

# When things fall...!

Surviving serious protest action and campus turmoil



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# A revolution in the making.



**It will take years (and multiple PHD studies) to understand the full scope, consequences and meaning of what transpired over eighteen months...but one thing is already certain and undeniable....it left the institution significantly changed and affected, its collective consciousness profoundly and irreversibly shifted**

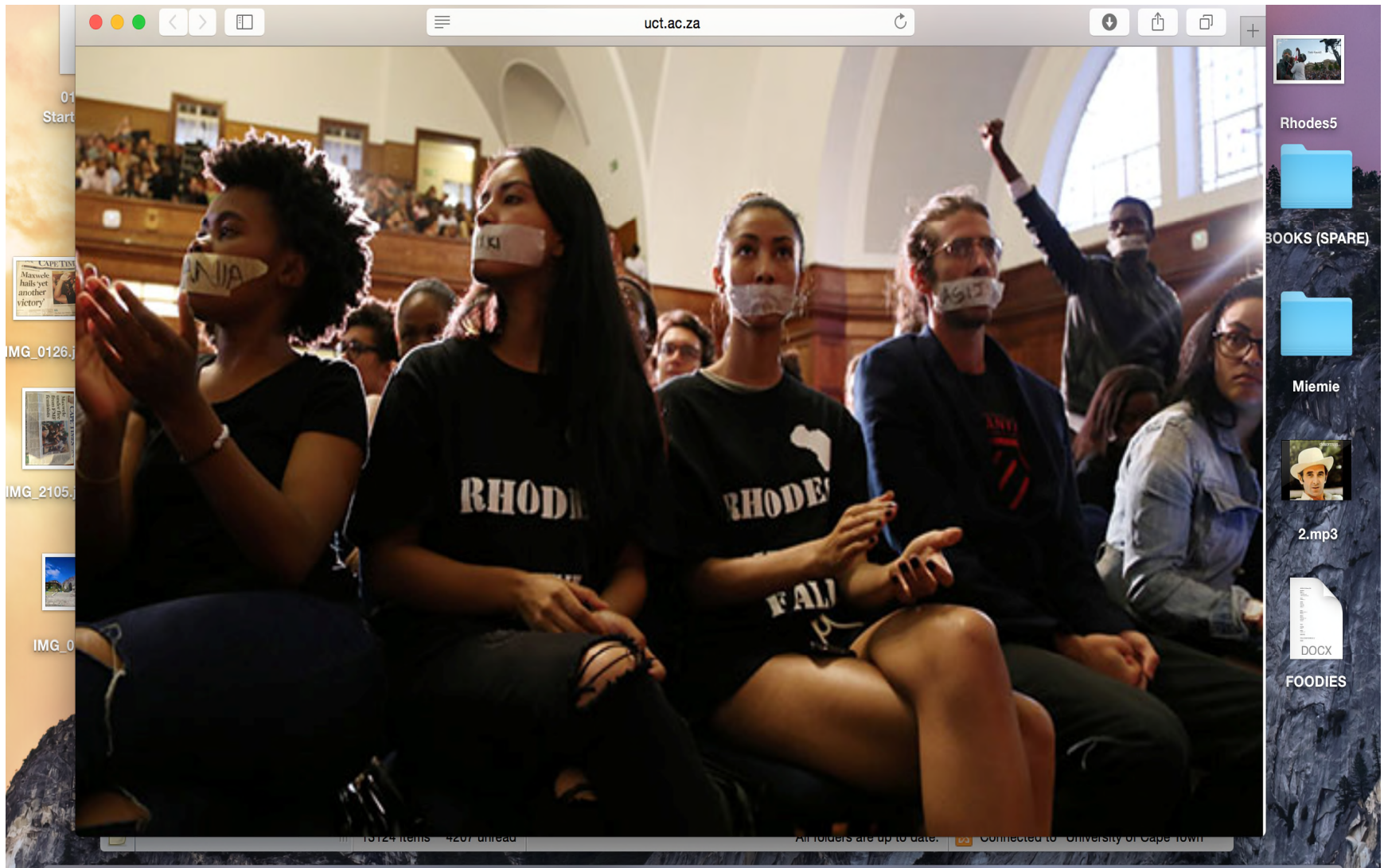


## THE FIRST WAVE OF CHANGE





# THE RISE of VOICES



## A SIGNIFICANT MOMENT





## THE SECOND WAVE OF CHANGE



Soon after, the first barricades went up at UCT on 19 October 2015



## Fees must Fall spread nationally



Under the banner of #FeesMustFall, students protested nationwide during the month of October 2015



## #FeesMustFall assembly





## A clash at parliament



Student and workers clashed with police outside Parliament on Wednesday, 21 October 2015



## Students and workers protest or insourcing



On 28 October 2015, UCT signed an agreement to end outsourcing with six service providers



# THE THIRD WAVE





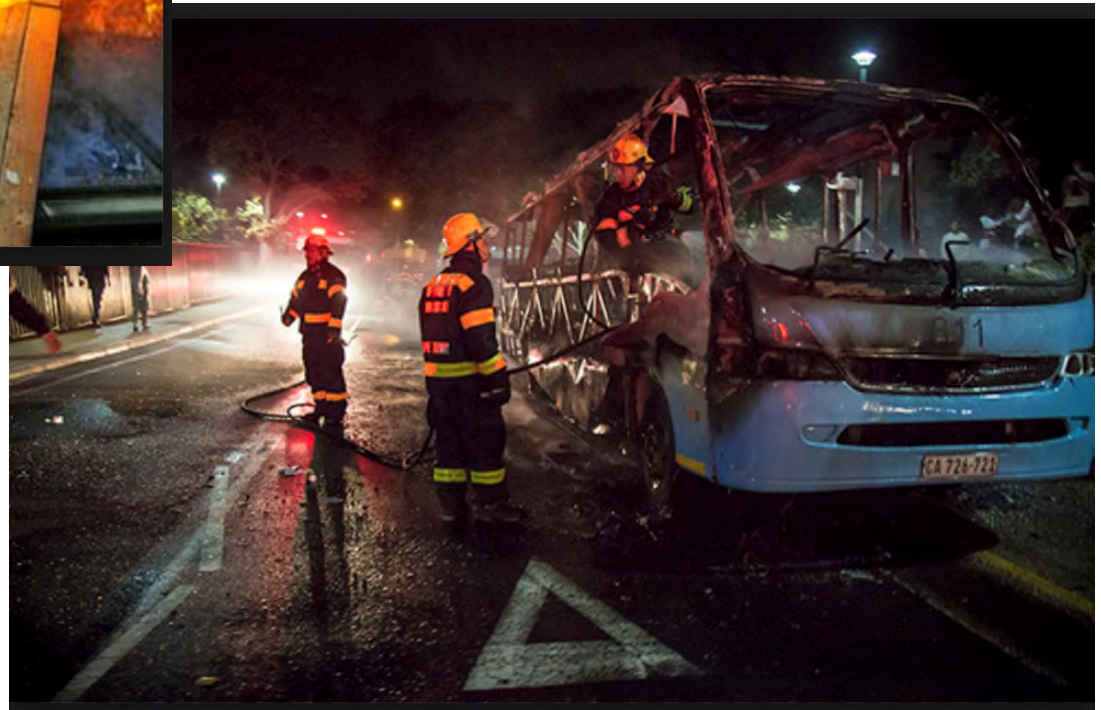
## #Shackville UCT Burns







Artwork ablaze





# The complexities facing UCT leadership:

- How to deal with the threat of violence, perceptions of capitulation by leadership to pressure and on the other hand the use of force and involving police on campus?
- How to protect operations and deal with significant consequences of interruption i.e repeating exams, the insourcing of 1000 new employees from five different companies.
- How to turn our enormous, slow ship around to be more responsive in real time, to implement changes operationally, to hold people accountable.
- How to overcome the prism problem: where every issue at UCT is now seen through a “lack of transformation lense”.
- How to mend the deep polarisation between different constituencies and complexity of bringing all along, including the trauma, mistrust suffered during the protests.
- The negative impact on external audiences via media sensationalism (particularly international alumni) – working against afropessimism.
- How to make the events an educational experience for all.

**The fundamental question is: WHAT KIND OF INSTITUTION DO WE REALLY WANT TO BE IN FUTURE ?**



# The birth of Must-Fall-movements and a whole new stream of activist bodies

RMF characterised in the negative by:

- a flat structure hence no leadership
- no accountability
- no negotiation possible
- a view that leadership is illegitimate
- a fallist agenda
- conflict and verbal abuse

A movement characterised in the positive by:

- Raising serious issues
- Gave rise to multiple movements
- Revitalised student activism
- Placed transformation on the agenda
- Strong student leaders visible

**NEW  
MOVEMENTS  
ARISE**

Rhodes  
must fall

I'key  
disability

Patriarchy  
must fall

Disability  
for justice

Trans  
Collective

Queer  
revolution

Fees must  
fall

Black  
academic  
caucus



# The key things leadership got right... and wrong.

## RIGHT:

- Stick with our values and listened when we had to (not defensive)
- Respect and support for lawful protest action no matter how creative or challenging.
- No ego...and always remembering protesters are our student and young people
- Concentrating on the educational value of the entire experience
- Setting up a special executive task team to manage the risk and different specific task teams
- Engage...engage...engage...

## WRONG:

- Worried way too much about social media negativities instead of making changes on the ground
- Reacted with “force” in one instance that was unnecessary
- We were not prepared and hence could not act pro-active enough
- Response time to matters still too slow

**The key lesson for leadership is prepare, work on accelerating our responsiveness, engage, make decisions and move on....the worst thing is too deliberate too long..**



# The critical things that comm's faced:

The key question for communicators was:

- What do we communicate when we are not quite sure what exactly is going on...when decisions are slow and sign off even slower.
- How to understand the new language is emerging ...and the 'normal' voices at UCT are 'silenced' or 'not accepted'
- How to be heard when we are facing the outpouring of such enormous pain, trauma and personal stories on exclusiveness, alienation, structural racism.
- How to bridge the extreme polarisation of audiences and not enough time to tailor-make communications for specific audiences.
- How to get the message across when direct media platforms(digital) drive the protesters message and we are one voice against thousands.
- How to win in traditional media when sensationalised "if it bleeds it leads" and uninterested in the complexities so extreme waves of criticism levelled publically at the institution from our own staff and students;
- Ensuring that our communication helps and does not hinder engagement or increase conflict.
- Creating a 24/7 remote office that could work anywhere, anytime
- Social media: How to use images and work against the edited versions online and the ethical questions about our images by the legal office.

The critical question is what to do when all the traditional communication techniques seem to fail you. In addition it is a fact that most the solution for the entire dilemma will be found in communication in one form or another.

# The things we think worked for comm's:

- Taking the long view: believing it will be ok over time, if we do the right thing. 34 op-ed pieced in 2015
- Sit in the JOC (security office): ignore sign –off: give running commentary: interpret the situation for the media.
- Ensuring a neutral platform that belongs to all voices. Learn the new language and sensitivities. Don't fear the arguments and verbal conflicts. Created a “view from the campus” space on the web.
- Developed human stories that spoke to certain main issues i.e. woman in leadership, 20 years tgo being a professor, student success stories and working in images.....i.e photo gallery on graduation etc.
- Remaining respectful and positive on all platforms and to all no matter what or how insulting/painful it got. 37 campus announcements in february alone.
- Interviewed people to advance the understanding of issues: “curriculum reform, queer issues, etc
- Developing fact sheets on key issues i.e financial aid, demographics at UCT, residences at UCT
- Continue to sell the “good news stories” on research etc...
- SETT successes: Sexual assault response team, lkey ability, art work and symbolism task team etc.





# Thank You

