

For the past few days in England, the debate over structural racism has once again been the theme of public discourse. It's doing the country some good, since a lot of anger has accumulated.

At the University of Oxford, whose list of alumni includes Prime Minister David Cameron, students of the #RhodesMustFall movement have been protesting during the past few months against the colonial legacy of the university. Now, it looks like a breakthrough is within reach.

The centre of the scandal is the statue of the colonial master, Cecil Rhodes, which has stood at Oriel College since 1902. At the time, Rhodes most notably bequeathed money through his own Trust to his former college. For that reason, the statue stands as a symbol of both the ideological and financial heritage of the university.

It's about racist structures

However, it goes a lot further than the two-metre-or-so high statue. It's about racist structures and patriarchal curriculum schemes.

Oluwafemi Nylander is annoyed. He is one of the leaders of the movement in Oxford and takes part prevalently at the protests. "Rhodes said, "I prefer land to niggers", and was an architect of Apartheid; what more is there to say about it? The statue represents everything that is wrong with this institution and the world in general. Of course, the statue must fall." He is not the only one to hold such an opinion; the 100-year-old statue became a political issue in all of England a long while ago. The statue is only the beginning.

The #RhodesMustFall activists are demanding a revision of curricula and university structures, such as the naming process of new professors. This summer, the University stated that it was prepared to reform the curriculum in the near future. However, in the eyes of many, Hegel's provocative statement, "there is none [African history], or very little – there is only the history of the Europeans in Africa", lingers like an evil omen over the reading lists.

The British steel magnate, Cecil Rhodes, as the Prime Minister of the British Cape Colony, was essentially responsible for the introduction of racial segregation in South Africa. His role at the end of the 19th century was deemed so important at the time that the whole colony was named after him - Southern Rhodesia.

Rhodes' biggest legacy lies in the Rhodes Scholarships, which are almost treated in the same way as noble titles in the academic world. His fortune covers the cost of tuition in Oxford for just 80 students from ex-Commonwealth countries (and Germany) each year. Alongside the Harlem philosopher, Alain Locke, Bill Clinton and the German campaigner against Nazism, Adam von Trott zu Solz, count among its recipients.

The #RhodesMustFall campaign began at the start of 2015 in Cape Town. Students demanded the removal of a statue of Rhodes on their campus. It portrayed Rhodes enthroned, with a pensive expression and his chin propped up by his fist. In April, that statue fell - however, the movement had

long since filtered out into the adopted home of Cecil Rhodes.

The British media has been reporting the first success of the British #RhodesMustFall movement in recent weeks. Oriel College decided to remove a plaque dedicated to Rhodes in the direct vicinity of the statue, and to deal with the council over the future of the statue itself. It seems to only be a matter of time until the statue is ultimately removed.

However, critics have strong arguments. They say that the removal of history also forfeits the acknowledgement of the atrocities. They say that smoothing out the history is approaching a disavowal of it.

There remains a controversial question, which is how one should deal with symbols of colonialism and racism. Symbols stand in place of the self-conception of whomever installs it. As a result, the statue has become this political issue.

*****Is #RhodesMustFall right?*****

Some symbols exist, but together, we have the freedom to redefine their context. We do so when we classify NSDAP-placards in museums in a historically critical manner. Placards, public testimonies and the acknowledgement of official positions which show racism as an institutional problem do not change anything about the problem itself, but rather redefine the context of these symbols.

Ceremonial staging of such people and their actions must therefore disappear immediately, but not the memorials. The question is whether one can redefine the context of the statue - whether a glorified statue of Cecil Rhodes can be turned into a memorial for Apartheid. And the goodwill of the university won't decide this, but rather the eye of the beholder.

For Femi Nylander, it stands as a grotesque glorification of colonialism, and he is not alone in thinking this by any means. It has nothing to do with historical revisionism anyway should one demand that the statue is removed from its current position.

It cannot stay in Oriel. The removal from its current setting does not equate destruction. Whether one possibly has it as a memorial in a museum, such as the Apartheid Museum set up in Johannesburg, will have to be another question.

The British educational policy is faced with a growing question. It will have to grapple with criticisms from students'. And this process has just begun.

Translated from German by Jordan Rose,

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