and how it will be perceived. Are the allegations reflective of the tensions between Pan-Africanism and intersectionality? And if so, is it fair to Mlandu to see him as the representative embodiment of Pan-Africanism? Also, once the charges are dropped, does this become a non-
issue, or do I read more into the fact that the complainant failed to submit a statement? In the end, I include the allegations to reflect the complex and contradictory nature of the research process. Perhaps my choice says more about me than the participants.

In my interview with Mlandu, he referred to authors such as Frantz Fanon, Robert Sobukwe and James Baldwin, to critique the epistemological foundations of the university (interview June 30, 2017):

> How does this knowledge move society? Is it orientated towards the market or is it orientated towards social upliftment to equip us with the necessary tools to go back home and deal with the issues that we find ourselves with? So when I graduate from UCT, how do I go back home in Khayelitsha and tell my mother that I graduated from... how is this degree teaching me to solve the fact that I live in Khayelitsha. So, the biggest critique, the biggest question is who is this university made for, you know? What is the university in our time, is it something that is a conveyer belt to the market or is it a space that wants to nurture and create young people who are going to take up the task as Fanon would say, to… uplift society to another epoch that we have never seen...

Mlandu’s critique of the university’s value in society, speaks to the paradoxical position of this authorized site of knowledge production. The university offers the opportunity, through education, to liberate black students from marginality, while simultaneously, enslaving black bodies through a market-centered epistemic coloniality. At the same time, one could argue that white students receive the same education and are similarly prepared to join the market. However, it is the black body that must endure the humiliation of a university education that fails to reflect Black existence and erases Black thought (Bell 2018).

Mlandu’s reliance on Fanon, who is frequently invoked by #RMF activists, leads scholars such as Mbembe (2015, no page number) and Gibson (2016, p. 2) to characterize the student
protests as South Africa’s “Fanonian moment.” According to Fanon (1963, 2001), “decolonisation is always a violent phenomenon” (p. 26). This idea is powerfully conveyed in Fanon’s (1963, 2001) writing which recognizes that “[d]ecolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a programme of complete disorder” (p. 27). Furthermore, Fanon asserts that, “[d]ecolonization is the meeting of two forces opposed to each other…” (p. 27). Adopting an understanding of violence that recognizes its liberatory effect on the colonized and its ability to create a form of equality between the colonizer and the colonized, Fanon finds that “violence against oppression is thus cleansing…” (Gordon 2015, p. 114). While Fanon does not consider violence revolutionary in and of itself, he recognizes that the violence of colonial occupation and its aftermath necessitates the use of violence by the oppressed (Gordon 2015, p. 118). This form of anti-colonial violence should be considered as ‘counterviolence’ (Hayman cited in Gordon 2015, p. 132).

#RMF activist, Brian Kamanzi, informed me that Fanon’s chapter On Violence, “was the first text that we read together” (interview June 27, 2017). While Fanon is extensively discussed by scholars who analyze #RMF (Mbembe, 2015, Pithouse 2015, Gibson 2016), it is important to note the tangible connection between Biko and Fanon. In Biko’s (1978, 2002), I Write What I Like, he specifically mentions Fanon and quotes him directly on two occasions. These quotations pertain to the idea of “consciousness of the self” (p. 72) and the destructive nature of colonialism (p. 69). At the same time, Mangcu (2012, 2014) states that, “It is not enough to reduce Biko’s thinking, as many scholars have done, to the influence of Frantz Fanon” (p. 14). In his foreword to Biko’s, I Write What I Like, Gordon (2001) also points out that Biko may have been influenced by W.E.B. Du Bois’ idea of “double consciousness” which is used to describe “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” as well as the schizophrenic
existence of being “an American, (and) a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled
strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body…” (p. 2). Gordon (2001) suggests that “Double
consciousness signals the most famous, and in some circles infamous, concept in Biko’s thought:
Black Consciousness” (p. ix).

At the same time, Mlandu’s invocation of Fanon in his formulation of Pan-Africanism as
a pillar of the decolonization movement, is contested by scholars such as Mbembe (2015) who
argue that, “As far as I know, Fanon’s is the most trenchant critique of the ‘decolonization-as-
Africanization’ paradigm” (no page number). According to Mbembe (2015), Fanon rejects the
idea that decolonization and Africanization are the same thing: “In other words, we topple Cecil
Rhodes statue only to replace it with the statue of Hitler” (no page number). While Mbembe’s
(2015) critique is incredibly valuable, it simultaneously appears to lock the #RMF’s engagement
with Pan-Africanism, decolonization and Fanon, into a static moment centered on the removal of
the Rhodes statue. What I see instead, are innovative and creative attempts by young students in
their twenties, trying to make sense of their experiences as black bodies in a predominantly white
space.

Drawing on Mlandu’s critique of the university, I construct the Black pain/Black
liberation thesis as a way of framing the contradictions embedded in the architecture of the
university. I believe that #RMF’s adoption of a decolonial framework flows from the paradoxical
position of the university as a site of oppression that marginalizes black bodies (including
students, workers and faculty), while simultaneously offering black bodies the space “to think”
as Mlandu put it (interview, June 30, 2017). #RMF’s development of a decolonial framework is
therefore a response to the Black pain/Black liberation dichotomy that emerges in the oppressive
university environment.
According to Ru Slayen (interview July 26, 2017), #RMF held two education seminars daily during the occupation of Azania House that covered a range of readings and theories which “aimed to challenge the pedagogical structures of the university.” In addition to engaging with the substantive content of the readings, Brian Kamanzi indicated that, “we attempted to always have [reading groups] in a space that was somehow pedagogically disruptive. So we had the Fanon one in the foyer of the politics department to help the students in the group who were trying to advocate for curriculum change there, to help them say, you know we haven’t read any black authors in all our time here. And now we’re going to do that. And we’re going to do that in your space” (interview June 27, 2017).

I suggest that #RMF’s challenge of the university’s pedagogical structure in spaces such as administrative buildings and foyers of academic departments, can be described as epistemic disobedience. However, I question the limits of epistemic disobedience as a theoretical framework when considering Mlandu’s response to the #Shackville protests in which he was accused of burning artwork depicting black bodies in dehumanizing ways. After citing Fanon’s distinction between the white European town and the black shanty town, Mlandu stated that “bringing that shack here is a clear display of that relationship, that relationship that is indicative of true power relations... So when we burnt the pictures, we were not just burning art forms that were precious… but it is a direct message that we are fed up and we are willing to take the struggle to another level… it becomes a form of knowledge consciousness but while speaking to power at the same time” (interview, June 30, 2017).

The destruction of art work seems to constitute erasure rather than epistemic disobedience. My sense is that epistemic disobedience would require a process of delinking that may include replacing the offensive paintings with art work from the margins. However, Mlandu
describes the burning of art work as “tak[ing] the struggle to another level” (interview, June 30, 2017). While it is unclear whether this next level falls outside the delinking process, interviews with many students involved in burning the art work, reveal that their actions were largely unplanned. Alex Hotz (interview, July 13, 2017), the first appellant listed in the Supreme Court of Appeal case pertaining to the burning of paintings, stated that “there was no plan…” It may therefore be possible to separate the destruction of art work from the delinking process articulated in #RMF’s mission statement noting Brian Kamanzi’s assertion that after the burning of the paintings, “there is no more #RhodesMustFall” (interview, June 27, 2017).
VI - THE RISE OF FALLISM

Introduction

“Fallism” is primarily used as a descriptive term to refer to the multiple student movements that use the “Must Fall” hashtag such as #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall. However, some students such as Wandile Kasibe, offered an understanding of Fallism that extended beyond its descriptive value. During our marathon four hour meeting in Cape Town, Kasibe, a Ph.D. student at UCT, indicted that the “greatest contribution of #RMF is the introduction of the philosophy of Fallism” (interview, June 28, 2017). Kasibe’s involvement with #RMF can be traced to his initial meetings with Chumani Maxwele to plan the March 9, 2015 protest in which Kasibe suggested that Maxwele uses feces to deface the Rhodes statue. Kasibe, who worked as the public programs coordinator at Iziko Museums in Cape Town while completing his Ph.D., captured many of the images of #RMF activism on his camera to create what he referred to as an “archive” of the movement. While Kasibe was not at UCT on the day Maxwele threw feces onto the Rhodes statue, he became actively involved in #RMF immediately thereafter.

Kasibe appeared to have carefully considered the concept of Fallism in relation to the movement’s decolonial framework as well as its intersections with land, humanness, and access to education. During our interview, he offered an understanding of the “must fall” dimension of Fallism (interview, June 28, 2017):

Anything that took the dignity away from black people must fall. Even those people who actually stole land from us—they must fall. Even the very transactions, the colonial transactions [that resulted in] certain African countries still paying colonial tax, we’re saying those colonial taxes must fall. Anything that has to do with the colonial project, we’re saying it must fall. Because if we let coloniality, the state of being colonized, or colonialism, the act of
colonizing a people, if we left those things unchallenged, you know, it means that we will be failing ourselves—not just ourselves—but we’ll be failing those who came before us.

Kasibe considers Fallism as a philosophy that facilitates the restoration of dignity for black people. He connects Fallism to the colonial theft of land and imposition of colonial taxes, and appears to suggest that Fallism requires the reversal of these colonial injustices. At the same time, Kasibe distinguishes between coloniality and colonialism, recognizing that the historic effects of colonialism on black people continue to manifest as coloniality. Kasibe therefore develops Fallism into a philosophy that far exceeds its original descriptive function.

The earliest references to Fallism that I could identity can be traced back to the “#fallist” hashtag that emerged on Twitter for the first time on December 9, 2015 when it was used by Lindiwe Dhlamini whose Twitter handle is @IAmAFallist. The #RMF Facebook page employs the term for the first time on February 27, 2016 when it refers to student activist Wanelisa Xaba as a “Fallist.” The notion of Fallism therefore seems to emerge nine months after the occupation of Azania House in March 2015.

This chapter engages with the notion of Fallism through the following research question: how did #RMFs adoption of a decolonial framework give rise to the emergent idea of Fallism? Building on the previous chapter’s consideration of the #RMF’s decolonial framework, I aim to understand the link between #RMF’s adoption of Pan-Africanism, Black Consciousness, and Black radical feminism, on the one hand, and the emergence of Fallism, on the other. Furthermore, as part of my attempt to understand #RMF’s decolonial framework through the lens of epistemic disobedience, I experiment with the idea of developing Fallism into a decolonial option as a pathway to decolonizing the university. For Mignolo (2011, 2018), decolonial options emerge through acts of epistemic disobedience to seek liberation from the colonial matrix of power. Mignolo (2018) emphasizes that “option” implies choice rather than “an imperative” (p.
and describes the decolonial option as “build[ing] decolonial paths of knowing, disobeying the epistemic regulations and subjectivities... [through] epistemic disobedience...” (p. 225).

**The Emergence of #Fallism**

References to Fallism emerge as the #RMF movement begins to dissipate. Its contested origins appear in the cracks of the movement in December 2015 and become more widely used during 2016 initially by black, queer women, such as Lindiwe Dhlamini, whose Twitter handle is @IAmAFallist. By February 27, 2016, the #RMF Facebook page refers to Black radical feminist, Wanelisa Xaba, as a “Fallist.” While it is useful to ascertain the origins of the word in much the same way as determining the genesis of the #RhodesMustFall hashtag, its meaning and significance as well as its later adoption by student activists as an identity and a philosophy, is what this section of the dissertation is particularly interested in. Furthermore, I offer insights into Fallism’s messy and complex beginnings and its unruly evolution and appropriation by particular members of the student movement.

Of the students I spoke to, there were some who identified very strongly with Fallism, others who rejected the concept altogether, and a few students who previously referred to themselves as Fallists but subsequently became disillusioned with the idea. The contested nature of what constitutes Fallism creates difficulties when attempting to define it. Alex Hotz eloquently captured this difficulty when she stated: “…I'm beginning to wonder what the fuck Fallism is… I just think there are so many contradictions…” (interview, July 13, 2017). Just before making this statement, Hotz suggested that Fallism emerged out of the three pillars of the #RMF movement: Pan-Africanism, Black Consciousness, and Black radical feminism. I argue that these three pillars constitute a decolonial framework that gives birth to the idea of Fallism. It is the weaving together of these pillars that creates the tapestry for the emergence of Fallism.
On Constructions of Fallism

For Boosyen (2016, p. 4), “[t]he notion of Fallism highlights the demand for far-reaching change.” She also cites #RMF activist, Athabile Nonxuba’s definition of Fallism as “an oath of allegiance that everything to do with oppression and conquest of black people by white power must fall and be destroyed” (p. 4). In the same edited volume, Sizwe Mpofu-Walsh (2016, p. 82) who was a leading student activist in the #RMF Oxford movement argued that “‘Fallism’ is a nascent, complicated and emerging viewpoint, combining aspects of decolonial thought, Black consciousness, radical feminism and pan-Africanism.” While Mpofu-Walsh’s involvement with #RMF Oxford will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, it is important at this stage, to note his definition of Fallism and his response to critiques of the concept. For Mpofu-Walsh (2016, p. 82) “no protest movement as wide as ‘Must Fall’ can claim coherence. The Must Fall umbrella is not, nor does it aspire to be, a body of literary thought, or a full social theory. Rather, it is a programme of political action.”

The lack of coherence associated with Fallism articulated by Mpofu-Walsh (2016) can be attributed to the multiple interpretations of Fallism. These interpretations recognize Fallism’s metamorphosis from a collective noun that describes the movements employing the “Must Fall” hashtag, to Fallism as a “philosophy” (W. Kasibe, interview June 28, 2017) or a “programme of political action” (Mpofu-Walsh 2016) with its “many contradictions” (A. Hotz, interview July 13, 2017). If Fallism’s roots exist in the #RMF’s decolonial framework comprised of Black Consciousness, Pan-Africanism, and Black radical feminism, then perhaps its contradictions can also be traced back to its roots.

Gillian Godsell and Rekgotsofetse (Kgotsi) Chikane (2016, p. 58-9) reflect on what they refer to as the “philosophy of Fallism” which is understood as the “reinvigorated process in
which the decolonisation project has been renewed in the higher education system and in society at large.” While they acknowledge that the philosophy of Fallism has varied meanings across academic institutions, they suggest that “the basic foundations of Fallism reside within the ambit of the decolonization project of the African university…” (p. 59). Godsell and Chikane (2016) draw on Ndlovo-Gatsheni’s (2013) scholarship to assert that this decolonization project is centered on radically transforming the curriculum, institutional structures, and the underlying values that shape the university. They also refer to Quijano’s work to argue that Fallism confronts the “colonial matrix of power” that is comprised of four interrelated dimensions, namely, “the economy, gender and sexuality, knowledge and subjectivity, and authority” (p. 59).

In Chikane’s (2018) later work entitled, Breaking a Rainbow, Building a Nation: The Politics Behind #MustFall Movements, he offers important insights based on his involvement in the #RMF movement, describing Fallism as an “ideological framework” (location 2264 Kindle Edition). Chikane (2018) argues that “The formulation of Fallism was the result of a variety of political contestations” that “is best considered as a subset of #MustFall politics and often its ideological driver, is the ideological nexus of black consciousness, radical black feminism and Pan-Africanism working in conjunction with a protest culture informed by radical civil disobedience” (location 2266 Kindle Edition).

Chikane’s analysis supports my contention that Fallism emerged from the #RMF’s decolonial framework, but his suggestion that Fallism “creates a veil of secrecy over a black person’s class difference to place focus on the broader struggle of black people” (location 2275 Kindle Edition), is not something I necessarily agree with. The class struggle that emerged and later manifested as a distinction between Biko blacks and black blacks, stemmed from the movement’s adoption of Black Consciousness which was only one of the pillars of #RMF’s
decolonial framework. Chikane’s (2018) conflation of Black Consciousness with Fallism and his assertion that the collapse of the Fallist movement can be attributed to a failure to engage with questions of class, tends to ignore the #RMF’s significant internal struggle with intersectionality. Despite this, Chikane’s (2018) contribution to an understanding of Fallism is critical.

In one edited volume, Fallism is described as an oath of allegiance, a viewpoint, and a philosophy (Booysen 2016). It is linked to the oppression of black people, considered as a program for political action, and as a continuation of the decolonization project in African higher education. The ubiquitous nature of Fallism is similarly reflected in my conversations with students, faculty and workers. Wandile Kasibe (interview, June 28, 2017) characterized Fallism as a philosophy, while Sandy Ndelu (interview, July 17, 2017), who used to identify as a Fallist, associated Fallism with “being part of a community of young people”. Wanelisa Xaba (2017) refers to “Fallism as an ideology” (p. 98) in her writing, similar to the description of Fallism as an “ideological framework” taken up by Chikane (2018, location 2264 Kindle Edition). Other descriptions of Fallism include Kotze’s (2018) assertion that it is “an ideological vehicle advancing a cultural revolution” (p. 112) centered on decolonizing the university.

While these different interpretations and understandings complicate the idea of Fallism, these engagements acknowledge the fact that the concept resonated with a cross-section of the student movement. During my interview with student activist Simon Rakei (interview, July 12, 2017), an #RMF signatory to the #ShackvilleTRC agreement with UCT, he indicated that, “I think Fallism is a real thing as an ideological, theoretical construct to try and understand the world.” For Rakei, Fallism is “disruptive in nature… it was a really powerful tactic.” He offered the throwing of feces onto the Rhodes statue, disrupting various meetings, and the #Shackville protests as examples of disrupting spaces that he asserted were “abnormal” spaces. “We are
taught to be normal in an abnormal space”, according to Rakei (interview, July 12, 2017). This suggests that in addition to being interpreted as an ideological, philosophical or theoretical construct, Fallism also embodies a physical dimension; this physicality requires radical, performative action that “abnormalizes” a space through disruption.

Piven (2006) describes disruption as a “power strategy that rests on withdrawing cooperation in social relations” (p. 23). This form of disruption offers the voiceless an opportunity to express their demands but does not necessarily translate into a shift in power. For the social movement to gain momentum and to sustain its collective action, McAdam et al (1996) argue that a more formal organizational structure is required that is dependent on various factors including, “disruptive tactics” (p. 3). These tactics operate outside ‘proper channels’ and include occupying spaces and disrupting public order. Tarrow (1994) adopts a similar position finding that disruption or the threat of disruption is what makes social movements effective.

At the same time, Fallism is not only about disruption. By employing public pedagogy as a theoretical framework to analyze this idea, Fallism exhibits characteristic reflective of one of the categories of public pedagogy, namely, public intellectualism and performative social activism (outlined in Chapter III). This suggests that student protestors can be seen as public pedagogues (O’Malley 2009; O’Malley & Roseboro 2010) who engage broader society on questions of social justice by creating public spaces for such pedagogical encounters (Sandlin et al. 2011).

For Burdick, Sandlin and O’Malley (2013), public pedagogy is primarily constructed outside of the formal classroom space. In their discussion of public pedagogy, O’Malley and Nelson (2013) reflect on the protests led by secondary school students in Chile during 2006 which has been referred to as the “Penguin Revolution.” Their empirical study uses public
pedagogy to argue that the Chilean student protestors sought to publicize the problem of increased privatization and to deliberately avoid confrontation. The #RMF movement on the other hand was deliberately disruptive.

During an interview with #RMF activists such as Ameera Conrad (interview, December 20, 2017), a drama student and one of the actors in *The Fall*, she indicated that artists and performers involved with the movement “tried to move the discourse from a purely academic one into one that can be engaged with at a more metaphysical level.” She recalled vividly her time in Azania House where she spent two nights after obtaining her parents’ permission:

I was very enlightened by a lot of the discussions. I didn't participate in a lot of them, because I felt almost like I didn’t know what to say a lot of the time. I really participated in the jam sessions because as a performer that’s really where I could express myself in the clearest way…

I interrupt Conrad to ask for more detail on the jam sessions:

So most evenings, they would have plenaries and discussions, and occasionally, lecturers would be invited to give presentations and lectures, and films would be screened, and then, when things sort of just mellowed out, someone would have a drum or a guitar, they would just start playing music, and people would sing and hum, and dance and like speak poetry… It was really the kind of space where you could, at any point when something wasn’t happening… you could be like, hi guys, I’d sort of like to just present this to you. And we actually had a group of the students from the drama department… who are in *The Fall*, came to perform for the students at Bremner. And they did a whole performance on hyper masculinity in the Black male community and like what that means… So it was very much a space for all kinds of engagement which I think a lot of people don’t realize… but it was like an alternative learning space that was a lot more holistic and focused on the things you were not getting… at the university.
These sentiments are echoed by fellow drama student and actor, Thando Mangcu, who indicated that she attended the plenary meetings all time: “the space really drew me in because of the open learning environment… the learning environment was truthful and powerful” (interview, July 10, 2017). For Lindiwe Dhlamini (interview, July 27, 2015), who entered Bremner as Pam Dhlamini and left Azania House as Lindiwe Dhlamini:

And one of the nicest things about that space, more than anything I value, and like ‘til this day, I say, I will never and I don’t think there will ever, be such a powerful space as Rhodes Must Fall in the beginning, where we had… the entire stay in fact of Rhodes Must Fall in Bremner building became such a powerful moment… because that’s when most of us started understanding the things that we were being taught in the lectures. We started making sense of those things in #RhodesMustFall.

The educational dimension of the occupation captured by Conrad, Mangcu, and Dhlamini is similarly reflected in the Bremner occupation statement released on Monday, March 23, 2015, three days after the start of the occupation: “We are implementing a programme 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” (#RMF 2015b). While this political education included Biko, Fanon and the work of Black feminists, it specifically excluded political party representatives from addressing the occupiers of Azania House according to Alex Hotz. The aim of political education, according to the occupation statement, was “to reject these [neo-colonial] narratives and their normative nature, because they re-inforce our displacement both geographically and existentially” (#RMF 2015b).

For Alex Hotz, “the occupation was really important for the developing of the movement; the politics of it, how we engaged with each other and also, it was very important for political
education and political consciousness. Because, some people called it the university of Azania House where we had like lectures every single day…” (interview, July 13, 2015).

Patricia Bevie, the chairperson of the workers’ union, NEHAWU, indicated that she joined the discussions at Azania House every evening after work: “it was a developing process and a growing process for me like you won’t believe it. I tell you, I used to sit open mouth listening to these students. They created this boldness within me… They were the intellectuals, they never made you feel less than them. It was just, it was just amazing… I learnt such a lot. I’m 52 years old. I have never heard any of these things in my life…”

The pedagogical approach adopted by #RMF seemed to take on four dimensions: first, there was an acquisition of new knowledge that included “making sense” of ideas that had already been acquired through university lectures (L. Dhlamini, interview July 27, 2015). Second, this knowledge spurred on a level of activism, described by Bevie as inspiring a feeling of “boldness” (interview, July 26, 2017). Third, the knowledge had a humanizing effect in that participants in the occupation felt they could engage in the complex conversations even if they were unfamiliar with the substantive content. Finally, the pedagogical approach created an “open environment” (T. Mangcu, interview July 10, 2017) centered on diverse forms of learning including music, drama and poetry that coexisted alongside traditional academic learning (A. Conrad, interview December 20, 2017).

Simon Rakei indicated that as a commerce student, he had never encountered the idea of decolonization until his involvement with #RMF. During our interview it became evident that Rakei was incredibly articulate about the intersections between Fallism and decolonization. He stated that Fallism aimed to “bridge the gap” between the university (as a hegemonic producer of knowledge) and communities (often seen as recipients of this knowledge). Through disrupting
the flow of knowledge from the university to communities, Fallism became a “theory of how knowledge is produced” (S. Rakei, interview July 12, 2017). Based on Rakei’s analysis, Fallism appears to possess some of the attributes of decoloniality described by Mignolo and Walsh (2018). For Mignolo (2018), decoloniality’s goal is “epistemic reconstitution” (p. 228) which comprises two dimensions: first, to engage with knowledge and ideas that have traditionally been marginalized by Western modernity. Second, epistemic reconstitution requires delinking from Euro-American constructions of universal knowledge.

In a #RMF press statement released on April 10, 2015 in response to an eviction notice following the removal of the Rhodes statue on April 9, it contended that: “The occupation has strengthened our ability to collectively deliberate on our plight... Azania House has evolved to be the only safe and therapeutic space for the marginalised on campus... It has become an educational institution for alternative pedagogy and critical engagement” (#RMF 2015c). The “alternative pedagogy” referred to in the statement appears to reflect the idea of public pedagogy, not only in the substantive content of what was discussed, but also in terms of the conditions for learning that were cultivated in Azania House.

The kind of public pedagogy that the #RMF movement adopted occurred within, but simultaneously outside the university’s designated learning spaces. In other words, while disruptive moments such as #Shackville and the occupation of Azania House occur within the precinct of the university, which is a traditional learning space, it also occurs outside the classroom in administrative buildings, lobbies of departments, and in the streets that run between the university buildings. The public pedagogy of the movement challenges existing designated learning spaces, thereby inverting the architecture of the university. Fallism appears to exist in
the in-between spaces of the university—the cracks—where ideas developed by the margins conveyed through public pedagogy serve to widen the cracks.

**Fallism and the Question of the Human/Non-Human**

During my interview with #RMF activist, Masixole Mlandu, he asserted that “in South Africa, the problem is whiteness… anything that is not white is expelled from the category of being human...” (interview June 30, 2017). While most constructions of Fallism have thus far centered on its epistemological and pedagogical dimensions, Mlandu also introduced a dimension to Fallism that raises questions about what/who constitutes the human. But Mignolo (2018) argues that “[t]he question is not ‘what is human and humanity’ but rather who defined themselves as humans...” (p. 153).

The construction of the human is also taken up by Mbembe (2015) in his reading of Fanon, who argues that decolonization is primarily about “self-ownership”, that is, “struggles to repossess, to take back, if necessary by force that which is ours unconditionally and, as such, belongs to us” (no page number). Self-ownership according to Mbembe (2015), is a pre-condition for becoming fully human. Consequently, Mbembe (2015) concludes that decolonization removes the gap between the distorted image of what constitutes the colonized being, and the essence of that being: “It is about the ‘restitution’ of the essence to the image so that that which exists can exist in itself and not in something other than itself, something distorted, clumsy, debased and unworthy” (no page number).

In his introduction to Moten and Harney’s (2013) *The Undercommons*, Jack Halberstam seems to interpret Fanon slightly differently to Mbembe (2015). Instead of seeing decolonization as a movement away from the image of the “distorted, clumsy, debased and unworthy” (Mbembe 2015, no page number), Halberstam (2013) writes that “In order to bring colonialism to an end
then, one does not speak truth to power, one has to inhabit the crazy, nonsensical, ranting language of the other, the other who has been rendered a nonentity by colonialism. Indeed, blackness, for Moten and Harney by way of Fanon, is the willingness to be in the space that has been abandoned by colonialism, by rule, by order” (p. 8).

Mbembe (2015) and Halberstam’s (2013) radically divergent reading of Fanon suggests two fundamentally different constructions of the human. For Mbembe (2015), becoming human requires a shift away from the distorted image of the colonized being toward self-ownership, whereas for Halberstam (2013), this distorted image must be inhabited since it represents the very antithesis of colonialism. The #RMF activists appear to move between these two constructions of the human, sometimes exhibiting the “crazy, nonsensical, ranting language of the other” (Halberstam 2013, p. 8), while at other times, seeking “self-ownership” (Mbembe 2015, no page number).

The construction of the human and the reclamation of humanity is further complicated by #RMF activists such as Wandile Kasibe (interview, June 28, 2017), who stated that:

Fallism cannot be understood outside of the framework of the land. Fallism then becomes a much bigger process whereby we claim our humanity; at the same time that humanity cannot be delinked from land. It is a humanity that is attached, that is basically connected to the ground, to the land that was taken from black people. Even if we claim free education, it is free education that is part of the land. It is free education that is meant to produce people to think creatively about how they will use the land. So the land then becomes an integral part of the Fallist movement. It becomes the national question for us.

Kasibe connects the epistemological dimensions of Fallism that center on disrupting the university as the dominant curator of knowledge, with a Fallist construction of humanity that confronts the human/non-human binary and that is deeply rooted in the land. References to land
are also scattered throughout official #RMF documents: in the mission statement, “The statue has great symbolic power; it glorifies a mass-murderer who exploited black labour and stole land from indigenous people” (#RMF 2015, emphasis added). In the Bremner Occupation Statement: “Management has told us that they are allowing us to stay in Bremner. This building that sits on the land of black people, this building that was constructed on the sweat and blood of black people” (#RMF 2015b, emphasis added). And in a document entitled, “Statement issued by the Rhodes Must Fall Movement on the reclaiming of Avenue House” which was released after the occupation of another UCT building, the following question is posed: “Why is our land in the hands of white people?” (#RMF 2015c, emphasis added).

The connection between land and humanness is also reflected in Fanon’s (1963) writing: “For a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity” (p. 43). The connection between humanness and the land is further explored in Lewis Gordon’s (2015) analysis of Franz Fanon’s Les Damnés de la terre (1961), popularly known as The Wretched of the Earth. Gordon (2015) argues that the title of Fanon’s work should be read as, The Damned of the Earth (p. 90). In an interview with Cihan Aksan (2018), Lewis explained how he arrived at this interpretation by considering the etymology of “human”. Gordon argues that the word “human” derives from the Latin word “homo”, which in turn, stems from the word “humus”, meaning “dirt” or “clay.” Similarly, the word “damned” is associated with being pushed back into the earth. At an existential level, Gordon argues that the human being emerges from the earth, “a creature with feet on the ground while reaching for the skies” (cited in Aksan 2018, no page number).

The question of humanness is also considered by #RMF activists in their engagement with human rights discourse. During my initial interview with student activist Brian Kamanzi, he
indicated that when the question of human rights was raised at an open dialogue hosted by the #RMF movement, one of the participants suggested that because black people were not seen as human beings, human rights could not possibly apply to black people (interview, August 12, 2016). This argument suggests that because human rights discourses center the human, and given that black bodies are often seen as non-human, human rights frameworks were unable to conceive of the non-human black body.

Kamanzi suggested that the idea of the non-human emanated from “black existentialists”, some of whom were in PASMA, as well as from “Afro-pessimists” (interview June 26, 2017). In developing the notion of Afro-pessimism, Frank B. Wilderson III (2010) argues that, “Afro-pessimists are theorists of Black positionality who share Fanon’s insistence that, though Blacks are indeed sentient beings, the structure of the entire world’s semantic field… is sutured by anti-Black solidarity” (p. 58). Wilderson (2010) distinguishes between the human life and the black non-human indicating that the divide between the two is an “unbridgeable gap” (p. 57). For Afro-pessimists such as Sexton (2011), “black life is lived as social death” (p. 28). Afro-pessimism then becomes a way of providing a language for such suffering, “to establish the rules of its grammar” (Sexton 2016, no page number).

The arguments developed by Afro-pessimists are however dismissed by Lewis Gordon (2017, p. 295) who asserts that while racism requires the construction of the non-human, “[t]he performative contradiction is that they would first have to be identified as human beings in order to deny their being such. It is thus a form of mauvaise foi” (bad faith). Gordon (2017) is therefore opposed to the idea of Afro-pessimism and offers a critique of Wilderson (2010) and Sexton’s (2011) argument that being black is equated with “social death.” Drawing on Fanon’s (1952, 1967) notion of “the zone of nonbeing” (p. 2), Gordon (2017) poses the following critical
questions for Afro-pessimists: “Why must the social world be premised on the attitudes and perspectives of antiblack racists? Why don’t blacks among each other and other communities of color count as a social perspective? And if the question of racism is a function of power, why not offer a study of power, how it is gained and lost, instead of an assertion of its manifestations as ontological?” (p. 297). Furthermore, Gordon (2017) suggests that an additional problem with Afro-pessimism “is that its proponents treat ‘blackness’ as though it could exist independent of other categories” (p. 297).

Gordon’s (2017) critique suggests that #RMF activists who invoke the idea of the non-human appear to misread Fanon’s (1952, 1967) assertion in Black Skin White Masks, that “a black is not a man” (p. 1). While humanness is certainly connected to the land through the human being’s emergence from the dirt or clay of the earth, the forced separation of black people from the land does not however render blacks as non-human. Maldonado-Torres (2007), who develops the idea of colonially of Being as an extension of Mignolo’s (2009) early work, appears to support Gordon’s (2017) argument. He states that the coloniality of Being is centered on producing the “exception from the order of Being” which produces “a non-human or rather an inhuman world” (p. 257). It is the inhuman world, as opposed to the non-human, that gives rise to the “violation of the meaning of human” through the idea of race. Maldonado-Torres (2007) concludes that the coloniality of Being is not “an inevitable moment” but “is always present as a possibility… when the preservation of Being… takes primacy over listening to the cries of those whose humanity is being denied” (p. 257).

Both Maldonado-Torres (2007) and Gordon’s (2017) construction of what constitutes the human, requires an understanding of the human in relation to other humans. In other words, humanness is not centered on the individual. Instead, people become human through their
relationships with other humans. At the same time, humanness is not an inherent characteristic; one is in a constant state of becoming human. African philosophers such as Menkiti (2005) describe this process of becoming, as an “ontological progression” (p. 326) using the concept to explain how a child moves from infancy to adulthood.

#RMF activist Ru Slayen (interview July 26, 2017) suggested that the idea of the non-human was used primarily “at the rhetorical level”, but that it “resonated with people even though few people had like actually engaged with the philosophical, like what is this thing actually saying…” For Slayen, “I think it was pretty clear to people just through their own lived experiences and from looking around, that this thing of human rights, it’s like this abstract notion that we supposedly have, that’s like completely inaccessible to most people. And when you look around it’s clear like who are the humans who have these rights, you know… and it’s not black people” (interview July 26, 2017).

While most students I spoke to, including Slayen and Kamanzi, were skeptical of the Afro-pessimist idea of the non-human as a counterargument against human rights, they continued to critique human rights discourse. This critique is also reflected in #RMF’s mission statement which makes one reference to human rights in its assessment of the South African constitution’s conception of racism. Under the sub-heading “on reverse racism”, the movement argues that “the Constitution’s conception of racism is fundamentally racist because it presupposes that racism is a universal experience, thus normalising the suffering of those who actually experience racism” (JWTC 2015, p. 7). The statement goes on to indicate that: “The Constitution’s conception of racism has systematically been used to deter irrepressible urges by black South Africans to challenge racism and violence” (JWTC 2015, p. 7).
This critique of South Africa’s progressive human rights based constitution seems counter-intuitive given the link between social movements and human rights more generally. Employing human rights language could strengthen claims for access to education; a right that is explicitly contained in South Africa’s constitution. In most case studies on human rights, it is usually civil society and social movements that employ rights discourse to make claims against the state (Nash 2005). The state is often seen as reluctant or unwilling to implement human rights laws and practices. In South Africa, it appears as if there is a reversal of these roles in that the #RMF movement rejects human rights discourses, while the state has taken significant measures to include human rights language in its laws and policies.

As part of its critique of South Africa’s human rights based constitution, the #RMF mission statement offered an example of how the equality provisions in the constitution were interpreted by the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC). In 2008, the SAHRC, an independent constitutional body established to monitor, protect and promote human rights, received complaints that the Forum for Black Journalists (FBJ), excluded white journalists from attending a meeting with former African National Congress president Jacob Zuma. After holding a public forum on these complaints, the SAHRC deemed the racially exclusive membership policy of the FBJ unconstitutional. The #RMF mission statement condemned the SAHRC decision arguing that it constrained black people from challenging racism. The #RMF mission statement therefore concluded that South Africa’s history compels black people to organize themselves “to the exclusion of white people in the fight against racism” (JWTC 2015, p. 7).

The critique of the constitution and its interpretation by the Human Rights Commission, is based on several arguments developed by #RMF activists and led primarily by law students involved in the movement according to Ru Slayen (interview July 26, 2017) and Leila Khan.
(interview July 19, 2017). Khan, a law student herself, stated that “there were a lot of law students involved in #RMF, which I think is also telling about the law faculty and how messed up it is” (interview July 19, 2017). For Khan, the criticism of human rights discourse is linked to a critique of the constitution. The constitution, according to Khan, “allows for non-structural interpretations of power… it allows land to be kept in the possession of white people…” (interview July 19, 2017). Brian Kamanzi similarly tied the idea of the non-human back to the constitution and the land question raised by Khan, arguing that, “many of those categories [of human] have no meaning outside of the return of the land, which is also the return of independence and the ability to self-determine” (interview June 27, 2017).

These arguments reflect critiques by scholars such as Maldonado-Torres (2017) who recognize human rights as a colonized discourse, suggesting that the decolonization of human rights first requires the “decolonization of the concept of human” (p. 117). Furthermore, Mutua (2004) finds that in the “Age of Rights” following the Second World War, South Africa “represents the first deliberate and calculated effort in history to craft a human rights state…” (p. 126). Mutua (2004) however, asserts that South Africa’s incorporation of human rights discourses into its constitution was a “mistake” (p. 128). Drawing on the work of Gassama, Mutua (2004) believes that South Africa’s mistake was failing to recognize that human rights can be used by the privileged white minority to protect their economic status as the holder of significant private property rights.

Khan (interview July 19, 2017) also recalled how a discussion on race organized at the law school was disrupted by #RMF activists in which someone shouted, “the constitution is anti-black (laughs). And I was like, ah that’s exactly what it is (laughs). Well, I remember for me, I was like, yes” (interview July 19, 2017). At the same time, Slayen recalled how UCT’s
management “ridiculed” the #RMF’s evaluation of the constitution as anti-black (interview July 26, 2017). He suggested that the constitution’s roots could be traced back to the Freedom Charter which was adopted by the African National Congress (ANC) in 1955, and that consequently, the #RMF’s critique of human rights reflects a critique of both the Charter and the ANC.

The rejection of human rights discourse then becomes a proxy for the rejection of the ANC and its human rights based constitution that fails to develop a construction of humanness linked to the land. In addition, various students I interviewed associated human rights with individualism, liberalism and whiteness, suggesting that decolonization as a framework, offered an approach to black struggles that were more relatable to their current condition as black students in a historically white university. For Chumani Maxwele, “there is no doubt that the language of the constitution is the language of white people” (interview June 26, 2017). Similarly, Mbali Matandela indicated that human rights was intrinsically connected to the 1994 transition to democracy: “human rights discourse, what it’s done, it’s a watered down discourse about blackness and critical race theory and instead, it has replaced it with liberal approaches on what is needed to be done with the black struggle…” (interview July 31, 2017).

Critical human rights scholarship contends that human rights discourses, though well meaning, are predominantly based on Euro-American values and have been deliberately designed as a mechanism to civilize the global South (Mutua, 2001; Kennedy, 2002; Douzinas, 2002; Kapur, 2006; Wilde, 2010; Bonilla, 2013; Dembour, 2014; Sharp, 2015). Human rights discourses therefore cannot be separated from its historical formation in the global North (Moyn, 2010; Martinez 2012), and its affiliation to capitalist globalization (Orford, 1998; Cheah, 2006). Furthermore, critical scholars argue that human rights have been appropriated by conservative governments, civil society organizations and international financial institutions (Mutua, 2002;
Guilhot, 2002; Perugini & Gordon, 2015). The #RMF’s negation of human rights in a country described as “a human rights state” (Mutua 2004) therefore seems to symbolize a denunciation of South Africa’s post-apartheid transition to democracy and the politically negotiated, human rights based constitution.

However, the #RMF activists’ understanding of human rights and its connections to South Africa’s constitutional dispensation is not shared by human rights lawyer, Tembeka Ngcukaitobi (2018). According to Ngcukaitobi (2018), a black advocate who practices human rights law in South Africa, the ANC first developed an “African Bill of Rights for South Africa” as early as 1923. While Ngcukaitobi (2018) acknowledges that “it is not possible to draw a straight line between the writings of early African intellectuals and the present Constitution” (p. 3), he argues that, “the idea of a Bill of Rights had its origins in South Africa… [and] was a negation of colonial violence” (p. 2). Ngcukaitobi’s (2018) comprehensive historical analysis of the development of human rights within the ANC among black intellectuals, leads him to dispute the “‘Eurocentric origins’ of the country’s constitutional order” (p. 196).

Consequently, Ngcukaitobi’s (2018) book challenges two arguments offered by #RMF activists: first, that human rights is a Eurocentric idea imposed on Africans, and second, that human rights is an inadequate framework to challenge colonialism. I argue that the #RMF’s rejection of human rights can primarily be considered as a rejection of the ANC and its failure to ensure the restoration of the dignity of black South Africans through among others, the restitution of dispossessed land. The critique of human rights developed by #RMF activists seems to center on what the bill of rights symbolize in South Africa’s negotiated democratic process and how its entrenchment in the constitution has restricted black people from seeking justice.
The rejection of human rights then appears to be a proxy for the rejection of the ANC’s negotiated settlement which student activists believe results in the continued dehumanization of black people and a failure to adequately address the land question. While the #RMF movement therefore delinked from universal human rights, this process of delinking was part of a broader dissatisfaction with the construction of the South African constitution. Since Mignolo’s (2011) description of delinking tends to focus almost exclusively on a movement away from Euro-American knowledge, can the students’ dismissal of the constitution—a document crafted in the South—also be characterized as delinking?

While the notion of delinking, which leads to decolonial options, can be widely interpreted based on Mignolo’s (2009, 2011, 2018) broad description of these concepts, it is clear that decolonization and decoloniality instead of human rights, becomes the primary theoretical framework employed by students to address the challenges they faced. Decolonization becomes a central theme for the movement by the time students emerge from Azania House on April 9, 2015 to reveal that, “[t]he decolonization of this institution is thus fundamentally linked to the decolonization of our entire society” (#RMF 2015c). In an April 13, 2015 press statement, decolonization is seen as a radical alternative to transformation, and becomes part of the new vocabulary of change that students introduced, both as a way of distancing themselves from the transformation agenda and what it symbolizes, but also, as a way of connecting their movement to decolonial struggles that predate apartheid. Furthermore, whereas transformation can be characterized as a process that involves all South Africans (including white people) working together, decolonization is seen by students as a black struggle. In the April 13 press statement the students make this point clear to the Vice Chancellor: “Dr. Price, the task of decolonization
cannot be left to the colonizer. We refuse to let white men take the lead in deciding the fate of black lives” (#RMF 2015c).

Mbembe (2015) critiques the #RMF’s employment of decolonization as a conceptual framework arguing that student activists have used it to describe “a psychic state more than a political project in the strict sense of the term” (no page number). He asserts that “[i]f we cannot find a proper name for what we are actually facing, then rather than simply borrowing one from a different time, we should keep searching” (2015, no page number). Acknowledging Mbembe’s (2015) critique, I suggest that Fallism could potentially constitute the “proper name” that reflects what #RMF activists were attempting to achieve in challenging the colonial university. In the next section, I attempt to experiment with developing Fallism into a decolonial option that seeks to crack the wall of coloniality constructed by the university.

Fallism as a Decolonial Option

Achille Mbembe would most likely argue against the development of Fallism as a decolonial option. At the launch of his book, A Critique of Black Reason, which I attended in Cape Town, he responded to a question about the appropriation of the concept of coloniality in relation to the #RMF student movement as follows (field notes July 20, 2017):

It's too easy to pick up a little bit of intersectionality here, a little bit of black feminism there, a little bit of queer theory... and make a potpourri of things... it doesn't make intellectual coherence... I am for the articulation from this part of our world of ideas, and concepts and theories that speak beyond our own boundaries, that can travel, make sense in America, in Europe, in Asia and elsewhere. We haven't been able to do that. Because to some extent we are too self-centered, we are too isolationist, we are not even linking with our own continent. We still hear people in South Africa saying “we are going to Africa”… (audience laughs).
Mbembe’s critique of the #RMF’s decolonial framework as a self-centered, South African potpourri of ideas that cannot travel to other parts of the world, merits further consideration. The framework is indeed a combination of Pan-Africanism, Black Consciousness and Black radical feminism; a compilation of old ideas. Furthermore, given the #RMF students’ own skepticism about how these old ideas translate into the concept of Fallism, as well as the uncertainty about what Fallism actually constitutes, it may seem futile to want to develop Fallism into a decolonial option.

However, I think that Fallism could nevertheless be constituted as an emergent decolonial option through a curtailment of its ubiquitous interpretation. For this nascent decolonial option to be comprehensible, I propose that for the time being, its application be limited to the university space, and that the Fallist identity be uncoupled from Fallism. By separating Fallists from Fallism, I seek to move away from the individualized interpretations of what it means to be a Fallist and the personalities and “egopolitics of knowledge” (Mignolo 2011, p. 62) associated with those interpretations. For instance, while Lindiwe Dhlamini and Wandile Kasibe referred to themselves as Fallists, Alex Hotz stated that, “I struggle with it because I wonder what it is to be a Fallist when you don't embody all the pillars of Fallism...” (interview, July 13, 2017). Sandy Ndelu, Mbali Matandela and Wanelisa Xaba used to identity as Fallists during the #RMF movement but no longer did by the time I interviewed them. For Matandela, “Fallism is an idea that has been captured” (interview, July 31, 2017).

When I asked Wanelisa Xaba (interview, July 13, 2017) how she felt about self-identifying as a Fallist, she indicated that:

I used to identify as a Fallist… I think it’s a very noble thought. It’s an opportunity to redefine Black Consciousness in South Africa today and contextualize it within a particular space in time and historical moment. However, you know, had the movement been sincere about
including everyone… it would have been amazing… but, if I would have to speak about Fallism, I would have to speak about… I don’t think that it transcends the space that it was in.

For Xaba, the origin of an idea is deeply rooted to the space within which it emerges. However, she recognized the possibility of reconsidering the idea of Fallism, indicating that the concept could be reimagined if it were redefined and de-linked from the dominance of black cis gendered heterosexual masculinity: “unless, like a group of other people can start writing about it and redefining it and living it, then… who are inclusive, then I would identify with it. I used to, but I don’t anymore, because I realize that #RhodesMustFall was essentially centered around black cis gendered heterosexual men fighting against racism” (interview, July 13, 2017).

I first encountered Wanelisa Xaba’s articulation of Fallism when we both presented papers at a graduate student conference at Columbia University in February 2017. When we met again a few months later in Cape Town, Xaba’s challenge to write about and redefine Fallism intrigued me. Many student activists, including Xaba, expressed an overwhelming sense of exhaustion and trauma following their involvement with the #RMF movement. It appeared that while they recognized the value of their contribution to the struggle to decolonize the university, they lacked the mental space to fully advance some of the ideas generated from their struggle. My aim in experimenting with Fallism as a decolonial option, is therefore a modest attempt to build on an idea generated through the #RMF movement, while simultaneously recognizing all the challenges of doing so.

In my conversation with Brian Kamanzi, he stated that while he never used the term “Fallism” in his writing, he nevertheless recognized the important ideas and contestations flowing from the #RMF movement. Kamanzi suggested that “things are still in flux… It's too early. We can't name that yet without seeing how this thing actually... yah. So I'm seeing it as emergent conversations and theorizations that have to find their content in actual struggles on
some of these issues” (interview, June 27, 2017). Acknowledging Kamanzi’s assertion that things are still in flux, I believe that it may be possible to synthesize the varying understandings of Fallism as an idea comprised of three dimensions: first, Fallism emerges from the disruption of dominant constructions of what constitutes knowledge and how knowledge is developed (epistemic disobedience). For #RMF, this disruption included demands to replace the Eurocentric university curriculum with one that was more African centered. Second, Fallism exposes the paradoxical nature of the university as both a space for black people to think (Black liberation), and a space that simultaneously dehumanizes black bodies (Black pain). This paradox derives from the university’s position as the authorized center of knowledge production and its engagement in epistemic coloniality. Third, Fallism facilitates the intersections between creative forms of activism and learning (public pedagogy). For #RMF, this dimension of Fallism involved reclaiming the non-academic, in-between spaces of the university and turning them into disruptive pedagogical spaces.

Mignolo (2011) however indicates that ‘[t]he decolonial option is not aiming to be the one. It is just an option…” (p. 21). Furthermore, Mignolo (2011) states that, “the goal of decolonial options is not to take over, but to make clear, by thinking and doing, that global futures can no longer be thought of as one global future in which only one option is available; after all, when only one option is available, ‘option’ entirely loses its meaning” (p. 24). For Mignolo (2011), engaging in the construction of a decolonial option is to advance the decolonial “cause, rather than to ‘advance’ the discipline (e.g., anthropology)” (p. 137). Drawing on Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s (1999) work, Decolonizing Methodologies, Mignolo (2011) argues that “[i]f you engage in decolonial thinking, and therefore engage the decolonial options, and put
anthropology ‘at your service,’ like Smith does, then you engage in shifting the geography of reason, by unveiling and enacting geopolitics and body-politics of knowledge” (p. 137).

My attempt at developing Fallism into a decolonial option can therefore be seen as advancing the #RMF’s decolonial cause which is deeply connected to the body-politics of knowledge and takes the form of black pain. Consequently, Fallism as a decolonial option, is a lens through which, the paradoxical positioning of the university as simultaneously empowering and dehumanizing for black bodies, can be better understood. It is therefore not only a collective noun to describe the student movements, but a decolonial option that emerges from the university’s margins to crack the epistemic architecture of the university’s epicenter. Fallism represents a decolonial option that flows from acts of epistemic disobedience emanating from the margins of the university, employing disruptive pedagogies that delink from hegemonic constructions of knowledge, to decolonize the university.

In addition to its disruptive epistemic and pedagogical dimensions that challenge the coloniality of knowledge, Fallism is also concerned with the continuous construction and reconstruction of what constitutes the human (coloniality of Being). This recognition of humanness as an ongoing process of becoming, is rooted in the idea of black pain reflected in the #RMF’s mission statement. Consequently, Fallism as a decolonial option deliberately conspires toward the fall of the coloniality of knowledge and the coloniality of Being within the university space. I have chosen to limit Fallism to the university primarily because this is where the idea originated but also because it allows for a more contained development of the decolonial option.

The university space is examined in Mahmood Mamdani’s (2016) work on “epistemological decolonization” (p. 79) in which he prefaces his arguments by drawing on Chumani Maxwele’s protest action that sparked the formation of #RMF. The decolonization of
the university “has been at the heart of discussions at African universities” according to Mamdani (2016, p. 69). He argues that the university’s position lies in a “tension” between “a singular notion of the human and… nationalist responses to it” (p. 68). Following an overview of decolonization movements at various universities across the African continent, including UCT, Mamdani (2016) offers a fascinating history of the colonial origins of the university in post-Renaissance Europe. Despite the existence of universities such as the Alexandra Museum in Egypt and Sankore in Timbuktu, which predates European universities, Mamdani (2016) finds that “neither the institutional form nor the curricular content of the modern African university derived from precolonial institutions; their inspiration was the colonial modern” (p. 70).

Importantly, Mamdani (2016) also indicates that the construction of the human which emerged in European universities, particularly at the University of Berlin in 1810, derived from Europe’s civilizing mission in which “Imperial Europe understood the human as a European, but colonized peoples as so many species of the sub-human” (p. 70). The colonial African university was therefore considered as an outpost of the European university. The movement to decolonize the African university emerged in the 1960’s at Makerere University spearheaded by Ali Mazrui, and at the University of Dar-es-Salaam led by Walter Rodney. While Mazrui was interested in developing the university as a space for scholarly ideas, Rodney wanted to create a university that was connected to broader society. These debates emerged in the early 1990’s in South Africa according to Mamdani (2016), who was personally involved in discussions hosted by the Union of Democratic University Staff Associations (UDUSA). The tension between white and black universities in South Africa centered on the historical relationship with the apartheid state as it transitioned to democracy in 1994.
For Mamdani (2016), “[o]ur understanding of decolonization has changed over time: from political, to economic to discursive (epistemological)” (p. 79). Epistemological decolonization centers on reconstructing the categories used to make sense of the world, which for Mamdani (2016) “is intimately tied to our notions of what is human…” (p. 79). Consequently, he concludes by asserting the importance of epistemology as “the process of knowledge production” (p. 81) in decolonizing the university as the “authorized center of knowledge production” (p. 69).

Achille Mbembe’s (2016) paper on *Decolonizing the University*, similarly recognizes the role of the university in producing knowledge and states that “[w]e need to decolonize the systems of access and management insofar as they have turned higher education into a marketable product…” (p. 30). The university, according to Mbembe (2016), limits and even deters both faculty and students “from a free pursuit of knowledge” (p. 30). While Mbembe acknowledges the role played by the #RMF movement in opening up the debate on decolonizing the university, he finds that “the terms under which the next phase of the struggle should be fought are entirely uncertain” (p. 32). At the same time, Mbembe (2016) suggests that in addition to curriculum reform, decolonizing the South African university should also include the development of African languages, as well as extend beyond the “confines of the nation-state” (p. 36).

This leads Mbembe (2016) to draw on Boaventura de Sousa Santos’ (2010) idea of developing “pluriversity knowledge”—a knowledge that is context specific “insofar as the organizing principle of its construction is its application” (no page number). Pluriversity knowledge comprises of various characteristics that de Sousa Santos (2010) sets out including its shareability, its transdisciplinary nature, and a reversal of the relationship between society and
scientific inquiry so that “[s]ociety ceases to be an object of scientific questioning and becomes itself a subject that questions science” (no page number). This form of knowledge is distinguished from and contrasted with “university knowledge” which de Sousa Santos (2010) defines as “a predominantly disciplinary knowledge whose autonomy imposed a relatively de-contextualized process of production in relation to the day-to-day pressures of the societies” (no page number).

Fallism then, is a decolonial option for introducing pluriversity knowledge from the margins in order to engage in epistemological decolonization within the university. This option reflects a movement away from “the egopolitics of knowledge (e.g., the knower and the known)… link[ing] (instead of delinking) with knowers who are dealing with conditions of colonality and projects of decoloniality (p. 62).” Fallism embodies the linking/de-linking dimensions of Mignolo’s (2009) decolonial option by disrupting university knowledge, and creating pedagogical spaces within the university that allow for the emergence of pluriversity knowledge (de Sousa Santos 2010).

Fallism as a decolonial option is not necessarily new; instead, it offers a new grammar for a “different beginning” (Mignolo 2011, p. 45) that de-links from Euro-American beginnings. In the context of the #RMF movement, Mbembe (2015) asks:

If everything “must fall”, then what exactly must stand in its place? Unless we extend our imagination and properly articulate what “must stand” in lieu of what will have been overthrown, we might end up privileging the politics of ruins over a genuine politics of creative emancipation. To distribute property and the wealth of the nation in a different way, we will need to massively reinvest in various generic human potentialities.

Mignolo (2011) however takes a different approach from Mbembe (2015); while Mbembe (2015) is concerned about “privileging the politics of ruins”, Mignolo recognizes that
decolonial options are “built on the ruins of imperial knowledge” (Mignolo 2011, p. 11). For Walsh (2018), “[h]ow do we, and can we, move within the cracks, open cracks, and extend the fissures?” (p. 83). As a decolonial option, Fallism creates the space for alternative ideas to emerge through cracks in the wall of coloniality, eventually leading to its fall. Fallism however, is not only about the fall of colonial knowledge; it also connects those who are engaged in developing decolonial options thereby facilitating the creation of new structures and building coalitions within and between people and institutions.

It is however uncertain whether Fallism as a decolonial option must be limited to a particular moment at UCT and spoken of as an option in the past tense, selected by student activists in a particular place and time. While Mignolo’s (2011) description of decolonial options tends to guard against universality by limiting these options to a specific space and time, Fallism appears to possess the capacity to extend its reach beyond its place of origin to become a decolonial option that can be employed in new contexts. Its extension to campuses across South Africa as part of the #FeesMustFall movement is one such example. Furthermore, in the context of the Oxford movement, Sizwe Mpofu-Walsh (2016) suggests that #RMF Oxford “was the consequence of a plan consciously to implant a way of looking at the world into the North, from the South: to subvert the directionality of colonial logic as a theoretical strategy, but also as an ironic political gesture” (p. 83). Consequently, Fallism appears to be constitute a decolonial option that possesses the ability to travel. This dimension of Fallism will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter as I examine the emergence of the #RhodesMustFall Oxford movement.
Introduction

As darkness slowly enveloped the intimate Brooklyn theatre in New York, I watched seven university of Cape Town graduates relive their experiences as members of the #RMF movement in the production of The Fall (field notes March 10, 2018). Clenched fists raised above their heads, the cast of The Fall occupy the black, naked stage bathed in light. Their lips are sealed with masking tape; their eyes filled with recalcitrance. Art imitating life, imitating art. As the actors weave together powerful narratives of student activists demanding the fall of the Rhodes statue, I listen for responses from, what I assume to be, a largely American audience to gauge their receptiveness to the ideas being articulated in the play.

The audience seemed to applaud and laugh at the correct moments but may also have missed some important nuances when the language changed from English to one of the other ten official languages used in South Africa. The New York Times review of The Fall on March 12, 2018 (Brantley 2018), affirmed the importance and relevance of the play observing:

‘That day,’ one of the students remembers, ‘for the first time I witnessed how little our lives matter as black people.’ American audience members will no doubt hear echoes of similar sentiments spoken with damning frequency in their own country.

The “echoes” certainly resonated with students in the United States, particularly at Harvard Law School, where the Royall Must Fall movement was created, but also at Princeton University where the Black Justice League occupied the university president’s office in November 2015 to demand that Woodrow Wilson’s name be removed from various buildings. Wilson served as the U.S. president from 1913 to 1921 and supported racial segregation.

However, I believe that the echoes of the #RMF UCT movement were felt most profoundly at the University of Oxford where the #RhodesMustFall Oxford movement was
established two months after Maxwele threw feces onto the Rhodes statue at UCT. At the same
time, Sizwe Mpofu-Walsh (2016) noted while reflecting on his involvement with the #RMF
Oxford movement, that “[o]ne of the most neglected aspects of the ‘Must Fall’ movement is its
spread to Euro-America” (p. 75). When connections between #RMF UCT and Oxford are made
in academic literature, they are often dismissive. For instance, Jonathan Jansen (2017, p. 52)
provides the following analysis:

Despite the petition with more than 2 300 signatures, the disposal of the Oxford version
of RMF was swift and cutting. The chancellor of Oxford, calling up the name of the man in
whose honour a new scholarship had just been created in South Africa, pronounced: ‘If they
aren’t prepared to show the generosity of spirit which Nelson Mandela showed towards Rhodes
and towards history… then maybe they should think about being educated elsewhere.’ Rhodes
remains standing at Oxford because of the resident power of the institution, its formidable history,
its national politics, and of course its prominent alumni who warned that giving into this crowd
would be ‘substituting moral vanity for fair-minded enquiry.’ That was the embarrassing end of
any activist illusion that an African action in Cape Town would stand a chance of rocking the
oldest university in the English-speaking world.

What Jansen (2017) neglected to mention, were the allegations that the “prominent
alumni” threatened to withdraw funding from Oxford if they removed the Rhodes statue from
Oriel College (Mpofu-Walsh 2016). More importantly, Jansen (2017) dismisses the influence of
#RMF Cape Town on the Oxford movement as “an activist illusion” (p. 52). Surprisingly, in my
engagements with students involved with the #RMF movement at UCT, they were just as
dismissive of the Oxford movement as Jansen (2017). Students from #RMF UCT sometimes
referred to the movement in Oxford as “RMF lite.” However, when I spoke to student supporters
from #RMF Oxford as well as Oxford faculty who were ardent critics of the movement, both
agreed on the important influence of the #RMF Cape Town movement on Oxford. Students and faculty at Oxford were therefore more likely to agree on the influence of #RMF Cape Town on the Oxford movement, than students and academics such as Jansen (2017) from South Africa.

These contrasting perspectives between the level of influence of #RMF Cape Town on #RMF Oxford, led me to develop the following research question: in what ways was the #RMF movement in Oxford shaped by #RMF in Cape Town? This chapter concludes by arguing that the influence of #RMF Cape Town on Oxford was emphatic. At the same time, I find that while there are significant similarities between the two movements, there are also important differences that distinguish the strategies, tactics and philosophies of these movements. One of the theoretical questions I struggle with is whether the influence of #RMF Cape Town on the formation of #RMF Oxford constitutes what Comaroff and Comaroff (2010) refer to as a “theory from the South.” This theory, which is introduced in more detail in Chapter III, asserts that the global South is increasingly exporting ideas to Euro-America, thereby reversing the conjectural flow of knowledge production. The Comaroff’s (2010) argue furthermore, that this epistemic reversal suggests that the South is anticipating and perhaps influencing, various political, economic, and cultural shifts across Euro-America.

At the same time, I recognize that the Comaroff’s (2010) theory, which Oxford professor Jonny Steinberg (interview, November 20, 2017), referred to as a “provocation” during our interview, has some conceptual and empirical gaps. He noted that, “it’s as much a polemic as anything else.” Consequently, I aim to supplement the Comaroffs’ (2010) assertions by drawing on Mignolo’s (2009) notion of epistemic disobedience to consider the ways in which the #RMF Cape Town movement shaped and influenced the formation and evolution of the Oxford movement. Lastly, I seek to extend my experimentation with Fallism as a decolonial option
developed in the previous chapter. By examining the extent to which Fallism was exported from Cape Town to Oxford, I attempt to build on Mignolo’s (2009, 2011, 2018) notion of decolonial options to consider whether Fallism possesses the ability to travel.

The Influence of #RMF Cape Town on the Oxford Movement

I first met Ntokozo Qwabe at the University of Oxford in July 2016 after a mutual friend introduced us via email. At that stage, I was uncertain about including #RMF Oxford as part of this dissertation research given the rich data collected on #RMF UCT. However, after speaking to Qwabe, I had no doubt that the Oxford dimension of the #RMF movement should be incorporated into my research and analysis. Our initial meeting in Oxford followed Qwabe’s involvement in a widely publicized altercation with a white waitress in Cape Town during May 2016. Instead of leaving the waitress a tip, Qwabe and his friends wrote “we will give tip when you return the land” on the check (Change.org, no date). The media lashed out at Qwabe referring to him as a “Racist Rhodes jackass” (Li May 5, 2016), and 47,255 people signed a petition to have him removed from Oxford (Change.org, no date). A fundraising campaign for the white waitress resulted in $6,000 being collected in lieu of the tip that Qwabe and his friends refused to leave (Freeman 2016).

Based on the media reports I read about Qwabe, I was uncertain what to expect when I first met him. The thing I noticed immediately when I shook Qwabe’s hand to introduce myself, was his stature. He was slim and short. As we sat down to talk at a coffee shop in Oxford, he smiled and laughed a lot and was incredibly charming and deeply insightful. He was nothing like the “jackass” described in the media. When we met for a second time in Durban in August 2017, Qwabe had had some time to reflect on his activism in #RMF Oxford, as well as his subsequent involvement in the #RMF and #FMF movements at UCT following his return to Cape Town at
the end of 2016. During another highly publicized incident in September 2016, Qwabe was accused of hitting a white student with a stick (Withnall 2016) at a protest outside the law faculty at UCT. The white student used his mobile phone to film Qwabe and others during the protest and was asked by Qwabe not to record them. Qwabe denied hitting the student but indicated on his Facebook page, “I wish I had actually not been a good law abiding citizen, and whipped the white apartheid settler colonial entitlement out of the bastard” (Withnall 2016).

Qwabe’s humble beginnings which he described in an extensive Facebook post published on November 9, 2016, went viral when it garnered 6,700 likes and was shared 3,156 times. In the post, Qwabe indicated that he was completing his fourth degree, of which, two were masters degrees from Oxford. Before becoming a student at Oxford, Qwabe attended law school from the age of 16 at the University of Kwa-Zulu-Natal, but had to drop out due to financial constraints:

…the only company willing to hire under-aged me was Shoprite Checkers - first as a trolley boy (yes, those people that push customer trolleys from outside stores), then as a Till Packer (yes, the people who put your items in your bags at the till), and finally as a Cashier (when I had turned 17).

After working at the Shoprite Checkers grocery store chain for three years, Qwabe returned to university with just enough money to complete his studies. But he continued to face several financial and administrative obstacles noting that:

what shatters me the most is that university seemed to do all it could to spit me out - when it was supposed to be a place of hopes and dreams for me. A place where I could escape the cycle of black poverty I had been born to… as a black person, university nearly broke me to pieces - never to recover, and with no hope of repair. You know, many people will not understand why we call for free decolonised education. They will never understand why we call for our
universities to be decolonised and to cease inflicting pain on black bodies. (Facebook November 9, 2016).

Ntokobo Qwabe’s experiences in South Africa and the U.K. reflect the paradoxical position of the university as “a place where I could escape the cycle of black poverty” (Black liberation), and the university that “inflicts[ing] pain on black bodies” (Black pain). For Qwabe, “racism at Oxford has grave psychological and mental health implications for black students” (interview, August 1, 2017). The Black pain/Black liberation paradox seems to play out in both Cape Town and Oxford but takes on slightly different nuances depending on gender, queerness and class. For instance, compared to #RMF Oxford activists such as Sizwe Mpofu-Walsh whose father is a well-known politician and lawyer, Qwabe’s father worked as a caretaker of a school in Durban. Recognizing that his son was highly intelligent, Qwabe’s father convinced the principle of the school he worked at, to allow his son to transfer from a rural Zulu-medium school to the school in Durban where Qwabe only learnt to speak English at the age of 13.

Having overcome incredible obstacles to get to Oxford, Qwabe also faced various threats following his involvement in #RMF Oxford. Interestingly, Qwabe never mentioned these threats to me and never spoke about his personal experiences. It was Charles Conn, the Warden of Rhodes House, who specifically noted Qwabe’s personal sacrifices and contribution to the #RMF Oxford movement: “I really admire him for standing up for something that he felt strongly about. And as you probably know, he was subject to the most unbelievable, not just hate speech, but physical threats during that period” (interview, November 22, 2017).

In my conversations with Qwabe, he recognized that there were a number of events centered around racial discrimination that preceded the formation of #RMF in Oxford: “[b]y the time #RMF came, that background work had been done” (interview, August 1, 2017). In March 2014 for instance, the Campaign for Racial Awareness and Equality (CRAE) led by the Oxford
University Student Union (OUSU) released a report entitled *The 100 Voices Campaign 2: Black and Minority Ethnic Students of Oxford Speak Out*, in which four themes were identified. The first centered on a lack of diversity among students, second, the limitations of a Western centered curriculum, third, a culture that was seen as unwelcoming to racial and ethnic difference, and fourth, social isolation for black and minority ethnic (BME) students. The CRAE found that “57.75% of BME respondents reported that they believed that racism is a problem at Oxford, as compared to 38.5% of white respondents” (no page number).

The campaign on race and equality developed through CRAE prior to the formation of #RMF at Oxford, would certainly have created a level of awareness about racial inequality and the Eurocentric university curriculum. However, this level of awareness was raised to national and international levels because of the #RMF Oxford movement. Even one of #RMF’s most ardent critics, Professor Nigel Biggar (interview, November 22, 2017), admitted during our interview that “#RhodesMustFall can take credit for that” when I asked him about the national impact the movement had on raising questions about race, iconography and curriculum reform. Similarly, during my interview with the Warden of Rhodes House, Charles Conn (interview, November 22, 2017), he also agreed that #RMF Oxford played a critical role in shifting the conversation on Rhodes’ legacy, even though he was “not a fan of choosing one historical character and banging pots and pans in the street.”

While conducting field work in Oxford, I had difficulty locating the historical character that was immortalized in the form of the Rhodes statue. It is not as visible or as prominent as the bronze statue at UCT because of its location on the upper façade of Oriel College on the High Street; a busy thoroughfare filled with students, tourists and Harry Potter fans. The Rhodes statue is covered with a net—a deterrent for Oxford pigeons—and depicts Cecil Rhodes standing, hat in
hand, with stone carved eyes peering down at the traffic below. One of the reasons I struggled identifying the Rhodes statue is because Oxford is filled with colonial iconography that seamlessly blends into the architecture of the city and is indelibly carved into the stone walls of almost every building.

It is therefore unsurprising that the #RMF Oxford mission statement (2015) lists “[t]ackling the plague of colonial iconography” as its first of three aims which include “statues, plaques and paintings that seeks to whitewash and distort history” (no page number). Renowned Oxford historian, Richard Symonds (1986, p. 161) notes that “[n]o one has more memorials in Oxford than Cecil Rhodes…” Prominent #RMF Oxford activist, Ntokozo Qwabe (interview, August 1, 2017), who first arrived in Oxford in September 2014 as a Rhodes Scholar, was surprised by what he described as the “outward celebration of colonialism and colonial conquest.” For Qwabe, “it’s very hard to miss the links to empire because they are quite striking.”

The second aim of the #RMF Oxford movement was to “[r]eform[ing] the Euro-centric curriculum” which they argued, “frames the West as sole producers of universal knowledge…” (no page number). In his explanation for the #RMF’s focus on curriculum reform, Qwabe indicated that several questions framed this aspect of the movement’s aims: “What is a university? But not just what is a university, but what is knowledge? How is knowledge produced and who produces it? For what purpose is it produced? (interview, August 1, 2017).” In its mission statement, #RMF Oxford sought to “remedy the highly selective narrative of traditional academia… by integrating subjugated and local epistemologies” in order to “create a more intellectually rigorous, complete academy” (#RMF Oxford 2015, no page number). For Dalia Gebrial from the U.K., who became a prominent organizer in #RMF, “Oxford is where the
elite and the colonial elite get educated. If you can change the curriculum in Oxford, there’s every chance that you will then be able to change the curriculum in schools all over the country” (interview, November 23, 2017).

The third aim of the #RMF Oxford movement was to, “[a]ddress[ing] the underrepresentation and lack of welfare provision for black and minority ethnic (BME) amongst Oxford’s academic staff and students” (#RMF Oxford 2015). Qwabe (interview, August 1, 2017) stated that at the time of his involvement with #RMF, “there [was] only one black professor at Oxford and only 20 something undergraduate students in the entire university.” Race then became an important consideration in formulating the aims of the movement according to Qwabe, who found that “the everyday experiences of racism at Oxford have grave psychological and mental health implications for black students.”

While the three aims of the #RMF Oxford movement shared several similarities with the objectives of the #RMF UCT movement, there were important differences in the framing of the respective mission statements. For #RMF UCT, one of their goals was to implement an African centered curriculum: “By this we mean treating African discourses as the point of departure - through addressing not only content, but languages and methodologies of education and learning - and only examining western traditions in so far as they are relevant to our own experience” (JWTC 2015, p. 8). The Oxford movement on the other hand, sought to integrate “subjugated and local epistemologies” (2015) into the Eurocentric curriculum. Whereas both movements were engaged in acts of epistemic disobedience, #RMF UCT’s approach was to center, rather than integrate, marginalized ideas.

However, the dehumanization experienced by black students at Oxford, was one of the noteworthy similarities encountered by activists from UCT. This common experience appeared
to shape the three objectives developed by #RMF Oxford as well as the long-term goals listed in the #RMF UCT mission statement. Since it was difficult to articulate experiences of black pain, both movements used the Rhodes statue as a tangible symbol to draw attention to and confront the dehumanization of black people. Following the Oxford Union protest on May 28, 2015 discussed in Chapter II, and the intervening summer vacation period, the next major action by #RMF was a protest outside Oriel College held on November 6, 2015, to demand the removal of the Rhodes statue. The Oxford movement drafted a petition which stated that:

At the University of Cape Town, the statue of Cecil Rhodes has fallen and uncritical memory of his legacy has been discredited. It is at the University of Cape Town where the Rhodes Must Fall movement, a student-led movement to decolonise education, challenges the active influence of colonial relations in Africa, and caused the removal of the statue of Rhodes that overlooked the campus. Rhodes Must Fall in Oxford supports and continues this vital work by looking to critically interrogate the colonial relations on which Oxford University is founded, not just in Africa, but worldwide. We see no reason why here, at the heart of the High Street, at the heart of Oxford, Rhodes cannot also fall.

Similarly, in a press release issued by #RMF two days earlier announcing the protest action, it provided that “[i]n calling for the Rhodes statue’s removal, we take inspiration from the Rhodes Must Fall movement at the University of Cape Town (UCT), which led to the toppling of Rhodes’ statue in South Africa earlier this year” (#RMF Oxford November 4, 2015).

There is consequently a clear link between the formation of the #RMF Oxford movement and the inspirational role played by the UCT movement. Despite this connection between #RMF UCT and Oxford, when I asked Ntokozo Qwabe about the extent to which #RMF Oxford adopted a similar decolonial framework to the one employed by UCT activists, he stated that, “I personally think #RhodesMustFall Oxford was not as great as #RhodesMustFall UCT in that
particular aspect of conceptualizing, or rather theorizing about the decolonial work that had to be
done. Which again is very surprising because (laughs)... there is this thought that Oxford people
are very theoretical” (interview August 1, 2017).

What Qwabe was alluding to is the epistemic differentiation that is often drawn between
Europe and the Global South; a problem identified by scholars such as Quijano (2000) in Latin
instance, challenges the presumed role of the global South “to supply data, and later to apply
knowledge in the form of technology and method”, and the role of Euro-America, “to collate and
process data, producing theory (including methodology)...” (p. 211). There is consequently a rich
history of critique related to epistemic deference to Euro-American knowledge (Bhambra 2007,
history, Comaroff and Comaroff (2012) develop a Theory from the South in order to “subvert the
epistemic scaffolding” (p. 2) upon which assumptions about the superiority of Euro-American
knowledge is based.

Subversion is precisely what activists such as Ntokozo Qwabe were seeking to achieve.
He spoke about “geographies of knowledge” (N. Qwabe interview, August 1, 2017) as a way of
distinguishing between the Global South on the one hand, and Euro-America on the other.
According to Comaroff and Comaroff (2010), the Global South is usually represented as a “place
of parochial wisdom, of antiquarian traditions, of exotic ways and means. Above all, of
unprocessed data” (p. 1). According to the Comaroffs (2010), the Global South has become a
shorthand for everyone who is not from Europe and North America; it is that part of the world
about which knowledge and theories are created and is rarely seen as a source of knowledge
development.
While the Global South is also referred to by other names, including the “Third world” or “developing world”, the term “South” is deployed by the Comaroffs (2010) as a set of relationships rather than a fixed geographical location. They use this understanding of the Global South to argue that Euro-American knowledge dominates our understanding of the world and that knowledge from “the ancient world, the orient, the primitive world, the third world, the underdeveloped world, the developing world and now the Global South” (p. 1) has largely been ignored or at best, exoticized. Definitions of the “Global South” are therefore intimately connected to epistemology; to questions of what constitutes knowledge and how and where knowledge is created.

Consequently, if the distinction between the Global South and Euro-America is essentially reflective of a relationship between these geographic fictions, how can this framework be applied to understanding the connections between #RMF Cape Town and #RMF Oxford? While Mpofo-Walsh (2016) argues definitively that the formation of the #RMF movement in Oxford is an example of the Comaroffs’ (2010) *Theory from the South*, it is uncertain how the Comaroff’s theory accounts for the influence of Euro-American students on the formation of the Oxford movement. In other words, for #RMF Oxford’s formation to constitute a theory from the south, to what extent must the ideas that give effect to the movement’s formation be an exclusively southern construct?

For instance, Annie Olaloku (interview November 23, 2017), a British national who was one of the organizers of the solidarity action on March 19, 2015, noted the important influence of the #BlackLivesMatter movement in the U.S. in raising the level of consciousness around race in the U.K. She stated that after the Ferguson protests in the U.S. in 2014, she worked on establishing a Black Students Union at Oxford prior to the formation of #RMF in Cape Town.
Dalia Gebrial (interview, November 23, 2017) also noted that, “for me, it’s really different doing a movement like this in a country that is like, the empire…” Consequently, it is important to acknowledge that while #RMF UCT inspired the formation of the #RMF movement at Oxford, there were other local and global developments that also played a critical role in shaping the Oxford movement.

In a conversation with Brian Kwoba (interview, September 21, 2017), an African American doctoral student at Oxford who attended the lunch organized by Coleman on May 9, 2015, being black in a place like Oxford can be a deeply traumatic and alienating experience. Students such as Olaloku and Kwoba, as well as #RMF activists such as Njodi Ndeunyema from Namibia (interview, November 21, 2017), Julian Brave NoiseCat from the U.S. (interview, August 24, 2017), Simukai Chigudu from Zimbabwe (interview, June 6, 2017), and U.K. students such as Femi Nylander (interview, June 15, 2017), Chi Chi Shi (interview, November 23, 2017), and Dalia Gebrial (interview, November 23, 2017), were greatly inspired by what black students achieved through the #RMF movement in Cape Town.

Kwoba for instance indicated that, “seeing the events at UCT was really inspiring… my jaw dropped, and [I was] just in awe…” (interview, September 21, 2017). Dalia Gebrial whose family is from Egypt and had since, settled in the U.K., joined Oxford as a student in October 2015 after #RMF started its campaign. She indicated that while her family often discussed the violent legacy of British colonialism, this was not a conversation that most British families engaged in before the #RMF movement. “For me it was the first time that wider British society was like talking about the empire as an unequivocally oppressive thing. It was the first time that this movement brought this issue up and was not about addressing racism in the present—it was about looking at the roots… I was like really inspired by that” (interview, November 23, 2017).
Femi Nylander, who became involved with #RMF Oxford after hearing about the “colonial comeback” cocktail incident at the Oxford Union, stated that, “the British educational system really doesn’t teach about political history to any great degree… Before #RMF… I really didn’t have much of a concept of colonial history, decolonization, Fallism” (interview, June 15, 2017).

Many #RMF Oxford activists also wrote about their experiences. Dr. Simukai Chigudu, who was a doctoral student at Oxford during the #RMF movement and was subsequently appointed as an Associate Professor in African Politics at Oxford, wrote the following reflective piece (Chigudu 2016, no page number):

Born in relation to the RMF movement at the University of Cape Town in South Africa, RMF in Oxford is both an expression of transnational solidarity and a critique of institutional racism and the politics of exclusion at Oxford… The notion of decolonisation has proven to be a cogent idiom for the work of RMF. In this context, it serves as a manifold metaphor to mean questioning the hegemony of white, western thought in fields of study as diverse as history, politics, philosophy, modern languages, and literature. Far from erasure, this is about free speech in its truest form: it is about pluralising and complicating the ways in which knowledge is produced, disseminated and granted legitimacy.

Two books were later published by Oxford activists in 2018 reflecting on the #RMF Oxford movement and its connections to the UCT movement. A book entitled, *Rhodes Must Fall: The Struggle to Decolonise the Racist Heart of Empire*, contains chapters by many of the #RMF Oxford activists I interviewed including Brian Kwoba, Simukai Chigudu, Rone McFarlane, Ntokozo Qwabe, and Sizwe Mpofu-Walsh. The book indicates that it was “written by Rhodes Must Fall, Oxford,” and provides various statements, personal reflections and interviews conducted with #RMF Oxford activists as well as activists involved in “sister movements” such as #RMF UCT, the movements at Harvard and Princeton in the U.S., as well
as student movements at the University of Sussex, Queen Mary University, and the School for Oriental and African Studies (SOAS).

A chapter written by Professor Patricia Daley, a former student at Oxford in the 1980’s and a member of the academic staff since 1991, offers profound insights into her struggle as the “first Black academic to be appointed as a University Lecturer at Oxford University” and the “first Black woman to gain a full professorship at Oxford” (p. 74). Daley reflects on the “simultaneous feeling of being excluded and de-humanised, and the epistemic violence that objectification, silences, and eurocentricism perpetuates…” (p. 81).

Daley’s experiences of the university are shared by activists and academics in a second book published in 2018 entitled, Decolonising the University. The book, which is co-edited by #RMF activist Dalia Gebrial, offers insights on decolonizing academia, curricula, science, education, philosophy and higher education more generally. Gebrial’s (2018) opening chapter on the #RMF Oxford movement employs Sara Ahmed’s metaphor of “chipping away” (p. 19) to characterize the struggle to decolonize the university. The idea of chipping away reminds me of Walsh’s (2018) attempts to create cracks in the wall of coloniality. Gebrial (2018) characterizes the decolonial imperative as a problem of how to simultaneously use the resources and position of the university, “while recognizing, accounting for and undoing its inherent exclusivity” (p. 20).

The paradoxical position of the university therefore appears to be a common theme in the experiences of black bodies at UCT and Oxford. Both Gebrial (2018) and Daley (2018) recognize the university as “a space where young people learn about the world, but more importantly, map out their futures and give meaning to their lives” (Daley 2018, p. 84). At the same time, universities can also be dehumanizing spaces for black bodies. This common
experience of black bodies at UCT and Oxford is explored further in the next section where I compare and contrast the tactics and ideologies employed by #RMF UCT and #RMF Oxford.

Comparing the #RMF Oxford and Cape Town Movements

There are distinct differences in the tactics employed by students in the Oxford and UCT movements in that the actions taken by #RMF Oxford were less disruptive than those used by students at UCT. According to Julian Brave NoiseCat (interview, August 24, 2017), a Native American from the U.S. and a former masters student in global and imperial history at Oxford, “compared to what was happening in South Africa, we were very very tame.” However, Ntokozo Qwabe (interview, August 1, 2017) noted that from the perspective of the University of Oxford authorities, the #RMF protest action “was seen as disruptive because it’s Oxford. But in South Africa, entering a room with placards—it’s not going to do the job, you know (laughs).”

During my conversation with Oxford professor, Jonny Steinberg, he indicated that, “I think that #RhodesMustFall here got off to a very good start at the beginning... this whole country’s national culture is very very strange. I think there’s a deep deep investment in this country in this idea of a long history of benign-ness. It doesn’t square with an imperial history at all... there’s this strange sort of cognitive dissonance deep in the heart of this country’s national culture” (interview, November 20, 2017). As a result of this cognitive dissonance that Steinberg referred to, Qwabe (interview, August 1, 2017) argued that “although the strategies looked different” when comparing the actions taken in Oxford and Cape Town, “I think it was still quite disruptive because of the context, because it was Oxford” (interview, August 1, 2017).

The distinction between the South African and U.K. contexts became a serious point of contention within #RMF Oxford. During an interview with Dalia Gebrial in London (interview, November 23, 2017), she noted that, “I think one of the biggest conflicts that happened is that
like, we came from different contexts and we did not discuss what that meant for what we prioritized and what we wanted the movement to achieve… it did not have to be so either or… It's easy when you're facing Oxford to be united by how shit they are.”

When comparing #RMF Cape Town to #RMF Oxford, activists at UCT often characterized the tactics employed by #RMF Oxford as a watered down version of their more radical struggle. At the same time, Oxford activists recognized that their engagement with the university differed from their counterparts at UCT, but argued that the context was profoundly different. Some of these differences in relation race and organizing tactics, theoretical frameworks, gender and intersectionality, and human rights, will be considered below.

**Race as an Organizing Tactic**

One of the important contextual differences between the #RMF Oxford and UCT movements pertained to the way in which race was employed as a basis for organizing: “Those [racial] categories are just not the same in Britain” according to Dalia Gebrial (interview, November 23, 2017). For Anni Olaloku (interview November 23, 2017) who self-identified as black, “tensions were developing within the group around political questions but also around the question of ethnic blackness and who gets to speak in what spaces, which I got caught in the middle of (laughs).” Olaloku provided a comprehensive analysis of these tensions but chose to speak about these matters off the record.

Brian Kwoba (interview, September 21, 2017), who was appointed as an Assistant Professor of history at the University of Memphis after completing his Ph.D. at Oxford, also noted that the demographic differences between, you know, Oxford and UCT… was a huge factor we had to deal with. In a majority white country, and in an extremely white and elite white institution, like Oxford, where black students are always the tiny, tiny minority, it was almost like
climbing a much more… climbing an uphill battle that was much more uphill (laughs) in some ways than at UCT. We couldn’t take for granted that people had the same sort of notions of race or blackness or even white supremacy that you might find to be more common currency in South Africa.

Because of these demographic differences between Cape Town and Oxford, white students formed an integral part of the #RMF Oxford movement. Ntokozo Qwabe (interview, August 1, 2017) indicated that there were too few black students at Oxford to create an exclusively Black #RMF Oxford movement: “we simply didn’t have the numbers or the labor to sustain… a totally Black space like UCT had.” While white involvement was not controversial in the #RMF Oxford movement, Qwabe noted that “it was controversial in some of my interactions with certain UCT Fallists who were like, you know, ‘comrades, you guys are #RhodesMustFall, you are a decolonial movement.’ They saw it as us being shaky in our decolonial politics” (interview, August 1, 2017).

During my conversations with white students and faculty who were actively involved with #RMF Oxford including, JanaLee Cherneski from Canada (interview May 31, 2017), Roné McFarlane from South Africa (interview, June 12, 2017) and Max Harris from New Zealand (November 21, 2017), they demonstrated an acute awareness of their positionality in the movement, preferring to play a background role. In an article written by Max Harris (2015) for the Huffington Post, in which he argues that “Rhodes Must Fall Oxford is inspired by the Rhodes Must Fall movement at the University of Cape Town in South Africa,” he goes on to state that:

I am not a distant observer of these trends. I am a Rhodes Scholar from New Zealand, and I have also attended Rhodes Must Fall meetings - though I speak for neither the Rhodes Scholarships nor for Rhodes Must Fall in this article… I am not a member of a colonised ethnic group. I will never be able to know exactly what it feels like to have had generations of my family
displaced, injured, killed, or affected in some other way by colonisation. What I do know is that the United Kingdom still has not fully reckoned with its colonial past, something I was surprised to discover after coming to this country from New Zealand.

Brian Kwoba (interview, September 21, 2017) also acknowledged the role of white student and faculty involvement in the #RMF movement indicating that,

white allies on the whole, were very respectful and very humble and I think played a very important role in helping us get things done behind the scenes, you know, writing press releases for example, or helping us, you know, to set up different events. I think they did a really good job. And one of the things that was interesting about that, is that they weren’t British. In fact, we had almost no British white allies.

The fundamental difference in demographics between Oxford and UCT necessitated a different approach to the question of race. Black and minority ethnic students were a small, vulnerable group, primarily comprised of foreign nationals. Furthermore, the Oxford student activists lacked a common historical or geographical reference point because of their varied backgrounds. The #RMF Oxford movement occurred in a fundamentally different geographical context when compared to #RMF UCT since the U.K. represents the heart of empire and the Oxford remains at the global center of knowledge production. By challenging the proud, imperial history of a nation and its highly-regarded institutions, the #RMF Oxford movement faced pressures that may not necessarily have been encountered by the movement at UCT.

In addition to the differences in geographical context and racial demographics, Dalia Gebrial also noted that there were different organizing tactics employed by #RMF Oxford. During a joint interview with #RMF activists, Dalia Gebrial and Chi Chi Shi in London (interview, November 23, 2017), Gebrial stated that “there was a difference of strategic opinion.
I think we had different ideas of what it means to organize. And that, I don’t think, was context… I don’t think that was like a geographical thing…”

Chi Chi Shi interjected: “I do think it’s kind of a geographical thing… it seemed that, we were staying here. This is our home. We live here. And we’re going to have to deal with this. Whereas like, a lot of people in #RMF Oxford were going somewhere else. So they had like these two years where they wanted to cause as much disruption. They didn’t seem to have… long term vision, because their long term vision was elsewhere. They wanted to make a name for themselves and get a job somewhere, in South Africa.”

Julian Brave NoiseCat acknowledged that there were differences between the approaches adopted by U.K. and foreign students during the #RMF Oxford movement: “we didn’t really play by those rules because we weren’t British” (interview, August 24, 2017). At the same time, he recognized that “a lot of this is theatre” which was critical to raising awareness about the aims of the movement. For instance, NoiseCat described Femi Nyalnder’s protest outside All Souls College where he dressed up as a slave, as “performative” and suggested that because Oxford did not have a history of student protest, these tactics were viewed as disruptive.

The performative dimensions of the #RMF Oxford movement reflected the public pedagogy of the UCT movement to the extent that students “create[d] a social space within which they engage[d] the larger society in learning about equity, accountability, and democracy” (Sandlin et al. 2011, p. 358). While the #RMF Oxford movement was not involved in occupying buildings or burning paintings, the level of attention garnered by the student protests was unprecedented. According to Newsinger (2016), “[t]he Rhodes Must Fall campaign has provoked more public discussion and debate on the rights and wrongs of the British Empire than any number of academic books and articles” (p. 70).
At the same time, not all foreign students involved with #RMF wanted to engage in this public form of pedagogy. Part of the reason stemmed from the vulnerability of international students who were in the U.K. on student visas and scholarships that could potentially be revoked if they participated in activities that were deemed “criminal” or that resulted in their arrest. Njodi Latenda Ndeunyema (interview, November 21, 2017) from Namibia, who was the President of the Africa Society at Oxford when I met him, stated that he was deeply concerned about the impact of his involvement in #RMF Oxford on his visa and scholarship status: “so I was reluctant to put myself out there fully.” Ndeunyema decided to “tread carefully” because “funding threats were made subtly” (interview, November 21, 2017).

Consequently, while Ndeunyema was involved with #RMF Oxford, he focused his attention on a process called “Redress Rhodes” initiated by Rhodes scholars at Oxford. The Rhodes Trust website describes Redress Rhodes as “a group of Scholars dedicated to developing a more critical, honest, and inclusive reflection of the legacy of Cecil John Rhodes and a clearer understanding of how it relates to the image, mission, and purpose of the Scholarships” (Rhodes Trust website). The activism of Redress Rhodes scholars, led to the introduction of among others, a “collaborative toast” at the final dinner held by Rhodes scholars at the end of their scholarship. In the past, Rhodes Scholars would raise a toast to Cecil John Rhodes. However, as a result of the pressure placed on the Rhodes Trust, the collaborative toast was introduced “instead of raising an unqualified toast to the Founder” (Rhodes Trust website).

While the #RMF Oxford movement may come across as #RMF lite when compared to the radicality of the UCT movement, the contexts that situated these movements were fundamentally different. The varying spaces within which these movements emerged are not only reflected in tactical differences or in how racial demographics shaped the movement, but
also in the language used to frame demands. Whereas the #RMF UCT movement wanted to
*center* marginalized epistemologies, the Oxford movement sought to *integrate* these marginal
ideas into the Eurocentric curriculum. These differences in approach suggest that there are
degrees of epistemic disobedience that are informed by contextual factors, and that the
subsequent emergence of decolonial options flow from the degree of disobedience employed.
Despite these difference in approach, both the UCT and Oxford movements sought to chip away
and crack the wall of epistemic coloniality.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

In addition to the differences in tactics used by #RMF UCT and Oxford, there were also
significant variations in how the movements engaged with theoretical frameworks. While the
#RMF Oxford movement discussed decolonial theory and adopted an intersectional approach, its
consideration of these ideas did not appear as comprehensive as #RMF UCT’s engagement with
theoretical frameworks. Ntokozo Qwabe (interview, August 1, 2017) explained this distinction
between the #RMF UCT and #RMF Oxford movements by firstly, noting the fact that while the
Oxford movement had

spaces where we met to unpack theory… it did not have the same permanency as Azania
House… There's something else that happens in how you produce knowledge when you do it in a
space that you identify with so much as a home, that is so familiar, where you sleep there, you
wake up there, you go and shower there, you have your meals there. I think there is something
different in pedagogy that is going on there that I don’t think you can emulate by meeting every
Thursday or every Friday to unpack decolonial theory, which is what we did.

Qwabe drew an important connection between space and knowledge production,
suggesting that the development of #RMF UCT’s decolonial framework in the occupied Azania
House, demonstrates that there is an intimate connection between knowledge production and the
spaces within which it is produced. In the case of #RMF Oxford, Qwabe found that there was no dedicated space to craft a similar framework. While I recognize the value of Qwabe’s analysis, I also believe that the differences in the broader socio-political context between the U.K. and South Africa, as well as the differences related to the composition of both movements, played equally important roles in shaping the politics of the two movements. For instance, if #RMF Oxford was an exclusively Black movement, this may have shaped their theoretical framework as much as the space within which their framework was developed.

Qwabe (interview, August 1, 2017) also raised a further dimension as he reflected on the distinctions between the UCT and Oxford movements:

the second challenge for us, was actually the selection of which ideologies would actually be pioneers of our decolonial thinking. I mean UCT had done this very well… those three pillars of #RhodesMustFall were identified very early and they were able to build a narrative around them. Whereas for us, it became slightly complicated because… we considered ourselves to be occupying a global location. So, the conversation about decolonization isn’t necessarily a conversation about Africa. It’s a conversation that includes a lot of geographies, ‘cause the colonial moment, or the moment of empire, is not just a moment in relation to Africa, it is a global project.

As an example of the global dimensions Qwabe referred to, he listed India, Latin American and the First Nations people in Canada and the United States. Qwabe therefore posed the following question: “what does this decolonization mean for me as someone who is at Oxford?” Due to the range of ideologies and sources of decolonial theory, Qwabe recognized that, “that selection [of theory] becomes slightly more complex” when compared to the process embarked upon by #RMF at UCT. He therefore indicated that “we never actually got to a point where we thrashed out like, these are our ideas. Of course, we always spoke about
intersectionality, we spoke about Fanon, we spoke about, you know, the same things but we never had a document that said these are our three ideologies… simply because there were so many contesting narratives…” (interview, August 1, 2017).

Similar sentiments were expressed by other #RMF Oxford activists. Chi Chi Shi (interview, November 23, 2017) noted that, “when we’re having these conversations and everyone says Fanon, you assume that everyone means the same thing…” but often, geographical contexts affected how student activists interpreted these texts so that “the kinds of directions it went was so radically different.” When I asked Brian Kwoba (interview, September 21, 2017) about #RMF Oxford’s engagement with theoretical frameworks, he indicated that:

But one of the things that we really did wrong, or I think one of the big mistakes that we made in contrast to the way things emerged at UCT, is that we didn’t actually ever clearly clarify or delineate the political boundaries of the movement with such ideological clarity, and explicitness as having those three pillars of Black Consciousness, Pan-Africanism and Black feminism. And one of the things that that meant, unfortunately, that we never clarified ourselves is that all kinds of people ended up coming into the space who had anti-black prepossessions and that ended up creating all kinds of rifts internally and a factionalism that undermined our movement in many ways. We hadn’t clarified who this movement was for, what it was about beyond just a kind of broad goal of decolonizing education in Oxford… I have to say from my perspective, I think that’s one of the things we got wrong... We didn’t frame what we were doing even internally for ourselves clearly enough.

During our interview in Johannesburg, Mpofu-Walsh (interview, July 31, 2017) agreed with the #RMF Oxford movement’s failure to substantively engage with questions of theory: “I think in early meetings we spoke about that, but quite ironically, the Oxford movement was not based around theory particularly. It was based around practice and action rather than theoretical
debates. The one thing we kept telling ourselves was that we really need to have sessions where we read and study, but that never quite crystalized… I think we committed ourselves to those principles in early meetings, but I think a lot of tensions and theoretical tensions began to develop as the movement progressed.”

At the same time, Mpofu-Walsh noted that “I think the beauty of the #RhodesMustFall moment in both places is that the theory was built from practice. They developed a whole practice of how to have a complex debate around a single icon, which itself is a whole theory of how you go about activism. But they built it through activism” (interview, July 31, 2017). This analysis by Mpofu-Walsh reflects Catherine Walsh’s (2018) assertion that decolonial theory should be built through practice. Walsh (2018) seeks to understand how those on the margins theorize their own practice.

For Mpofu-Walsh (interview, July 31, 2017) who was intimately involved in #RMF Oxford, the emergence of the movement could be explained through the Comaroffs’ *Theory from the South*:

The other thing we spoke about, not quite directly in terms of our ideology as #RhodesMustFall, we were very interested in this idea of theory from the South. And saying, if this thing started in the South, then we should intentionally bring it to the North as an antecedent of what started in the South. To show that the directionality can happen in the opposite direction which is another reason we decided to call it #RhodesMustFall. To break that linear directionality. So those were the theoretical discussions…”

I interrupted Mpofu-Walsh asking whether their engagement with theory from the South was deliberate. He responded, “Absolutely. Many of us were reading the Comaroffs *Theory from the South*, and thinking, you know what, let’s put this into practice and have something that starts in the global South and spreads to Euro-America” (interview, July 31, 2017).
At the time I spoke to Mpofu-Walsh, his ideas made complete sense. Upon further reflection, I wondered how, on the one hand, Mpofu-Walsh could assert that theory should be built from practice, while on the other, he was using the Comaroffs’ theory to shape the #RMF Oxford movement. Using theory from the South to construct the Oxford movement, including its name, suggests a reliance on theory to shape decolonial practice. This approach seems diametrically opposed to Walsh’s (2018) idea of building theory through practice. My assessment of Mpofu-Walsh’s description of the #RMF movements in Cape Town and Oxford, lead me to conclude that the interactions between theory and practice were iterative. Student activists were inspired by existing academic theories to shape the #RMF movements in Cape Town and Oxford, while simultaneously generating their own theory through the movement building process.

Furthermore, the interactions between academic theory and movement generated theory also had an important geographic component for Mpofu-Walsh—he was interested in importing movement generated theory from Cape Town to Oxford using the Comaroffs academic theory. This disruption in the flow of knowledge from South to North was a deliberate attempt to address the fact that “[c]olonialism brought not only theory from the Western academy but also the assumption that theory is produced in the West…” (Mamdani 2016, p. 81). This suggests that while places such as Oxford are often seen as producers of knowledge and theory, and the colonies as spaces where these theories are applied as “turnkey project[s]” (Mamdani 2016, p. 81), Mpofu-Walsh was deliberately attempting to reverse engineer the assumed geographical flow of knowledge through #RMF Oxford.

However, Dalia Gebrial offered a different take on Mpofu-Walsh’s characterization of the #RMF Oxford movement as a manifestation of a theory from the South: “For me, I felt what
it meant to express solidarity [with South Africa] is to attack, undermine, expose the system as it exists here at the heart of empire… rather than just imitate, transplant everything from South Africa, and like mimic… The British population did not know about empire. We’re starting so much further behind. There’s so many layers to get through. And like, we’re not at that stage where we can skip all of those steps” (interview, November 23, 2017). Gebrial stated that she was not opposed to more radical action, but it “would have had a place after a program of escalation.”

For #RMF activists such as Gebrial, the Oxford movement was not so much the result of a theory from the South, but rather an expression of solidarity with the South. This fundamental difference in perspective between Gebrial and Mpofu-Walsh, makes it difficult to conceptualize the #RMF Oxford movement as a pure manifestation of the Comaroffs theory. The formation of #RMF Oxford certainly reflects elements of a theory from the South, but its creation is not entirely explainable through one theoretical framework.

When I asked Professor Jonny Steinberg (interview, November 20, 2017) based at Oxford, whether he thought the transfer of ideas from the #RMF movement in Cape Town to Oxford constituted a theory from the South, he responded:

I don’t think [theory from the South] is the sharpest analytical tool. I think it’s a sharp polemical tool… The fact that #RMF did not resonate beyond the university raises questions about whether it is a theory from the south… I wouldn’t say that #RMF comes from the depths of the South. I think it comes from particular places.

Steinberg offered two important critiques of a theory from the South that warrant further consideration. The first pertains to what exactly constitutes a theory from the South? Must the theory emanate “from the depths of the South” as indicated by Steinberg, or does its emergence in the South form a sufficient basis for it to be categorized as a theory from the South? How
widespread must an idea be in the South for it to constitute a theory from the South? For instance, could it be argued that Fallism’s spread through #FeesMustFall to universities across South Africa is sufficient evidence of its resonance across South Africa?

These questions highlight some of the difficulties with applying a specific theory to understand the movement of ideas from Cape Town to Oxford, and more specifically, highlights some of the gaps inherent in the Comaroffs (2011) theory. In considering whether the emergence of #RMF Oxford constituted a theory from the South, to what extent must the theory’s implementation in Euro-America be endorsed by those in the South who developed the idea? In other words, can Oxford students claim #RMF Oxford as a theory from the South when those in the South may be dismissive of the movement’s manifestation in the North?

Consequently, a number of outstanding questions remain unresolved: how pervasive must a theory be in the South for it to constitute a theory from the South? If the theory contains elements that were developed in the North such as intersectionality, can it still be considered a theory from the South? Must the theory be applied in totality in its new location to be classified as a theory from the South? Does it have to be successfully implemented, and if so, how do we measure its success? Or does the theory simply have to be a source of inspiration for cultural, political or economic shifts in Euro-America? The disagreement among #RMF Oxford activists about the theoretical framing of their movement as a theory from the South, extended to questions of gender and intersectionality discussed in further detail below.

**Gender and Intersectionality**

In addition to the tensions around race, theory, and tactics within the #RMF movement, there were also frictions around gender and patriarchy among student activists, and more
specifically, variations in understandings of intersectionality. Brian Kwoba (interview, September 21, 2017) noted that:

I found it was the non-black people of color that were the most problematic… There was this group of non-black women of color… the way they used intersectionality was I think, almost as a way to put themselves at the head of the movement… as against the black students, both men and women, who had founded the movement and who had led the movement as in South Africa. That for me was a really good object lesson in what Patricia Hill Collins calls ‘the gentrification of intersectionality’, you know, given that it’s a black feminist concept but can be co-opted and misused in even anti-black ways.

Many women activists such as Dalia Gebrial and Chi Chi Shi disputed Kwoba’s interpretation of events. According to Gebrial (interview, November 23, 2017):

For me there were two ways that patriarchy played out: first in terms of division of labor. That’s how our complaints and holding to account started. And I think the other one was, in terms of the political disputes… It just so happened that the young women of color in the organization were British. And I think that what we raised as ‘political differences’, was taken as naïveté. So if we had a political disagreement, men in the movement would say, like, ‘oh, let me take you for a coffee and chat to you about this disagreement.’ That would end up essentially being patronizing berating. And when I argued that if we have political disagreements, like all other political disagreements, we should hash it out in a meeting, that was taken as belligerence, or being ungrateful, or like resistant...

Chi Chi Shi (interview, November 23, 2017) added that in certain cases, men in the movement would view women who had differences of political opinion with men, as having a “personal vendetta.” Both Shi and Gebrial (interview, November 23, 2017) also indicated that they “pretty much single-handedly organized” the protest march to Oriel College on November 6, 2015 where Ntokozo Qwabe handed over a petition to the Vice-Provost. It took a significant
amount of work to organize the event behind the scenes according to Gebrial, resulting in women in the movement being so exhausted, that it was the men who ended up speaking publicly at the protest march.

Other students such as Julian Brave NoiseCat, (interview, August 24, 2017) also found that “gender was a major division in the group even though it was not in the public eye.” For Ntokozo Qwabe (interview, August 1, 2017), “#RhodesMustFall Oxford did tend to centralize black men in ways that I think can be critiqued. I think the media was very obsessed with me because of my Rhodes association and because I was a Rhodes scholar and very obsessed with Sizwe because… he is from a family that was well known. So media narratives did have the same patterns of centralizing men in ways, and we must be honest… that under-represented other voices.” In order to deal with these disputes, Qwabe mentioned that attempts were made at introducing “conflict resolution” processes among the core members of #RMF. However, he found that “it just became very messy” (interview, August 1, 2017).

The similarities in the types of conflict around gender and intersectionality that erupted in both the #RMF UCT and Oxford movements are fascinating to me. Women in both movements expressed a strong sense of being marginalized by black men and often took on a lot of the behind the scenes work. My sense is that both movements struggled to implement the intersectional component of their framework. In the case of #RMF UCT, an intersectional audit committee was established, whereas in the #RMF Oxford movement, dispute resolution mechanisms were established—both approaches failed to resolve the conflict.

Faculty that I spoke to, such as Professor Jonny Steinberg, a South African academic who teaches African Studies at Oxford, argued that “using intersectionality as your guiding principle is naive if you want to act” (interview, November 20, 2017). Steinberg offered this perspective of
#RMF Oxford during our interview in his office at the African Studies Centre in which he also revealed that some of the #RMF activists were his students. Steinberg (interview, November 20, 2017), indicated that he was initially “quite excited” by what #RMF was attempting to do, particularly around the curriculum. However, he found that:

I think they went astray in exactly the same way the South African movement did. They started fighting very bitterly among each other and on grounds that were almost a caricature of identity politics. About who had the authority to speak and who didn’t… If you take that to its logical conclusion, no one has the authority to speak. And that’s what happened. Nobody was allowed to speak inside that movement and it tore itself to pieces… and the divisions were, men and women, Africans and African Americans, black people and Indian people; it was absolutely riven by, you know, one division crossing another, crossing another, crossing another to the extent that they wrapped a rope around themselves and all fell over.

While Steinberg’s assessment of the collapse of both the #RMF movements in Cape Town and Oxford resonated with me, it was the incorporation of an intersectional approach that allowed members of the #RMF movement to recognize the intersections between race and patriarchy as manifestations of colonialiality. In the Cape Town movement, the incorporation of intersectionality also created the space for queer and trans activists to engage in the movement, despite the challenges that were subsequently highlighted by the Trans Collective. I am therefore not as quick as Steinberg to dismiss the incorporation of intersectionality as “naïve”, but must acknowledge that its role in the fracturing of both #RMF movements raises important questions about how activists interpret intersectionality as a framework for challenging racism and patriarchy.
Human Rights

While #RMF UCT engaged with the question of human rights in their conversations about the South African Constitution, the #RMF Oxford movement did not appear to ever raise the issue of human rights in their discussions. Brian Kwoba (interview, September 21, 2017) stated that “if [human rights] ever came up, it was rare. I can’t even recall a specific instance honestly, where anyone was really strongly pushing that framework or discourse as something relevant here…”

#RMF Oxford activist and former Oxford lecturer, JanaLee Cherneski (interview May 31, 2017), offered the following observations on why rights discourses were not discussed:

Human rights is perceived as being bound up with ‘liberal institutions of power’ whose construction and legitimation has gone hand in hand with the disenfranchisement, oppression, etc. of most of the people involved in this movement. To make claims from within the discourse of human rights, then, is to already reify or legitimate the very institutions and mechanisms that have been established on such problematic grounds in the first place. So basically, to make such claims is to continue to acknowledge and legitimate the power of those who are seen to be the oppressors, which is obviously counter to the goal of liberation.

These arguments reflected similar concerns raised by the Cape Town movement who was equally concerned about legitimizing a discourse that failed to properly address the legacy of racism and land redistribution. When I asked Ntokozo Qwabe (interview, August 1, 2017) whether universal discourses on human rights may have been a useful framework for engaging with the issues #RMF Oxford was dealing with, he argued that “we don’t want to take global narratives and particularize them. We want to start from where we are…”

I was interested in Qwabe’s understanding of “location” and his assertion that “we want to start from where we are” given that he was a South African studying at Oxford. If his location
is Oxford, then adopting a global narrative such as human rights would seem appropriate. Qwabe elaborated by stating that, “our location as black non-beings come with a particular historical location. How do we then understand the world from that position of black non-existence or black pain?” When I asked how he understood the idea of the non-human which was also raised in conversations with student activists from #RMF UCT, Qwabe referred to it as a “descriptive label” that is not restricted to blackness. He noted that it also extended to womanhood and queerness. Qwabe added, “right now, I’m not seen as a human being. I move around Oxford and no one sees me” (interview, August 1, 2017).

Qwabe’s location is therefore determined by blackness rather than geography. It appears that irrespective of whether he is based in South Africa or the U.K., his location is the same—his black body. His understanding of the physical space he occupies is deeply rooted in his blackness. The black body for Qwabe becomes a lens through which to theorize—to understand the world. But Qwabe also recognizes that the notion of a “black non-being” is not necessarily limited to blackness and can be used as a “descriptive label” to represent the position of women and queer people (interview, August 1, 2017). This perspective on theory development emanating from the body seems to reflect Walsh’s (2018) description of the Afro-Colombian decolonial feminist, Betty Ruth Lozano’s idea of blackwomen. While the term denotes the intimate connection between Lozano’s blackness and her gender, it also becomes the location from which she constructs meaning.

It is from trying to “understand the world from that position of black non-existence or black pain” (N. Qwabe, interview, August 1, 2017), that Qwabe dismisses human rights discourse. The lack of engagement with human rights in both the Oxford and UCT movements is especially striking to me as someone with a human rights background. Its irrelevance in any of
the Oxford discussions cannot even be described as delinking from Euro-American knowledge since human rights was never raised in any meaningful way. In the Cape Town movement, human rights was rejected as part of #RMF’s dissatisfaction with the constitution and its failure to effectively deal with racism and land restitution. Consequently, it remains unclear whether Mignolo’s (2009, 2011, 2018) notion of delinking is the most helpful way to describe #RMF UCT’s rejection of universal human rights, since their delinking process was part of a broader dissatisfaction with the South African constitution. Recognizing that Mignolo’s (2009, 2011, 2018) delinking framework primarily focuses on a shift away from Euro-American knowledge, the dismissal of the constitution as a document crafted in the South, continues to raise questions about the value of adopting specific academic theories to make sense of complex social movements.

**Fallism as a Decolonial Option from the South**

The limitations of trying to apply Mignolo’s (2009, 2011, 2018) notion of delinking to both the #RMF movements in Cape Town and Oxford, extends to my experiment with Fallism as a decolonial option that emerges through epistemic disobedience. Despite these limitations, Fallism as a decolonial option can be tied to Mignolo’s (2011) argument that an engagement in decolonial options is essentially an “engage[ment] in shifting the geography of reason, by unveiling and enacting geopolitics and body-politics of knowledge” (p. 137). Black pain, which is a constitutive element of Fallism, is reflective of Mignolo’s (2011) unveiling of a body-politics of knowledge.

At the same time, I also wanted to examine the ways in which Fallism as a decolonial option that emerged in Cape Town, was exported to Oxford. While Mignolo (2011) does not explicitly reflect on whether decolonial options can travel, I was interested in how ideas
generated through the #RMF movement in Cape Town were taken up in Oxford. When I asked #RMF Oxford activist, Sizwe Mpofu-Walsh (interview, July 31, 2017) whether he identified with the concept of Fallism, he responded:

I’m not sure. It seems that when Fallism as an ideology emerged, the ideology became a little bit more rigidified and a little less welcoming of outside views and a politics of hyper-reflexivity emerged… at some point, the politics of reflexivity becomes so inward that you lose sight of the social circumstances that you’re trying to overcome. So in that sense I am somewhat reluctant to describe to myself as a Fallist. On the other hand, I’m very happy to embrace the politics of decolonial practice as practiced by #RMF and say that I’m a Fallist and say that I took a Fallist debate into Oxford. But I don’t sort of go around espousing Fallist ideology.

Mpofu-Walsh’s position on Fallism can be contrasted with that of Ntokozo Qwabe who stated that, “I do identify as a Fallist. And really, being a Fallist is identifying with the ideology of Fallism, which of course has its pillars. Being a person who identified with Black Consciousness, with Pan-Africanism and Black feminism and who identifies with the decolonial cause, or with the decolonial struggle so to say… in a world that remains infested by coloniality” (interview, August 1, 2017).

While these views are not diametrically opposed, they offer two distinct approaches to the concept of Fallism within the #RMF Oxford movement. Mpofu-Walsh (interview, July 31, 2017) is only willing to acknowledge that he “took a Fallist debate into Oxford” whereas Qwabe strongly identifies with Fallism. Based on their responses, Fallism as a concept appears to have at least resonated with #RMF Oxford activists and was taken up in varying degrees by individual students rather than by the #RMF Oxford movement. However, student activists with no ties to South Africa, did not appear to expressly adopt the idea of Fallism. For Brian Kwoba, “identifying as a Fallist wasn’t something that I saw” within the #RMF Oxford movement.
Kwoba went on to state that, “Fallism as like a more general category… I don’t think that really developed in the U.K. in the way that it did in South Africa. So I would be happy and honored to call myself a Fallist… because I’m, you know, for the things that people identified as Fallists are for” (interview, September 21, 2017).

The lack of consistency among #RMF Oxford activists about the adoption of Fallism as a concept in their movement, makes it difficult to conclude that Fallism was an idea exported from Cape Town to Oxford. At best, elements of Fallism including the language of Fallism, may have been taken up by individual #RMF Oxford activists, but not by the movement as a collective. However, if Fallism is understood as a decolonial option that unveils the paradoxical nature of the university as simultaneously empowering and dehumanizing for black bodies, could #RMF Oxford’s aims not be considered as reflective of Fallism? For students such as Qwabe (interview, August 1, 2017) who self-identified as a Fallist,

Black pain is the foundational basis of Fallism. #RhodesMustFall uses black pain as a powerful assertion of the fact of black existence but also ties it to a struggle. We’re not just here saying it’s so painful being black. It’s really about what moves us to this movement where we are crafting a struggle, where we are crafting a cause. And I think ideologies becomes very important in this. Being a Fallist does not mean going to a protest. It means identifying with the ideologies of the Fallist movement and embodying that in your work and your daily life.

Qwabe’s strong affinity with Fallism may have to do with the fact that he was actively involved in the Cape Town movement unlike his fellow #RMF Oxford activists. This raises some difficulty when trying to delineate between the two movements. At the same time, Qwabe’s active involvement in both the Cape Town and Oxford movements suggests that he has important comparative insights that other activists may not have had the opportunity to develop. In his explanation of Fallism, Qwabe (interview, August 1, 2017) went on to argue that:
Being an epistemology, a way of producing knowledge, I like that, because, at the end of the day… we are getting to the core of what it means to know. So how we know ourselves and how people know us and highlighting that we’ve always had that determined by someone else… so it’s flipping that and turning it on its head and saying we are actually going to know the world through ourselves. Decolonial theory is not saying we should not know about others… but it is to say we need to speak from where we are located. So the question of who are we becomes important… to build a base of knowledge from within out, rather than outward in.

Qwabe’s description of Fallism contains several elements that are reflective of Mignolo’s (2011) decoloni al option. By centering black pain as the foundation of Fallism, Qwabe recognizes the value of unveiling what Mignolo (2011) defines as the “body-politics of knowledge” (p. 137). Fallism requires those on the margins to construct an understanding of the world through their experiences—“to speak from where we are located” (N. Qwabe, interview, August 1, 2017)—rather than being subjected to an externally imposed understanding of the world and themselves. Furthermore, Qwabe recognizes as Walsh (2018) does, that looking at the world from the margins does not preclude a consideration of Euro-American perspectives, but rather, “advance[s] radically distinct perspectives and possibilities that displace Western rationality as the only framework and possibility of existence, analysis and thought” (Walsh 2018, p. 17).

Qwabe (interview, August 1, 2017) indicated that while student activists from #RMF Oxford did not engage with activists at UCT very often, most of the #RMF UCT students he spoke to were supportive of #RMF Oxford. However, he found that the #RMF UCT students remained skeptical “about the appropriation of the #RMF UCT movement” which led to #RMF Oxford constantly stating in their official documents and press statements that they were inspired by the #RMF UCT movement. In my engagement with UCT activists however, I found that they
continued to be dismissive of the #RMF Oxford movement and questioned the extent to which #RMF Oxford embraced the ideas developed in Cape Town.

It is therefore difficult to state categorically that the emergence of the #RMF Oxford movement and the exportation of Fallism from Cape Town to Oxford, can be fully explained through the Comaroffs (2010) theory from the South. For the moment, it seems sufficient to conclude that #RMF was a movement that emerged in the global South and that it inspired the formation of #RMF Oxford, which incorporated many of #RMF UCT’s characteristics into its epistemic foundations. However, based on this analysis, I argue that both #RMF movements exhibited elements of the Comaroffs (2012) theory in that these movements sought to deliberately disrupt the geographies of knowledge by contesting “core and periphery, relocating Southward…” (Comaroff & Comaroff 2012:7). In this way, #RMF Cape Town’s engagement with and contestation of the effects of coloniality, their decoding of these effects theoretically, and their innovative political responses which were then exported to the global North, reflects the Comaroffs theory. Consequently, #RMF’s formation at Oxford could support key elements of the Comaroffs’ thesis including the idea that the South is anticipating and driving the political, economic, and cultural modalities of the Euro-American future.

During my conversation with Dr. Zethu Matebeni (interview, July 21, 2017) at UCT, I relayed the skepticism I encountered among #RMF UCT activists when I asked them about the Oxford movement. She indicated that students involved in #RMF UCT failed to fully appreciate the international dimensions of their movement: “I was teaching a course now at Yale on ‘Gender and Sexuality and Decolonizing South African Universities’… What was interesting for me, was that [the students at Yale] were looking for leadership from South Africa. And I don’t think South African students realized that.” After arranging a Skype conversation with activists
from the Trans Collective during her class, Dr. Matebeni, found that the students at Yale “got energy and power from what was happening here… so they used #RhodesMustFall as a thing for them to mobilize and to say the things that they needed to say… all they wanted to hear about was #RhodesMustFall.”

According to Matebeni (interview, July 21, 2017), many Yale students “were really considering the idea of Fallism. A lot of them were writing their thesis on Fallism and wanted to learn more about this new way of understanding who they are.” While her students at Yale were also critical of certain elements of the #RMF movement, she recognized that #RMF activists at UCT “gave people a language.” Reflecting on the global impact of the #RMF UCT movement, Matebeni concluded our interview stating that, “[m]aybe one day they will realize that they really did change the world. And it was a powerful thing to be part of and to experience.”
VIII – CONCLUSION

While the #RhodesMustFall movement is intrinsically associated with the statue of Cecil John Rhodes and takes its name from the demand for the statue to fall, #RMF had very little to do with statues or with Rhodes himself. The #RMF movement is therefore not quite what it appears to be. Even after the Rhodes statue fell at UCT, the #RMF movement maintained its name. This empirical study of the #RMF movements at UCT and Oxford therefore sought to develop a deeper understanding of the emergence of the radical student movements, beyond its demand for the removal of the Rhodes statue.

In doing so, this dissertation not only sets out an analysis of the emergence and evolution of the #RMF movements, but also points to the paradoxical nature of the universities in which these movements emerged. My analysis builds on scholarship that recognizes the centrality of the university as knowledge producer, but does not always fully comprehend the oppressive dimensions of the university’s epistemic architecture. I argue that black students at UCT with the support of workers and faculty, played a fundamental role in unearthing and articulating the paradoxical role of the university as a simultaneously empowering (Black liberation) and dehumanizing (Black pain) space for those on the margins of the university.

Since the university’s engagement in epistemic coloniality forms the basis for its paradoxical construction, the #RMF movement engaged in a process of epistemic disobedience, creating a decolonial framework centered on Black Consciousness, Black radical feminism, and Pan-Africanism. This framework inspired a new grammar of Fallism, creating a paradigm shift from the dominant Eurocentric model of knowledge production, to one centered on decoloniality and disruption. Calling for the fall of the colonial university using symbols such as the Rhodes
statue, student activists employed disruptive tactics to create public awareness of their demands, engaging in a form of public pedagogy.

Through a combination of epistemic disobedience and public pedagogy, I argue that the #RMF movement was not only engaged in demanding the fall of the colonial university, but also in generating the emergent idea of Fallism. While Fallism only emerged toward the end of the #RMF movement at UCT, many student activists subsequently embraced the Fallist identity primarily as part of the national #FeesMustFall movement. The multiple understandings of Fallism and what it meant to be a Fallist, speaks to its nascent disposition as a concept emerging from protest and disobedience. What I try to do in this dissertation, is experiment with developing Fallism into an emergent decolonial option informed by the multiple and divergent perspectives extracted from students involved in the #RMF movements at UCT and Oxford. I argue that Fallism can be constituted as a decolonial option to challenge the paradoxical nature of the university as a space that simultaneously empowers and dehumanizes marginalized bodies.

My introduction of the #RMF movement in Chapter I, was followed with a timeline of the Cape Town and Oxford movements in Chapter II as well as the historical context within which the movements emerged. Chapter I also set out the three research questions that form the basis for the three empirical research chapters in this dissertation. The first research question focused on what led #RMF student activists to adopt a decolonial framework centered on Pan-Africanism, Black Consciousness and Black radical feminism. The second question sought to better understand the development of Fallism by considering how the #RMF’s adoption of a decolonial framework gave rise to the emergent idea of Fallism. Finally, the third research question examined the formation of #RMF Oxford and the ways in which it was shaped by the #RMF movement at UCT.
In Chapter III, I set out Mignolo’s (2011) notion of epistemic disobedience as the overarching theoretical framework for this dissertation, and weaved together three further overlapping frameworks, namely, social movements theory, public pedagogy, and theory from the South, to consider the complexities and contestations embedded in the #RMF movement. I employed these multiple theoretical frameworks to reflect on the evolution of the #RMF movement from different angles, allowing for varying, contested perspectives to emerge.

In Chapter IV, the research methods that formed the empirical basis for the findings in this dissertation were set out in more detail. Three research methods were used, namely, in-depth semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis. During my field work, I conducted 98 semi-structured interviews with a range of students, faculty, and university workers at UCT and Oxford, but deliberately constructed my analysis by privileging the views of students. This was primarily because student voices were often excluded from academic analyses of the #RMF movement, but also because I was unable to incorporate reflections on every interview due to space limitations. I conducted 72 interviews with individuals involved with #RMF UCT, and 26 interviews with students and faculty at Oxford mainly because of the relative size of the movements as well as my research emphasis on #RMF UCT.

In addition to the interviews, I conducted about 90 hours of specific observations and hundreds of hours of informal observations between 2016 and 2018 at the UCT and Oxford campuses. Furthermore, I looked through hundreds of pages of documents, Tweets, and Facebook posts that emerged from the #RMF movements, and also analyzed press statements issued by UCT and Oxford, as well as media reports and court documents. I also developed coding profiles to analyze the interviews, observation field notes, and documents. Two cycles of
coding employing NVivo coding software was used to interpret and categorize the data to detect emerging patterns.

The first empirical chapter of my dissertation was Chapter V, which considered the following research question: what led #RMF student activists to adopt a decolonial framework centered on Pan-Africanism, Black Consciousness and Black radical feminism? This chapter started off by examining Chumani Maxwele’s performative protest which sparked the creation of #RMF at UCT, and considered why student activists adopted a decolonial framework to make sense of what they characterized as black pain. I offered a detailed description of the three pillars of the decolonial framework, tracing its origins and interpretations primarily through interviews with proponents of the pillars.

By employing social movements theory and epistemic disobedience as overlapping frameworks, I concluded that #RMF’s formation was a response to an oppressive, anti-black university structure. This conclusion was however complicated by the fact that the university simultaneously offered black and marginalized students the space to reflect and organize; a space they may not have had elsewhere. I found that while the educational experience at UCT was often portrayed as a mechanism to emancipate marginalized students from their socio-economic conditions, this experience was simultaneously dehumanizing because the university engaged in epistemic coloniality that disregarded the contribution of Black thought and scholarship. This chapter therefore offered insights into the paradoxical position of the university as both a site of empowerment (Black liberation) and dehumanization (Black pain) for those on the margins.

The decolonial framework developed by #RMF, also became an important precursor to the emergence of the concept of Fallism which I discussed in further detail in Chapter VI. While Fallism was mainly used as a descriptive term to group together the multiple student movements
that incorporated the “Must Fall” hashtag, some students offered an understanding of Fallism that went beyond its descriptive value. In Chapter VI, I considered these extended interpretations of Fallism and what students meant when they self-identified as Fallists by responding to the following research question: how did #RMFs adoption of a decolonial framework give rise to the emergent idea of Fallism? This question drew on Chapter V’s analysis of #RMF’s decolonial framework to understand the connection between the adoption of Pan-Africanism, Black Consciousness, and Black radical feminism, on the one hand, and the emergence of Fallism on the other. To fully answer this question, I used epistemic disobedience together with public pedagogy as overlapping frameworks to argue that Fallism involves a process of delinking from Eurocentric knowledge structures, employing disruptive pedagogical approaches to create an emergent decolonial option.

The final substantive chapter in this dissertation centered on the ways in which the #RMF movement in Oxford was shaped by the ideas developed by the #RMF UCT movement. Chapter VII concluded that the Cape Town movement inspired #RMF Oxford’s formation, as well as the tactics and theoretical approaches adopted by the U.K. based movement. At the same time, while #RMF Oxford adopted a decolonial approach, it failed to develop this approach in the same way that the UCT movement did. Given Oxford’s reputation as the number one rated university in the world, it was surprising to discover that UCT students engaged more substantively with theory than their Oxford counterparts.

After considering the three aims developed by the Oxford movement centered on the removal of colonial iconography, reforming the Eurocentric curriculum and addressing questions of underrepresentation for black and minority ethnic students and staff, I examined the perspectives of some of the leading #RMF Oxford activists. My interviews with students...
revealed how the movement slowly evolved from a solidarity campaign, what the primary differences were between the Oxford and Cape Town movements, as well as the ideological tensions that emerged at Oxford. The implementation of an intersectional approach appeared to challenge both the Oxford and UCT movements leading to fractures in the respective movements and ultimately resulting in their unravelling.

Based on my analysis of the #RMF movements in Cape Town and Oxford over the six chapters described above, I concluded by finding that the universities of Cape Town and Oxford—historically, white, liberal institutions that are highly regarded internationally—are paradoxical spaces that simultaneously empower and dehumanize students who exist on the margins of these institutions. I believe that the #RMF movements in Oxford and Cape Town emerged in part, as a response to this paradox, embracing decolonial thinking and delinking from the university’s Eurocentric architecture as an act of epistemic disobedience. Through this process of delinking, the student activists at UCT developed the idea of Fallism as a decolonial option, exporting elements of this emergent idea to the University of Oxford.

Due to the limitations in terms of space, time and resources, I believe firstly, that Fallism as a decolonial option could be expanded upon in future research. The emergent idea could potentially extend beyond UCT and Oxford and applied to universities more generally, but may also be applicable to other contexts engaged in knowledge production. By experimenting with Fallism as a decolonial option, I was encouraging the reader, as Walsh (2018, p. 17) does, “to think with (and not simply about)” the communities or social struggles that support decoloniality. Second, in addition to considering the influence of the #RMF UCT movement on the formation of #RMF Oxford, future research could also examine the creation of similar movements at Harvard, and in the Caribbean, as well as student movements that did not employ the “Must Fall”
hashtag, but were inspired by #RMF to raise concerns about symbols and iconography at their institutions. Third, there were several interviews conducted with academics, workers and administrators that were not explicitly incorporated into this dissertation. Their perspectives could add to a fuller and richer understanding of the emergence of both movements. Lastly, the multiple and overlapping tapestry of theoretical frameworks adopted in this dissertation could contribute to a more complex and nuanced evaluation of empirical data. By employing four theoretical frameworks to analyze the #RMF movements, I hoped to unearth the multiple dimensions of the Cape Town and Oxford movements, while simultaneously pointing out the limitations of adopting a single lens to try and understand the complexities of #RMF’s radical, decolonial agenda.
REFERENCES


Bond, Patrick. 2006. South Africa's Resurgent Urban Social Movements: The Case of


Comaroff, Jean, and John L. Comaroff. 2011. Theory from the South: or, how Euro-America is
evolving toward Africa. New York: Paradigm.


Kamanzi, Brian (#RMF student activist) in discussion with the author, August 2016.


Kessi, Shosi. 2015. Of black pain animal rights and the politics of the belly. *Thought Leader*


Mamdani, Mahmood. 2016. Between the public intellectual and the scholar: decolonization and


Maxwele, Chumani. (#RMF student activist) in discussion with the author, August 2016.


Peirson-Hagger, Ellen. 2016. Rhodes Must Fall campaigners demonstrate outside Oriel open


Salman, Ton, and Willem Assies. 2010. Anthropology and the study of social movements. In


Trans Collective. 2016. We are the trans people who have loved RMF even when it did not love us. Media Alternatives March 10, 2016 https://medialternatives.com/2016/03/10/we-are-the-trans-people-who-have-loved-rmf-even-when-it-did-not-love-us/


**Annexure 1**

**Timeline of events at UCT from March 9-25, 2015**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday, March 9</td>
<td>Maxwele throws feces onto the Rhodes statue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, March 10</td>
<td>In a news article entitled “Protesters throw poo on Rhodes statue” published by Independent Online (IOL), it quotes UCT spokesperson Patricia Lucas as saying that “UCT is investigating this action and we will take legal steps if it is established that there was unlawful behaviour.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UCT students’ representative council (SRC) arranged a meeting in which they unanimously endorsed the call to have the Rhodes statue removed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, March 11</td>
<td>Statement released by SRC president, Ramabina Mahapa, confirming that the SRC was not involved in the protest but that they supported Maxwele’s actions. The statement ends with an invitation to all students to a mass meeting on Thursday, March 12 at 1pm on Jameson Plaza at UCT.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dr. Zethu Matebene hosts a seminar entitled: “What is African about UCT?” at the Institute for Humanities in Africa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A group of student representatives from the Left Students Forum, Anarchist Collective, Palestine Solidarity Forum and non-aligned students, meet informally to develop a pamphlet on moving the debate beyond the statue which they plan to hand out at the mass meeting scheduled for March 12.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, March 12</td>
<td>At the outdoor mass gathering of about 1,000 students on Jameson Plaza, the discussion centers on race and the symbols that perpetuate racism at UCT.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some students meet in the Leslie Social Sciences building after the conclusion of the public gathering to discuss further action. The students who meet include Chumani Maxwele, as well as representatives from the SRC, Left Students Forum, Anarchist Collective, Muslim Youth Movement, Imbizo, Black Monday, Aluta, South African Young Feminist Activists, and the Pan-Africanist Student Movement of Azania (PASMA). The hashtag</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
#RhodesMustFall is developed at this meeting. It is also resolved that the SRC should cover the Rhodes statue.

The #RMF UCT Facebook page is created. The first #RMF Facebook post shows pictures of the Rhodes statue covered in red and white sheets which students, including the SRC president, placed on the statue.

Friday, March 13
A meeting is held by a small group of black students including representatives from the South African Young Feminist Activists, Muslim Youth Movement, and Left Students Forum, to discuss how “this moment must be seen as an opportunity for black movements to come together…”

Saturday, March 14
An article appears on bonfire.com written by Jessica Breakey, the SRC’s transformation coordinator, encouraging white students to support the #RMF movement. She arranges a meeting for white students on March 18.

Sunday, March 15
Students protest at the Rhodes statue during the Cape Epic cycle race. The statue is covered with black trash bags. Students start gathering daily at the statue at 1pm.

The #RMF Facebook page shares a link to a Drop Box folder with readings ranging from Biko’s writing on Black Consciousness to George Orwell’s Animal Farm.

Monday, March 16
Students disrupt the seminar on heritage, signage and symbolism hosted by Prof. Crain Soudien, the Deputy Vice Chancellor of UCT. One of the speakers, Ramabina Mahapa of the SRC invokes Biko, and then stages a walkout.

Wednesday, March 18
Student group, Black Monday, posted pictures of swastikas and Adolf Hitler onto the pillars of Jameson Hall at UCT (later renamed Sarah Baartman Hall on December 8, 2018), in order to show how the Rhodes statue was as offensive as Hitler. They later apologized for their actions.

Meeting arranged by Jessica Breakey at 1pm in the Leslie Social Sciences building to establish the “white privilege project” which is later renamed as “disrupting whiteness”.

Friday, March 20
Students protest outside UCT's administration building, Bremner. The students push past the Vice Chancellor and enter the building and begin to occupy it. They rename the building Azania House.

The Pan-Africanist Student Movement of Azania (PASMA) hosts a launch event at UCT.

Monday, March 23
#RMF releases the “Bremner Occupation Statement” on its Facebook page.
Wednesday, March 25

Students and staff gather in Jameson Hall (now Sarah Baartman Hall) to express their views on the Rhodes statue. The meeting is temporarily disrupted by students who remove UCT’s appointed co-chairperson, Barney Pityana.

The #RMF releases its mission statement on Facebook.

Annexure 2

Timeline of Significant #RMF Activities at Oxford from May 2015 to December 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected Dates in 2015</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, May 28</td>
<td>#RMF organizes its first protest at the Oxford Union and encounters posters advertising the “colonial comeback” cocktail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday, June 5</td>
<td>First student event hosted by #RMF Oxford entitled, “Why Must Rhodes Fall?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday, June 13</td>
<td>#RMF hosts its first “Public Forum - where Dr JanaLee Cherneski… will be in conversation with Oxford alumnus, internationally acclaimed Scholar in Literature, and multiple award winning Author and Critic - Professor Amit Chaudhuri!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday, October 17</td>
<td>#RMF activists incorporate the color red into their traditional matriculation dress comprised of white shirts and black gowns at an event held at the start of the new academic year. The “Matricul-action Against Oppression” protest organizers chose to incorporate red as “a vivid reminder of the blood that has been shed as a result of colonial domination – at the hands of renowned Oxford figures such as Cecil Rhodes and Christopher Codrington” #RMF Oxford Facebook page)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday, October 23</td>
<td>#RMF Oxford holds its first General Assembly with a stated purpose of “channel[ing] the collective will of the movement for big-picture decision making.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday, November 6</td>
<td>Protests are arranged outside Oriel College where a petition is handed over to the Provost demanding the removal of the Rhodes statue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, December 1</td>
<td>Public conversation with South African author, Eusebius McKaiser</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected Dates in 2016</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, January 19</td>
<td>#RMF activists, including Ntokozo Qwabe, participated in an Oxford Union debate, following which, 245 to 212 voted in favor of removing the Rhodes statue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, March 9</td>
<td>#RMF arranges a “mass march for decolonization” through the streets of Oxford which included a walking tour pointing out the historical roots of the symbols and statues located around the city.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday, June 3</td>
<td>About eight #RMF activists disrupt a “listening session” held by Oriel College on recontextualizing the Rhodes statue which only three people attended.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, June 20</td>
<td>Femi Nylander stood topless dressed as a slave in chains outside All Souls College to raise awareness about the Codrington library named after slave owner, Christopher Codrington.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, June 30</td>
<td>Femi Nylander and Ntokozo Qwabe protest shirtless outside Oriel College during the College’s open day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday, October 15</td>
<td>#RMF encourages students to “Wear a red ribbon and a red square to show your support for a free and decolonised education” at the matriculation event.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday, December 2</td>
<td>#RMF hosts an event entitled “Oriel: Name Your Price? - Rhodes Must Fall Protest Action” and submits a public letter to Oriel College</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Annexure 3

Interview Protocol

Interviewee: ______________________________________

Date: __________________

Interviewee Background

Name:
Age:
Race:
Gender:
Language:
Nationality:
University degree program:
Degree program start/end dates:

Semi-Structured Questions
1. When did you first become involved with the RMF movement?
   - What motivated you to become involved with the movement?
   - What was the extent of your involvement?
Are you still involved with the movement? If not, why not?

2. RMF has explicitly adopted various theories in its mission statement. What is your understanding of the main theoretical frameworks that inform strategies employed by RMF?
   - Why do you think these specific theories were employed?
   - Were other theories/frameworks considered? If so, what were they and why were they rejected?
   - What is your understanding of concepts such as decolonization?
   - How do you feel about the various tactics of disruption employed by RMF and what do you believe motivated these disruptive tactics?
   - Are you in agreement with the theoretical framework/strategies/tactics employed by the RMF?

3. In its Mission Statement, the RMF limits the involvement of white students. What are your thoughts on this limitation?

4. The RMF expressly recognizes the idea of “black pain.” What is your understanding of this concept?

5. In its Mission Statement, the RMF refers to various types of violence and disruption. How would you interpret these ideas in theory and practice?