

# **Rhodes Must Fall: The Uses of Historical Evidence in the Statue Debate in Oxford 2015-6 - And Some Recommendations**

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## **Summary of Recommendations**

Oxford and Oriel should take positive action and move the statue, ideally into museum that can mount a critical exhibition.

The University should recognise the origins of these endowments and commit itself to developing its role as a major centre for the study of Africa. Rhodes scholar committees should be asked to reassign at least temporarily more of their scholarships to African, especially southern African, countries.

The Rhodes Chair of Race Relations should be renamed the Chair of African Studies

Oxford and Oriel should sponsor research into the character of conquest, the repression of rebellions, and scale of deaths in Zimbabwe in the late nineteenth century.

## **Background**

This paper was written in early 2016, after the Oxford Union debate and other meetings on the Rhodes statue at Oriel College, as a way clarifying my thoughts about the various arguments presented. It has been modified a little in the light of subsequent developments, but not published or footnoted, and remains a personal response.<sup>1</sup>

It is striking that historical interpretations did become important in the debate. Although they probably faded somewhat in 2016, when issues of race and decolonisation became more central, they did not disappear. And these are of course connected. The protests about the statue persuaded many to think about the connection between the past and the present - and what, if any, action should be supported in the present. As a participant in the Oxford Union debate, I had

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<sup>1</sup> It was tidied up for presentation at the Conference on Racialisation and Publicness in Africa and the African Diaspora, convened by Wale Adebawale, African Studies Centre, Oxford, June 2019 and takes into account a few recent developments (June 2020). The paper has not been peer reviewed and I would be grateful for corrections and comments.

to take a position rather than to act only as an academic observer, always the most comfortable terrain for historians.

Rhodes and his network have long been a shadow in my academic career. The professorship I held in Oxford from 1997 to 2015 was titled the Rhodes Chair of Race Relations - a cause of embarrassment and humour. I have never specifically researched Rhodes, but have given talks about him to Rhodes scholars and others – and have lectured and written about late nineteenth-century southern Africa when he was so influential. In 2002, along with Karen Brown, a post-doc, and Paul Maylam, visiting from Rhodes University, I convened a workshop at St Antony's College on Rhodes and his legacies to coincide with the centenary of his death. We did not produce a published record but Maylam's Oxford research fed into his critical book *The Cult of Rhodes* (2005) and Brown's thesis (D. Phil, Oxford, 2002) and published articles covered late nineteenth and early twentieth century Cape history, in particular the period when Jameson was Prime Minister (1904-8).

Rhodes made two separate endowments to Oxford. The first and smaller was to Oriel College, for the erection of a building (and supplements to the Fellows' stipends and the 'dignity and comfort of high table'.) The other was a direction to his Trustees to use his estate to fund the scholarships and this was done through a separate Trust that worked with the University as a whole. Rhodes did not require a statue to be erected by Oriel College in his will (published in Philip Ziegler's book *Legacy* and on the Web). It was not a legal condition for the College in accepting the endowment. The College was responsible and commissioned the statue by Henry Alfred Pegram (who also did a bust of Rhodes and a statue in Cape Town) when the building was erected in 1909-11. Some endowed buildings in Oxford are put up with more discreet reference to donors – for example a plaque or a painting in the Senior Common Room.

The statue is not very prominent at street level and the great majority of people have walked past it frequently without noticing it. RMF supporters were perhaps being ingenuous in claiming that it had offended them as they walked up and down High Street before the campaign. Nevertheless, RMF 'revealed' the statue and the decision to make it the initial focus of campaigns, following the UCT precedent, proved strategically fruitful – almost certainly more so than, for example, prioritising a change in the English or History syllabus.

RMF's intervention was welcome for historians not least because it helped to trigger a historical debate and challenging questions about the relationship between the past and the present. Moreover, there is a South African saying: the wind blows hard on the higher branches. Aside from his very public role in his life time, Rhodes quite deliberately set out to memorialise himself and his

views, and this was further pursued by his admirers and protagonists (Maylam). In life and after death, he and they put him firmly on the upmost branches, and kept him in the public arena; he and his legacy should indeed be a subject for debate and controversy.

There is not one statue facing High St on the Oriel College building, but seven. Rhodes stands alone on the top tier, placed at the centre of the assemblage above a Latin inscription thanking him for his munificence. Below him are two kings, George V and Edward VII, and he more or less has a foot on each of their heads. Various Oriel religious men, College provosts from the distant past are at the edges of the second tier. It is fascinating that the College chose this assemblage and that royalty (whom I assume were consulted) allowed it. Are the religious men sanctifying the precedence of money over birth, or of empire builders over kings? Are the Oriel provosts blessing both Rhodes and the Kings?

Queen Victoria is not honoured in the group of statues; I have not tried to find out why. Surely it would have made more sense to include her, as Rhodes (1853-1902) lived almost his whole life during her reign and sometimes acted in her name. A more appropriate assemblage would have been Victoria on top, with Rhodes underneath. There is a statue of a Queen further down High Street - Queen Caroline who was also controversial in her life time - in the portico of Queen's College. (Caroline did not found the College but was placed there during its early nineteenth-century rebuilding.)

### **The Debate about Rhodes**

Much of the Oxford Union debate on the statue in January 2016 related to Rhodes - his thoughts, words and deeds. A couple of the speakers, notably Ntokozo Qwabe and Athinangamso Nkopo, representing RMF, associated Rhodes with racism, genocide, slavery, murder, conquest, land appropriation and concentration camps. They also used the word criminal. Richard Drayton was a little more careful with his words but was scathing in his critique of Rhodes's thought and action. Nigel Biggar, by contrast, argued that the statue should stay. Rhodes was a man of his time, flawed, but not – in his context – particularly racist. He was an innovative entrepreneur, helped to lay the foundations of the mining industry and left his fortune for the public good both in Britain and Southern Africa.

I took a different approach: the statue was secondary and divisive; our efforts should focus on what should rise rather than what should fall. The university should recognise where the money for these endowments came from, and ensure that it developed further as a leading centre for the study of Africa, with

more African students, and more diverse teaching. These were all central ambitions of the African Studies Centre since its foundation in 2002. In the debate I suggested that the statue be put at least temporarily in a museum.

It is difficult to deal with all of the issues in detail. Rhodes did an extraordinary amount in his short life. Hugely ambitious and driven, he made an impact in many different spheres. However, discussions in Oxford tended to personalise many historical developments and processes with which he was associated, but for which other people and groupings were significant agents. He was not omnipresent. In his short, highly critical biography (1933), William Plomer thought that Rhodes suffered from a bad case of titanism and that this was particularly attractive in late nineteenth century Britain. Subsequent memorialisation, as well as popular debate, including that by Rhodes Must Fall, also tended to personalise broader historical forces.

Most in Oxford had probably forgotten about Rhodes as a historical figure, and the University (and most Rhodes scholars) in a sense neutralised his legacy in this absence of mind. Perhaps the donation of a small part of the endowment to the Mandela Rhodes scholarships in South Africa (around 2000) also helped to calm the troubled waters of Rhodes's legacy. I was asked a few times in the 1990s to give talks on Rhodes to the Rhodes Scholars, but not since then. It is wonderful for historians that interest has surged in the nineteenth century, but History should not be trapped in the morality and deeds of big men.

In various public fora Rhodes was quoted disparaging people of colour. Such statements do have particular force in the current context. One of his offensive usages – common at the time – was to refer to African people as children. It is intriguing that Rhodes also used the word about the fellows of Oriel in his will – at least in reference to their capacity to invest money wisely. Perhaps less highlighted, he also contributed to restricting the vote for black people. This has been an important theme in the historiography of late nineteenth-century South Africa – a central element of the shift from Cape liberalism to segregationism. The Cape of Good Hope was granted a measure of representative self-government in 1854 with a non-racial qualified franchise for the colonial legislative assembly. This was taken forward into Responsible government (1872), after which Cape parliamentarians, then all white, could form their own executive. Rhodes became a Member of the Legislative Assembly in 1881 and served as Prime Minister from 1890 to 1896. After Sprigg, he was the longest serving Prime Minister of the Colony and would have been in office longer if he had not staged the Jameson Raid.

Rhodes supported two major limitations on the black franchise. The first, in 1887, when Sprigg was Prime Minister, excluded land held in communal or

customary tenure from the property qualifications for the franchise. This in effect excluded most Africans from using the value of their land as part of the property qualification. The second (1892), during his time in office, raised the property qualifications and introduced an educational qualification. As I understand it, this applied to all people but had the effect of excluding a higher proportion of black people. Much of the pressure for this latter legislation came from the Afrikaner Bond with whom Rhodes made an alliance in order to take office. The franchise continued to be significant for educated black people at the Cape but never gave them a decisive voice in the Colony's politics. It was further diluted in 1910, when a Union of South Africa was formed and in subsequent years: Africans lost any franchise on a common voters roll in 1936; people classified as coloured finally lost such a vote in 1956.

Those in the debate who saw Rhodes as a man of his time, a pragmatist, and not particularly racist in that context, returned to his statement that there should be equal rights for all civilized men. Leaving aside what he actually said and how he modified it, Rhodes was not opposed to a small measure of representation in the central colonial legislature for black people. He accepted that African people could become educated and share in the progress (then a central idea) of the Colony. But at a time when the number of black voters had started to increase significantly, he was in favour of restricting such expansion and thus the possibility of major black influence in Cape parliamentary politics. He excluded the great majority of Africans from the category of civilized.

Nevertheless, they were in some senses justified in characterising Rhodes as a pragmatist. He was certainly prepared to work with Afrikaners, some disparaged by his anglophone South African colleagues as enemies of progress, and had dealings with African politicians, chiefs and individuals. As Biggar and others noted, he funded the newspaper *Izwi laBantu* for a few years at the end of the nineteenth century. It was edited by A. K. Soga, one of a famous family, who was educated partly in Scotland and a radical in the spectrum of African opinion at the time. This may seem counterintuitive but it is partly explained by Rhodes seeking support from black voters in the run up to the closely fought 1898 election. He and the Progressive party had fallen out with J. T. Jabavu, editor of *Imvo Zabantsundu*, who was for a time the most influential figure in mobilising the African vote in the Eastern Cape. There is an interesting historical literature that covers some of the unpredictable political alliances in the Cape at this time.

Rhodes adopted a restrictive approach to both white diggers and black workers at Kimberley. He effectively monopolised diamond production and sales through De Beers and by the mid-1880s the company introduced closed compounds for African migrant workers (Turrell, *Kimberley*). Compounds

were initially in part a means of suppressing ‘Illicit Diamond Buying’, but increasingly they became a means of reducing costs, wages and African bargaining power. Compounds were transposed to the Witwatersrand gold fields but Rhodes was not so significant a figure there. Not only did they restrict individual freedoms but also the growth of a more diversified commercial economy. RMF used the word slavery to describe Rhodes’s approach to black workers, which is uneasy for historians; the Cape, as part of the British empire, abolished slavery in 1834. African workers were highly constrained but they were contracted wage labourers and this is an important conceptual distinction. Kimberley initially provided some opportunities for a small African elite (Willian, *Plaatje*).

The Glen Grey Act of 1894 came up in various contexts as part of Rhodes’s segregationist drive and the origins of apartheid. It is generally seen as a key measure in driving Africans into the labour market; teaching - in Rhodes’s words - ‘the dignity of labour’. Its impact has been exaggerated. The ideas in it all predated Rhodes and there were precursors before his time. The labour tax (and his speech in favour of the Act) certainly confirm that Rhodes prioritised mobilising African labour, if necessary by using means other than the market. (He showed also in his approach to diamond sales that he was not wedded to free markets when these worked against his interests.) But this tax was not implemented. The system of individual tenure was only introduced in a limited number of Cape districts occupied by Africans and it did not spread to other provinces. It was implemented slowly with decreasing enthusiasm on the part of officials. So far historical research has not convincingly shown that this form of tenure drove young men differentially onto the labour market – migrancy rates from districts that retained customary tenure were probably not significantly different.

The council system was the most influential element in the Act and was a harbinger for segregation. Rhodes and others saw it at the time as increasing local government responsibility for African people (with a new tax that was implemented). It was part of a policy that was moving towards segregated reserves and segregated administration for Africans, but did not yet preclude African land ownership outside of these areas. Apartheid was a different policy introduced half a century later and in key respects differed from Glen Grey in this sphere. Critically, Glen Grey councils were intended as a system of local government, with some element of election, that foresaw the political emergence of a new, educated African elite. The Tribal Authorities in the apartheid era privileged traditional leaders to a much greater extent. The impact of this change should not be underestimated. The form of individual (but not private) tenure imposed under the Glen Grey Act has historically, on the whole,

given the relevant landholders stronger rights over their land than those with customary tenure and/or PTOs. This applies to the present.

There was a significant white liberal political network at the Cape; Rhodes was not one of them. But he did work with white liberals such as John X. Merriman for a time. Many across the political spectrum saw him, at least initially, as a force for modernisation and progressivism – though the latter should not be equated with liberalism that envisaged protecting the African franchise. Olive Schreiner, probably South Africa's best known woman writer at the time, was initially interested in Rhodes's ambitions, although turned against his policies within a few years of meeting him. Her polemic, in novel form, against the colonisation of Zimbabwe, *Trooper Peter Halket* (1897), was perhaps the first sustained, published critique of Rhodes in English. (There were many other critics of Rhodes at the time.)

In summary, with respect to Cape politics, Rhodes supported a limited franchise, educational advancement for black people, and a local council system that was not based on traditional authority. To my knowledge, Rhodes supported, or at least did not oppose, the legal right of black people to purchase and hold private land. In respect of twentieth century South African history, when African access to private property was severely curtailed, this is worth noting and investigating further. But he was a deeply committed British imperialist, convinced about racial superiority, and also prioritised his own business interests. He was involved in the beginning of compounds and other restrictive practices as an employer. His allies in Kimberley helped to suppress information about a smallpox outbreak in the early 1880s, for fear of scaring away workers, and this probably led to a greater death rate. He was a political pragmatist in Cape politics, prepared to work with a range of people who would be useful to his interests and used financial rewards if necessary. (Zimbabwe is discussed below.)

As Afrikaner nationalism became a potent political force in South Africa in the twentieth century, many English-speaking people in Southern Africa saw Rhodes as representative of a pragmatic, Anglophone progressivism. White, English-speaking South Africans increasingly came to support Botha, Smuts and the South African (1910-1934) and United Parties (1934-1977), with their strong commitment to a shared white identity, but also to the British empire and commonwealth. In the late nineteenth century, Rhodes had supported a similar approach in the Cape. As the South African and United parties moved towards a more rigid pattern of segregation, including the 1913 and 1936 Land Acts, which curtailed black rights to purchase land and ended the franchise, Rhodes came to look more tolerant. The slogan of equal rights for all civilized men was associated with him at a time when anglophone whites, including some white

liberals in South Africa and Zimbabwe, advocated a restricted or qualified franchise. For many, Ranger writes, Rhodes's grave in the Matobo hills 'was the monumental centre of the white Rhodesian "nation"' (*Voices from the Rocks*, 40). During the apartheid era some white Rhodesians, invoking the legacy of Rhodes, distinguished their approach from the rigidities of Afrikaner nationalism.

It is intriguing that when the Chair of Race Relations was established in Oxford in 1953-4, the donors, Rhodesian Selection Trust copper mining company (owned partly by American Metal in the US and Anglo-American in South Africa), named it after Rhodes. As far as I know, the Rhodes Trust did not put any money at all into the chair. It was named after Rhodes (on the centenary of his birth) in part because the donors wished to recognise that he had helped to lay the foundations for the mining economy of southern and central Africa. Mining was still a motor of the South African, Zimbabwean and Zambian economies. They intended the chair to focus largely on Africa and, in part, they felt that Rhodes represented a pragmatic, middle route in 'race relations' at a time when extreme Afrikaner nationalists had come to power in South Africa and African nationalism (and trade unionism) was gaining strength. They wanted to see research and policy in this middle ground, with which some associated Rhodes.

## **Racism and the Will**

The debate also touched on racism in respect of the will, which stipulated that students should not be excluded from Rhodes scholarships on the grounds of race or religion. Student representatives during the Oxford Union debate argued that the meaning of race in this context referred to whites of different backgrounds. The term race was sometimes used in South Africa at the time to distinguish between Briton and Boer. A few historians have taken this view and a note to this effect, quoting Maylam's *The Cult of Rhodes*, was circulated on the web and helped inform the RMF argument. Jameson apparently said that he thought Rhodes wished to restrict the scholarship. So this is a reasonable view with some backing.

Ziegler, author of *Legacy*, the most detailed recent book on the Rhodes Trust, takes a different view and a draft paper by Oriel College lawyer Paul Yowell argued similarly and pointed out that Rhodes often used the term race to mean black people – for example 'native races'. Nigel Biggar supported this view suggesting that as the will was drawn up in Britain, the meaning of race was intended to include black people.



The evidence points to the latter interpretation and the first Warden of the Rhodes Trust, Parkin, as well as Rhodes's lawyer, understood the will to mean that the scholarship was open to black people. A black candidate, Alain Locke, was elected in the US in 1907. According to Ziegler, the Trustees were divided and initially uncertain but the majority agreed on this point. Although some American Rhodes scholars were opposed to Locke's election, and some Colleges refused to accept him, Locke did come. He was followed a few years later by black scholars from the Caribbean.

However, it is important to note that this tells only a small part of the story. Locke had a difficult time in Oxford. Partly for this reason, and partly because of the attitudes of American scholars and selectors, it was 'nearly sixty years before another black American was selected as a Scholar' (Ziegler). The US scholarships were the majority. A black South African was not selected till the 1970s. Although a limited number of black scholars continued to be selected from the Caribbean, in effect the scholarship selection excluded scholars who were not white from the two most important zones of potential recruitment of black students for many years. Women were excluded till the 1970s.

If the will was indeed intended not to exclude black students, then the selection committees acted against the letter and spirit of the will for many decades. This was the case in relation to both the southern African and American selection process. The Rhodes Trustees at least colluded in this racial exclusion although they did not ban all black Rhodes scholars because some came through the Caribbean scholarships. The Trust has cited the will in limiting its choice – for example in reducing the number of American scholars – but this evidence surely calls for a very significant readjustment.

Since then, the position has changed and the Trust eventually worked hard to ensure that the Southern African scholarships were deracialised. The Trust, however, has globalised the scholarships when they could have focussed them particularly on southern Africa, or Africa, in recognition of the origins of the money and in recognition of their practice of exclusion for many decades. By globalising the scholarships, the number of African students has remained relatively small.

The Trust says that it cannot change the number of American scholarship because of the will. I do not know the legal position. When I worked as Rhodes Professor of Race Relations (a post that has no formal relationship to the Trust), I suggested that the Trust might get around this problem by canvassing support from the American Rhodes scholar selection committees and alumni to transfer some of 'their' scholarships for a period of five years to Southern African countries. To my knowledge they did not pursue the idea.

They did, as noted above, transfer some money into the Mandela Rhodes scholarships in South Africa (starting in 2005), an important gesture. But the selection committees and the Trust failed to operate the principle of the will for over 60 years. In past years they made discretionary donations to other causes in the University such as the American Studies Centre. This seems to require a greater level of recognition.

## **Land and Conquest, Genocide and Murder**

With respect to land and conquest, South Africa should be distinguished from Zimbabwe. Rhodes had barely arrived from England when the Cape Colony forcibly annexed the diamond fields in 1871. He was certainly an expansionist, but the great majority of what became South Africa was already annexed by the time he had significant political power. Rhodes did, however, have some role in Botswana and the northern Cape, and oversaw the annexation of Mpondoland in 1894 - the last independent African kingdom that came under the Cape.

There is a story (I don't think mentioned in the Oxford debates) that when Rhodes visited Mpondoland in 1894, he ordered a field of maize to be flattened by machine gun fire in order to demonstrate what would happen to the Mpondo if they tried to fight annexation; this persuaded them to sign the agreement. I have not researched the veracity of this story in detail. It is mentioned, perhaps for the first time, in J.G. McDonald's sympathetic biography *Rhodes: a Life* (1927). McDonald says that Rhodes told him this. Some of McDonald's detail is incorrect in that he claims that the visit and episode preceded the act of submission. In fact Walter Stanford and Henry Elliott, the two key local officials, had already negotiated Sigcau's agreement without significant conflict before Rhodes arrived. The supposed episode is not in Stanford's reminiscences although he does give details of Rhodes's visit. However it was picked up in later biographies, as well as in Monica Hunter's (later Wilson) anthropology of Mpondoland. Hunter does not question the account in McDonald and it may be from this footnote in her well-known and widely circulated *Reaction to Conquest* (1936, 1964) that the story spread. Whether or not Rhodes or McDonald were remembering correctly, the story says something about metaphors of power.

Rhodes was quite capable of authorising extreme violence against African people by then. He did send a telegram to his officials at the time suggesting that force should be employed if there was any resistance by the Mpondo. He drew an analogy with the disaster that struck the Ndebele when they rebelled in 1893. Machine guns had been used in southern Africa, both in the wars against the Zulu and the Ndebele. (This did come up in the Oxford debate.) However,

very little land was appropriated in Mpondoland. The Cape government disallowed some land concessions made to a British company by the Mpondo king Sigcau. By this time the Cape government, and especially the Native Affairs Department, was committed to a policy of African reserves in which African occupation was protected.

The arguments in Oxford characterising Rhodes as violent, criminal and responsible for genocide focused particularly on the colonisation of Zimbabwe by his privately owned British South Africa Company in 1890-97. The Cape government was not directly involved. It is extraordinary in retrospect that he was permitted to play both the role of Prime Minister and managing director of the Company at the same time. Rhodes's actions in Zimbabwe and in the Jameson raid must be at the heart of retrospective evaluation. They certainly involved force and violence, when he was at the height of his political power. It seems that as power and wealth concentrated in his hands, Rhodes's sense of urgency, and perhaps hubris, increased.

Lobengula, the Ndebele king, signed the Rudd concession voluntarily in 1888 although his indunas and chiefs were split and he soon tried to retract. He sent a delegation to England, which, somewhat surprisingly, did get an audience with Queen Victoria. But the British government decided to enforce the concession. To my knowledge, the Rudd concession covered minerals and not land rights. It was an important step in winning support for the British South Africa Company charter in 1889.

The pioneer column of 1890 was an armed invasion and the British South Africa Company went further than any concessions and treaties signed by chiefs in the area. Jameson, administrator from 1891, was particularly generous in handing out farms. At a time that the Cape government was peacefully annexing Mpondoland and reserving its land for Africans, Rhodes and Jameson were responsible for an aggressive settler colonialism in Zimbabwe that precipitated rebellions. There is a large historiography on the rebellions of 1893 and 1896. Here, as elsewhere, there was a major gap in weaponry and wealth – and maxim guns were used with no constraint.

In a meeting after the Oxford Union debate, one of the RMF representatives mentioned a figure of 60,000 deaths all told in the Zimbabwe rebellions. Despite asking, I have not been able to find out where this figure came from, nor have I looked sufficiently at the detailed historical writing. I could see little concrete information on this point in key sources such as Ranger. It is a vital figure. There are estimates of 3-4,000 Ndebele soldiers killed in 1893 in two major battles. Bulawayo was burnt by the retreating Ndebele, resulting in great social disruption. Ndebele cattle were looted. The losses in 1896 may have

been higher. Although the Ndebele soldiers avoided direct confrontations in this second rebellion, the conflict covered a wider terrain, including Shona chiefdoms. 10,000 deaths in war (a number similar to that estimated for the 1878-9 war against the Zulu) is possible. There were few medical facilities for African soldiers.

Nineteenth-century wars often resulted in a higher number of deaths from disease and famine than from direct military casualties. This was the case on both sides in the South Africa War of 1899-1902. The Boers lost about 34,000 people, about 27-28,000 from disease, largely in the concentration camps, and perhaps 6-7,000 in conflict. Two thirds of British deaths were also from disease, largely typhoid, roughly 14,000 out of 24,000. It is estimated that a further 20,000 Africans died, largely in (segregated) camps. Deliberate scorched earth tactics by the British destroyed food supplies of both Boer and African people. Perhaps 10 per cent of the Boer population of the two republics died in the war. Did this constitute a genocide? It depends partly on the intent, partly on the calculation and partly on the definition. I find the term problematic in this context but it should be further debated. Perhaps as significant, it was conceived as a calamity and a devastating historical moment; it helped to shape Afrikaner identity and politics for many decades.

Iliffe (*Famine in Zimbabwe*) paints a bleak picture of the consequences of conflict in precipitating famine during 1896. Rinderpest – the cattle disease – and locusts compounded the problem. But Iliffe, one of Britain's leading historians of Africa, insists that the famine was not primarily caused by natural disasters but 'created by the violence of the rebellion and its suppression' (Iliffe, 23.) Food stores were destroyed in some, though not in all places. There were regional repercussions in 1893 and 1896 as those fleeing from attack in turn pressed on the food supplies of others. Iliffe does not give figures but it may be possible to piece together some of the numerical evidence and a more detailed overview of the tactics and consequences of these wars. This seems to me a valuable and important area of research, now urgent in the light of the statue debate. The total population of Zimbabwe was estimated at about 700,000 at the beginning of the twentieth century and it is possible that tens of thousands died in war, and of war-related famine and disease between 1890 and 1897.

These were brutal suppressions of people on their own land following an invasion. Again I find it difficult to use the term genocide because they do not seem to have been intentional genocides and deaths were perhaps not on the scale of events that have, since then, been conceived as genocides. (Though fewer were killed at Srebrenica.) David Olusoga and Casper Erichsen (*The Kaiser's Holocaust*) have justifiably used the term in relation to German colonisation in Namibia. A re-examination of Zimbabwe's experience of

conquest would need to explore the methods of warfare used and the intent of those fighting for the company as well as the scale of death. It is difficult to calculate deaths across a number of years. Demographic halts were experienced for complex reasons prior to colonisation and, over the long term, some suggest that parts of Africa during the slave trade experienced a slow genocide. In the late nineteenth century, a range of colonised countries in Africa and elsewhere experienced high rates of death (Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts*; Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*). However, this phase was relatively brief and the twentieth-century colonial period is characterised more generally by sharp increases in population. Whatever the demographic impact, it is again important to acknowledge the deep legacy left by these rebellions and suppressions in Zimbabwe over the subsequent century, which fed into the anti-colonial struggle.

Rhodes must be accorded responsibility for these deaths. He and his company chose to colonise Zimbabwe and other parts of central Africa by force. Rhodes and Jameson could have annexed Zimbabwe on the basis of the Rudd concession and left the great majority of land in the hands of African people; there were contemporaneous models in Mpondoland and the Bechuanaland protectorate. This may not have averted conflict entirely but it would have minimised the risk of rebellion and warfare. This direct responsibility for violence on a major scale was largely glossed by proponents of the statue.

Britain, and especially Lord Salisbury's Conservative administration, also has to be assigned responsibility. The use of companies in Central and Eastern Africa was a means for the British government to expand colonisation on the cheap. Salisbury secured an area of interest that Britain wished to occupy effectively in competition with the Transvaal, Portugal and Germany. Even though the High Commissioner in Cape Town nominally exercised some oversight, this was not effectively used to control the excesses of the British South Africa Company. It is important in this context to recognise that Rhodes's political actions were largely mediated through institutions. The charter was granted (directly after a similar East African charter) by the British government and the Queen. Perhaps the argument should be for the removal of Salisbury's statues; his responsibility for colonialism was broader than Rhodes's. Rhodesia's capital was named after him. (His family was further connected with southern Africa in that his eldest daughter, Maud Cecil, married the Earl of Selborne, who became High Commissioner in South Africa in 1905, helping to guide the country to a Union in 1910 that firmly excluded black political rights - except the remnant qualified franchise in the Cape.)

At the end of 1895, Rhodes and Jameson tried to orchestrate an invasion and internal rebellion/coup by 'Uitlanders' in the Transvaal. It failed but it was

illegal, highly aggressive and careless. Most of the deaths – probably less than 100 – were amongst the small invading force, which was based on the British South Africa company police and volunteers. (It is worth noting that some Africans supported this invasion. The Jameson raid started partly on Silas Molema's farm with his permission.) Many years ago, Jean van der Poel argued strongly that Chamberlain, Secretary of State for the Colonies in Salisbury's administration, as well as Rhodes, was party to the raid and encouraged it; this now seems to be accepted in the historiography.

Rhodes had to resign as Prime Minister because he lost the support of the Afrikaner Bond. He did not, however, stay out of politics and he supported the British move to war against the Transvaal in 1899. Ntokozo Qwabe associated him with the concentration camps of the South African war. This connection is not justified; they were the responsibility of the British army.

Was Rhodes a criminal? Jameson was convicted in Britain and was, formally speaking, a criminal. (He nevertheless became Prime Minister of the Cape 1904-8). Cecil's brother, Frank Rhodes, was convicted by a Transvaal court as a key Uitlander leader. Rhodes was not convicted for planning an illegal act and was unrepentant. Political power and connections saved him from being brought to trial but his actions effectively put him (and Chamberlain) in the same position as Jameson.

Nigel Biggar suggested that Rhodes largely used his wealth for public purposes and this is justified – although the subsequent racial restrictions on scholarships should be noted. This argument should also be qualified in other ways. Firstly, he used his political power, as well as his wealth, to accumulate a good deal of land which, had he lived, would have been for his own personal use or profit. He invested some early earnings in a property in Hampstead and at the end of his life bought an estate, Dalham, in Suffolk to which it seems he intended to retire. (A number of South African mining magnates bought British estates – including Wytham Abbey next to Oxford, which was later donated to the University.) He carved out a large area on the slopes of Table Mountain, around his mansion of Groote Schuur. This was donated to the Cape government and the University of Cape Town was also later built on the land. He took over a huge tract of land in Zimbabwe. After the Jameson raid he sought solace in purchasing 29 fruit and wine farms in the Western Cape for about £250,000. (He worked quickly to improve these and, with others, supported the development of refrigerated export.) He died in his cottage in Muizenberg, now a museum.

## **Back to Statues and Some Comparisons**

Part of the argument for removing the Oriel statue was that Rhodes, in his attitudes and even more his actions, was the symbol of a particularly racist and violent form of colonialism, even by the standards of his own time and certainly in retrospect. By allowing the statue to stand, Oriel and Oxford more generally was associating itself with these elements in Rhodes's character and career. The students suggested further that this signified Oxford's embeddedness in the imperial era and that the university needed to be decolonised.

On the pro-statue side, a key argument – even when it was agreed that Rhodes was racist - was that societies should live with the evidence of their past rather than eliminate it. History is seldom a comfortable place. Other points included Rhodes's generosity to Oxford, and the benefits that accrued to Rhodes Scholars. Another interesting pro-statue strand was that following generations should accept decisions made in the past. Retaining the statue did not imply support for Rhodes's views, and we should recognise the complexity of our historical legacies. An underlying concern was that removing the statue could be seen as a dangerous signal to potential donors. And it was widely reported that some Oriel donors would withdraw support if the statue was removed.

Such discussions raised the interesting question of historical comparisons. Would the University retain statues of Hitler and Stalin had they been put up in the past. The answer was by general agreement in the negative. But how different, the RMF students asked, was Rhodes? Who should we compare him with? Should we aim at consistency? I think that it was accepted that Rhodes could be differentiated from Hitler – although some in RMF, by invoking the term genocide, may have been contesting that. For this reason, analysis of deaths in Zimbabwe is important.

With whom should we compare Rhodes, then, and what should be our attitude to their statues? Why Rhodes in particular? Should not every past statue and monument associated with colonial expansion fall? Violence was a particular characteristic of the early phases of colonial rule in many places. To choose a few examples from the late nineteenth century, Garnet Wolseley was ruthless in destroying Kumasi in 1874 and then turned his attention to the Pedi in South Africa. Frere and Chelmsford were probably responsible for the direct slaughter of as many Zulu soldiers in the war of 1878-9 as Rhodes in Zimbabwe. Again they fought that war on Zulu land when there was no danger to Britain, and not even to Natal. There was an element of destructive vengeance in some of these wars. Kitchener's armies killed similar numbers at Omdurman in 1898. Including 34,000 Boers and 20,000 Africans, well over 50,000 were killed or died in the unnecessary South African War, initially under Roberts's command. All of these colonial wars were fought on the authority of the British government. As mentioned British Prime Ministers such as Salisbury, Colonial

Secretaries such as Chamberlain and of course Queen Victoria herself were ultimately responsible.

John X Merriman, later also a Cape Prime Minister (1908-10), but more liberal than Rhodes, said in the 1890s

‘We fight Rhodes because he means so much of oppression, injustice and moral degradation in South Africa...Rhodes is a curious product of his time. People who compare him with Clive or Warren Hastings are those who take their history from the *Daily Telegraph* or *Tit Bits*. He is a pure product of the age, a capitalist politician ...In Australian or English or, I conjecture, American politics, he would have made no figure, as he cannot stand up to his equals in debate and has neither moral courage nor convictions, but he has the sort of curious power that Napoleon had of intrigue and of using men – the worse they are the better for his purpose which is self-aggrandisement under one high-sounding name or another’ (Lewsen 265, 254-5).

Merriman, like many others, had been content to work with Rhodes at one time. His comparisons are interesting. Napoleon worked on a different scale and of course was responsible for massively more bloodshed. Both to some degree used their power in transformative ways that left long legacies to the present. Zimbabwe is one such legacy. Despite its birth in conquest, its sovereignty is fiercely defended by African political leaders. Rhodes conceived elements of a continental unity, of course with imperial interests at its heart. Had he achieved a Cape to Cairo railway, it would have greatly benefited independent Africa. Clive (from what little I know and contrary to Merriman) is potentially a good comparison – and he was probably more violent in his conquests and less generous with his estate. (They both died at 49, Napoleon at 52). Similarly there is an interesting comparison to make between Rhodes and the American magnates of the opulent late nineteenth century Gilded Age – such as the Vanderbilts and Rockefellers.

Should all statues to them come down? Victoria, Salisbury and many others are probably untouchable. Prior to the Oxford Union debate I thought that the issue of consistency was important. In other words if Rhodes was to fall, so should many others who were involved in imperialism (and the slave trade). During the debate a speaker from the floor dismissed this concern on the grounds that you would not hesitate to catch one criminal because you could not catch them all. That is true. But I am not convinced by the argument in connection with statues. Firstly, those responsible for catching criminals would not stop at one. They would certainly try hard to catch more and are likely to be constrained largely by issues of capacity and evidence. Statues are easier to catch than criminals so that an argument for consistency would imply support for removing those that publicly celebrate others – at least if they could be shown to



have been responsible for similar levels of violence. Secondly, in running institutions such as universities, fairness and consistency is very important – for example in admissions, in assessment, in dealing with colleagues. I think it is reasonable to consider the Rhodes statue in the context of potential action against other statues.

Most nations and certainly all empires were forged in violence as well as by other forces. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when military and naval might were central to British society, there was a disproportionate tendency to honour those who succeeded in those spheres. This included career soldiers and administrators employed by the British state, but also freebooters and more independent empire builders, some of whom became official. Wealth also bought memorialisation, as well as mansions - some protected by the National Trust. The differential public celebration of military men, empire builders, the rich and royalty – especially at a time in the nineteenth century when the cores of so many British cities were being rebuilt – is a more general issue for British society. The First World War was probably the turning point and it is interesting that the statue of Rhodes at Oriel was erected just before then. Subsequently, public sculpture seems to have been far less devoted to such individuals and far more to war memorials (initially), to representative images or to those who made contributions in domestic politics and welfare. Pegram, the sculptor, himself worked on the Welsh war memorial, the Preston cenotaph and the Edith Cavell monument.

There are, however, limits to the consistency argument and these have persuaded me. Firstly, the British South Africa Company's conquest of Zimbabwe seems to have been particularly violent. Secondly, at the heart of the issue is the need for symbolic statements at particular moments in respect of specific public images. During the debate, a pointed question was asked about the US Confederate flag. For a long time it was flown semi-publicly despite the fact that it was offensive to many black (and white) people and was associated with slavery. Its time only came when it was used as a symbol by a racist mass murderer. A statement needed to be made.

This is where the argument about consistency does falter. This flag should surely be consigned to museums where it can be contextualised and explained. The same should (and largely does) apply to the old South African flag. Students also pointed to action by US universities which dropped inappropriate symbols – for example Amherst College removed its Lord Jeff motif because it was based on an image of 'Lord Jeffery Amherst, the commander of British forces in North America during the French and Indian War, [who] supported giving blankets laced with the smallpox virus to Indians to advance the goal of destroying their race'. Should Oxford follow such examples in order to make

an important symbolic statement, even if this resulted in an element of inconsistency? This particular statue of Rhodes would be moved, even if other statues of powerful and imperial figures survived? I think so and the new political context (May/June 2020) surely strengthens this argument.

Another analogy was made during the debates. In South Africa, an airport has been named after King Shaka and a statue erected. He was a conqueror who used war and violence to create the most powerful pre-colonial state in nineteenth-century Southern Africa. There are exaggerated figures of the deaths that he caused, but the Zulu kingdom engaged in a series of conquests that probably resulted in tens of thousands of death during Shaka's rule (c. 1816-1828). I started to discuss this analogy in a seminar at Rhodes University in South Africa (which decided to retain its name) and four or five students were so incensed that I could even talk about Shaka being compared with colonial figures that they walked out. I think that it is valuable to explore such comparisons, but I can see the limits too. Shaka was a political leader of great stature and importance, who changed the course of history, and who is well-known beyond his own country. (He may well be the best-known African king, globally speaking, despite his short rule of about 12 years and despite the fact that West African kingdoms were on a larger scale.) I am not a proponent of inscribing an iconography of past or present power into every public space. But in the immediate post-apartheid era, recognition of Shaka in the public realm by a statue is appropriate. Ideally, I would also like to see critical commentary on nearby plaques or in museums.

There is an element of contingency and political judgement here. And protagonists of retaining the statue often asked: where will it end? With respect to the debate in 2015-16, RMF was not demanding, at least publicly, a wider cull of statues. In Cape Town, the UCT statue was the major political focus. Although the bust at Rhodes memorial was slightly disfigured, neither this nor the Pegram statue of Rhodes in the Gardens became central in the campaign. They are still, for the moment, there. In Oxford, there seemed little concern about abolishing the Rhodes Trust. The Trust has modified the iconography in Rhodes House in recent years, with banners advertising the Mandela Rhodes Foundation and a more diverse range of paintings in the main hall. But many of the older images and room names remain. These were not a significant focus of RMF. (The Rhodes scholars amongst RMF were publicly challenged as to this anomaly, and also whether it was legitimate simultaneously to accept the money and protest against the statue. They developed various defences. I am similarly at risk of such a challenge in that I applied for and accepted the Rhodes Chair of Race Relations, with knowledge of his role in southern Africa, and then argued for a change of name. In the case of the chair, no money came from the Rhodes Trust and this was a decision by the African Studies Centre as a whole.)

Additional statues in Britain have been challenged, especially in the broader Black Lives Matter protests of 2020. The focus of public protest cannot be easily predicted, nor can the determination of statue defenders. Public monuments and sculpture will inevitably reflect contestation and changing political balances. A great deal remains from the past in the United Kingdom; little has been removed recently for specifically political reasons and more is destroyed by growth and rebuilding. And the argument is generally not to destroy such objects but to move them.

During the Union debate, Sophia Cannon was eloquent in her argument that images of people such as Rhodes should be retained, so that British people don't lose sight of this history, but find ways to make it more central in public discourse and debate. In general I prefer to add statues rather than to subtract - for example Gandhi and Mandela in Parliament square alongside Churchill and Smuts, who had uncomfortable views about race. From what I heard in their political rhetoric during the initial protests, RMF would probably prefer not to have so many Mandela statues. They see him as having been too tolerant of the old order in South Africa and insufficiently radical in 'transformation'. Mandela professed non-racialism; the RMF, sadly, seemed to place race – a colonial concept - at the heart of their thinking.

I am sympathetic to the idea that statues provide a route into history, as long as vehicles can be developed for critical debate. It is difficult to contextualise and criticise when they remain in prominent places with little or no change to their surroundings. That is why a museum or similar environment is suitable; statues don't have to stand still. The Museum of Africa in Belgium has been thoroughly reworked in the light of a national reassessment of Leopold's role in the Congo. Leopold's bust has been moved from its central position and placed in a context where his responsibility for violent extraction of ivory and red rubber are clear. The location of this statue of Rhodes – for example in a critical exhibition on the late nineteenth century British empire in Africa - would need considerable consultation. But I could imagine it alongside images and analysis of a mining compound and a maxim gun – as well as his Baker-designed house at Groote Schuur.

I argued in 2016 that the symbolic battle over the statue was secondary – even if fascinating and attractive to public opinion and the media. There were a number of concrete and positive measures that could be taken, which would have more significant longer-term impact in the university and potentially win wide support. Nevertheless, the implication of the above arguments is that Oriel

and Oxford should have made a stronger symbolic gesture. Oriel has now (June 2020) apparently reconsidered its position in the light of new global protests led by Black Lives Matter.

### **Some Recommendations**

This paper does not attempt to deal with other issues that became central to the debate such as admissions policy, diversity and the content of some of the degree courses. In brief, the student body was more diverse than RMF realised and the University is gradually developing strategies on this front. Of the top ten universities in the THE rankings, Oxford (in first place) ranks only behind Imperial College (in tenth) in the percentage of its international students; they come from a very wide range of countries. The specific issue at the time of the debate was the intake of those identifying as black British students at undergraduate level.

Academic endeavour, especially at the postgraduate level, has long been innovative in discussing the history of colonialism and of Africa. The students found the absurd old quote about African history from Trevor-Roper and reiterated it as representative of Oxford. What they did not say is that even at the time in the early 1960s, Oxford was a significant centre for African studies and Thomas Hodgkin, for example, had already produced one of the first major books analysing the social roots of African nationalism. Since then, a large academic output, from staff, students and visitors, and countless seminars and conferences, have explored many innovative routes in African history and social sciences, the majority adopting Africanist perspectives. The university has been one of the major institutions in the UK, and even perhaps globally, for the interdisciplinary study of Africa societies.

Despite the strength of African Studies at Oxford there is still great opportunity to develop these fields and for the Rhodes Trust, as well as the university as a whole, to recognise the origins of the money that came to Oxford from this and other endowments based on southern African mining wealth. The critical point is ensuring that the University commits itself to developing its role as a major centre for the study of Africa and especially southern Africa. There is potential for expanding teaching in this and related fields especially at the undergraduate level. This has implications for staffing, student recruitment, scholarships for African students and diversity. I recommended above that the Rhodes Trust reconsider the balance of scholarships and that US Rhodes scholar committees should be asked to assign temporarily some of their scholarships to African countries. Such scholarships can make a particularly valuable impact in African countries as they become increasingly significant in a global context.

During my period of tenure, we tried to change the name of the Rhodes Professor of Race Relations (established 1953-4). The key point is that the 'statute' establishing the chair does not specifically refer to Africa. The negotiations leading up to the endowment by Rhodesian Selection Trust largely had Africa as the reference point but the final wording was generic. The juxtaposition of Rhodes and race relations was also, in the context of the early twenty-first century, uneasy. The African Studies Centre argued that the origins of the donation should be recognised and that the chair had always focussed largely on the study of Africa. The title should become: professor of African Studies, or something similar. The chair should be fully committed to studying, and teaching about, Africa. This proposal failed – it is a practical and symbolic statement that the university could make at little cost. It would be a positive step that would attract wide approval. No outside donor or body stood in the way of such a change.

Oriel College and the university need to know how many people died in the early colonisation of Zimbabwe from about 1890 to 1897 and how those deaths should be characterised. Systematic research should be sponsored: this is what universities are for.

The statue should be made an object of debate and analysis. Statues, metaphorically, have feet and can move. Art works are often moved for many different purposes and urban landscapes change. Oxford and Oriel should not be on the defensive about this, but take positive action and move the statue, at least temporarily to a museum or similar institution. Ideally it should be taken to the much-visited Ashmolean museum and form part of a display that deals more broadly with aspects of empire. There are rooms devoted to other empires, from Egypt to Rome, but not to Britain's own empire, one of the largest the world has seen, and the most important for us to understand, discuss and criticise. There is little to be lost from this and everything to be gained at this particular historical moment. Perhaps the plinth could be left vacant initially or Oriel could advertise for, commission and display images that may stimulate further debate of relevance to the issues that have been raised. This is a good site for public art, similar to the rotating art on a plinth in Trafalgar Square.