



## **Remembering Marikana: public art intervention and the right to the city in Cape Town**

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### **Abstract**

This article investigates the role played by cultural initiatives in urban struggles in South Africa, and the emergence of public art to assert the right to the city. I explore how artistic–activist interventions engage an understanding of social justice and the right to the city in provocative visual and performance art. I demonstrate how such interventions reflect Lefebvre’s conceptualisation of the city as a space to be inhabited in an active process, which critically includes its re-imagination.

The paper focuses on creative interventions in Cape Town that confronted the city’s genteel public space with the second and third anniversary of the shooting of 34 striking miners at Marikana on August 16 2012. I argue that bringing the commemoration of the massacre into the public urban space – where post-apartheid Cape Town exhibits its claim to cosmopolitanism – challenges the politics of space in South Africa. I asked, how these cultural initiatives articulate claims through reimagining the city how they engage with the intertwined politics of culture and class followed by both the city and the nation–state, and how the artistic practices contest urban citizenship in contemporary South Africa.

### **Remembering Marikana in Cape Town: August 2014**

In August 2014 social activists and artists claimed ownership of central Cape Town through a series of creative interventions that confronted the city’s public space with the second anniversary of the shooting of 34 striking miners at Marikana. The Marikana massacre of August 16 2012 has been described as a “watershed moment” and a “turning point” of post-apartheid South Africa (Alexander 2013). It certainly continues to be a traumatic moment (Marinovich 2016). On that fateful day the South African Police opened fire and killed 34 workers who were on strike at the Lonmin-owned mine on the platinum belt in the country’s North West province.

Two years later a group of artists and activists took to the streets of Cape Town, 1,500 km southwest of the site of the shootings. South Africa’s oldest, and at almost four million inhabitants the country’s second largest, city is also its most famous urban tourist destination and often either proudly proclaimed or denounced as being (too) “European” and “not really African.”<sup>1</sup> “We are all Marikana” was the slogan under

which a number of social movements and trade unions had come together in Cape Town for the Marikana Day second anniversary. The coalition organised marches and a candlelight vigil in memory of the dead miners. Protests took place in central Cape Town and on the Cape Flats, where the march led on to the informal settlement, named “Marikana,” which at the time was the site of running battles between residents and city authorities (Davis 2014).

Activists came from organisations such as Right2Know that advocates freedom and access to information, the Social Justice Coalition, trade unions, and the shack dwellers association Abahlali baseMjondolo. Also among the participants was the African Arts Institute (AFAI), a Cape Town-based NGO in the Culture and Development field. A key role in the Cape Town commemoration was played by activists connected to Tokolos Stencils, a stencil and graffiti initiative in Cape Town, whose activists prefer to remain anonymous.<sup>2</sup> The “Tokoloshe,” as they call themselves after the mischievous spirits that can be called upon to cause trouble (Anonymous 2014), created a stencil, which became iconic for Marikana remembrance. Above the heading “Remember Marikana” is the image of “the man in the green blanket,” based on a photograph taken by Leon Sadiki. This figure with the bright green blanket draped around his shoulders, and forever associated with the tragedy, was Mgcineni Noki, a rock drill operator at the Marikana mine who rose to prominence as a strike leader in mid-2012. Colloquially known as “Mambush,” after a famous soccer player he adored, this 30-year-old migrant labourer from the Eastern Cape died that fateful afternoon in August 2012 with 14 bullets to his face, neck and legs.<sup>3</sup>

In August 2014, two years after the Marikana shootings (and while a government-appointed commission was investigating the events), the Tokoloshe’s stencil was sprayed all over the city. This was not all however. Members of the collective, together with staff members of AFAI dropped large-scale banners from the N2 highway bridges, challenging motorists driving in and from the city with slogans such as “Miners down – profits up” and “Sharpeville. Never again. Marikana. Again.”<sup>4</sup> These banners also played a prominent role during a public picket outside the national Parliament buildings located in the Cape Town Central Business District (CBD); later in the month they were displayed in townships on the Cape Flats. Hosted by AFAI, seven performance poets participated in a Marikana commemoration poetry procession through the St George’s Mall pedestrian zone in the Cape Town CBD, where the pedestrian area serves as a significant tourist spot. In this urban space, lined with quirky coffee shops and endless rows of stalls where traders offer ethnic merchandise (mainly to European and North American tourists), seven poets, accompanied by 34 marchers, representing the slain miners, publicly gave expression to feelings of mourning in movement and words. In another initiative of AFAI, activists and artists “renamed” well-known streets in the Cape Town CBD with the names of the 34 miners who had died at Marikana. Placards with the names of the miners were placed underneath the official street sign, and short

biographies and their photographs were placed lower down on the street poles in popular public places of significance.

My article looks into creative interventions in Cape Town in 2014 and 2015 that commemorated the second and third anniversary of the Marikana massacre. I argue that bringing the commemoration of the August 2012 killings of striking workers into the public urban space – where post-apartheid Cape Town prominently exhibits its claim to cosmopolitanism – challenged the dominant politics of space of contemporary

South Africa. I investigate how these cultural initiatives articulate claims through reimagining the city, how they engage with the intertwined politics of culture and class followed by both the city and the nation–state, and how the artistic practices contest urban citizenship in contemporary South Africa.

In theoretical perspective I demonstrate how the artistic–activist interventions reflect Henri Lefebvre’s conceptualisation of the city as a space to be inhabited in an active process, which critically includes its reimagination. Taking its cue from Lefebvre’s concept, the “right to the city,” as understood in this paper, is about advocating transformation of the city through artistic intervention towards a new urban humanism. I draw on and bring into discussions of public art intervention Nigel Gibson’s (2011) work on the “Fanonian practices” of movements of the urban poor for social transformation in contemporary South Africa. Gibson reads them through the connection of Fanon’s dialectic of liberation with the activists’ assumption of a Lefebvrian understanding of the right to the city as “a cry and a demand.”

The article makes multiple connections. Firstly it points out the links between different public art interventions in Cape Town, which include the artistic activism at the heart of the Marikana commemorations and those of anti-gentrification campaigns in the city. Secondly it shows how public art activism relates to contemporary insurgency in South Africa, particularly the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall student movements. While this discussion remains somewhat open-ended – necessarily so, I argue – it throws open, and begins to address significant questions of aesthetics and urban politics in contemporary South Africa.

### **Public art interventions and the right to the city in Cape Town**

Post-apartheid Cape Town has no paucity of public art controversies and activism by subversive collectives such as the Tokoloshe. Indeed there are artistic public interventions to consider, which seem more directly leaning towards the right to the city as “a cry and a demand” than the activism to commemorate the labour struggles and state violence that took place a thousand miles away from the city. Yet, the Marikana urban arts activism does not only inform, indeed iconically hold together, the less than polite arguments and iconoclastic activism around Michael Elion’s sculpture “Perceiving Freedom,” which was installed on November 6 2014 on the Sea Point Promenade. It also turns up in the visualised spatial struggles over the gentrification of the inner city working-class

neighbourhood of Woodstock. Though its historical origins are located in a different part of the country, the iconic image of the “man in the green blanket” has come to play a central role in recent public art interventions and the struggle for the right to the city in Cape Town. I argue that this image embraces contestations to urban citizenship on the basis of interconnected racialised class and cultural politics.

Elion’s piece, installed with the City of Cape Town’s financial and logistical support was “vandalised” two weeks after it had been erected. The sculpture, a giant pair of metal spectacle frames, unmistakably of the Ray-Ban brand, was installed originally – looking out across the sea to Robben Island – with links suggested between the designer spectacles and former South African President Nelson Mandela. The information board featured a photograph of Mandela wearing a pair of sunglasses, inferring that they were Ray-Bans and declared the piece a “sculptural tribute” to Mandela. It explained that it

“looks out in contemplation towards Robben Island and sets up an axis and dialogue with our nation’s history” (cited in Hodes 2014). Critics sarcastically asked, “what remained unclear to many was *how* an outsized pair of Ray-Bans was to achieve such an ambitious feat, geometric and discursive, aesthetic and ideological” (Hodes 2014). Two weeks after the installation of this piece of public art, the giant plastic “lenses” were defaced with graffiti (“We broke/Your hearts”); among the commentary on the controversial artwork appeared again, a few months after the Marikana anniversary, the characteristic stencil of the “man in the green blanket.” A historian based at the University of Cape Town candidly commented on the “vandalism” (as the city’s and Elion’s initial response went):

Elion’s work pretended to be about democracy, but it was really a case of an individual and his corporate sponsors doing damage to public property, spoiling the commons, for personal gain. And that, by any other name, is vandalism. Ironically, it is through the opposition that the work has inspired, including the “defacement,” that it has been a force for political participation and engagement – the shared objectives of both public art and democratic citizenship (Hodes 2014)

Around the same time another form of public art graffiti and “defacement” activism occupied public discourse in the city. In Woodstock, a residential neighbourhood close to the Cape Town city centre, a new stencil, featuring the ornamented words “gentry-naaiers” (literally: “gentry-fuckers;” “*naai*” is an Afrikaans slang term, best translated as “fuck”) appeared on buildings that house wine bars, real estate agents, etc. Over the past few years this neighbourhood, a long-time home to a predominantly Coloured working-class population has been subject to an increasing gentrification process which has progressively displaced inhabitants.<sup>5</sup> Tokolos Stencils insisted that this artistic graffiti activism was not of their doing but credited an independent collective. Yet the iconic stencil of Mambush appeared in several instances on walls and signboards alongside the “gentrinaaiers” lettering.

Eventually, a group calling themselves the “Xcollektiv” claimed responsibility for this anti-gentrification activism.<sup>6</sup> The Xcollektiv has engaged in a range of campaigns attacking the alleged anti-poor politics of the City of Cape Town. For instance, stencils reading “this city works for a few” appeared on posters picturing Cape Town major Patricia de Lille, sarcastically taking on the city’s own slogan, “this city works for you.” Battles against anti-poor politics indeed have been at the centre of struggles over the right to the city taking the shape of popular protests over housing, sanitation, water supply etc. in post-apartheid South Africa, with a steep upsurge over the past decade (see, e.g., Brown 2015; Paret, Runciman, and Sinwell 2017).

## **Right to the city, art, and the struggle for liberation in South Africa**

### ***Right to the city and the anti-apartheid struggle***

In South Africa, claiming the right to the city has been an integral part of the continuing struggle for liberation. In South Africa, along with much of the Anglophone Global South, the discourse tends to apply the “right to the city” merely as a slogan or a term, taking its meaning for granted rather than using Lefebvre’s writing to think through urban struggles (Huchzermeyer 2013, 4). However it has become significantly applied during the past decade by urban social movements and a few academics, social scientists and urban planners (Huchzermeyer 2013).

Urban social movements such as Abahlali baseMjondolo<sup>7</sup> have been at the forefront of campaigns for the right to the city in contemporary South Africa, which they understand as the urban poors’ demand to have a life of dignity (Gibson 2011). These struggles express more than just claims to improving people’s neighbourhoods, and the city through “service delivery,” as the state’s and developmentalist discourses have it (e.g., Nkomo 2017). They claim control over the city and arguably understand the right to the city following David Harvey, as far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanisation. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights (Harvey 2008, 23).

The widespread assumption of Lefebvre’s concept under the banner of a politics of claiming “rights,” as indicated by Harvey’s summary, ostensibly deviates from how Peter Marcuse (2014) delineates Lefebvre’s own reading of the right to the city as a political claim for social justice and social change. However, following Marcuse, although activism by urban social movements is often initially concerned with being included in the existing city from which they have been excluded, this does not contradict Lefebvre’s own understanding. Contemporary urban movements may have often more limited claims (than advocating revolutionary change) but those that they address tend to be particularly urgent. Marcuse thus argues that the “strategic reading”

of the right to the city, as it has been picked up by urban activists around the globe should be seen as a step towards a radical perspective of urban renewal, citizenship and revolutionary transformation, which was espoused by Lefebvre 50 years ago.

Marcuse's discussion is helpful to understand the situation in apartheid South Africa where the struggle for the right to the city as "a cry and a demand" meant, first and foremost, the claims by the country's majority population for the right to reside in the city on a permanent basis and to move freely within the urban space at any time of the day. Until the Abolition of Influx Control Act of 1986, with few exceptions, black Africans were regarded as non-inhabitants of the urban and were controlled, through the infamous pass laws, as "visitors" who were issued only temporary visiting rights to the city for the purpose of providing labour. Within the urban space, moreover, residency was sub-divided on the basis of "race" and, in the heyday of grand apartheid in the 1960s and 1970s, also ethnicity.

In Cape Town most Black residents were forcibly confined to the "Cape Flats," the location of most of the city's townships, as the racially segregated "black" and "coloured" residential areas are known in South Africa, that were designated by the country's previous white rulers. Moreover, the Group Areas Act of 1950, which enforced residential segregation, had very different effects on the city life of black Africans and Coloureds (and the very small number of "Indians," never more than about 1–2% of Cape Town's population). In the heyday of apartheid, Coloureds were evicted from most of the city's urban spaces and forced to relocate to new, racially segregated settlements on the Cape Flats.<sup>8</sup> However, black Africans were excluded from residency rights in Cape Town even more than in the country's other cities. Significantly, the Western Cape was declared a "Coloured Labour Preference Area;" this meant basically that for any job opening (unless it was declared "white") Coloureds would always be considered to the exclusion of Africans. Finding employment was thus made almost impossible. Black Africans, therefore, were consistently deported from Cape Town to the ethnic "homelands," to which they were assigned, mostly those named "Transkei" and "Ciskei" in the Eastern Cape, more than 1,000 km to the east of the city.

The "right to the city" thus understood meant struggles for residency in the cities. From the mid-1970s onwards, mostly blacks began to erect unauthorised shack settlements, most often in close proximity to existing formal townships. In the 1980s some of these settlements (Nyanga, Crossroads, KTC) erupted in horrific violence when local black authorities, known as "councillors," with support of the apartheid authorities, began using ethnic criteria to allocate residence rights and plots.

In post-apartheid South African cities shack settlements, today referred to as "informal settlements," remain – and have increasingly become – central for the understanding of the divided city. While there are no more legal restrictions of

residence, informal settlements residents are the most marginalised; they are not disconnected from the city, though.

Over the past decade (since 2004), struggles for the right to the city have gained momentum, with community protests arising in informal settlements, townships, and occasionally spilling over into the broader public space, such as national roads and highways (see Paret, Runciman, and Sinwell 2017). These protests have in general discourse been dubbed “service delivery protests,” ostensibly demanding access to services such as sanitation, new land occupations, etc. This terminology has been critiqued by critical scholars and activists alike (e.g., Alexander (2010); who claimed that they constituted a “rebellion of the poor,” and their alternative consideration as popular struggles for recognition and dignity, which has been suggested by authors such as Fakir (2014); or Gibson (2011)).

Lefebvre’s reading of the right to the city, and the analysis by recent scholars of urbanism such as Harvey and Marcuse makes good sense. It was certainly not restricted to the improvement of “service delivery;” equally, Lefebvre’s deliberations on notions of citizenship and belonging went beyond the inclusion of marginalised groups in the city as it already existed. Instead his focus was on transformation and renewal of urban life and throughout his seminal work he emphasised the role of “revolutionary groups” (Lefebvre 1996, 154). This Marxist theorist saw the urban revolution under way, and to be pushed forward by a revolutionary working class constituted out of urban rather than exclusively factory workers. This point has been emphasised more deeply by Harvey in his recent work (Harvey 2012).<sup>9</sup>

### ***Art, resistance and the South African city***

Lefebvre (1996, 156) further invoked the significance of art, which “brings to the realisation of urban society its long meditation on life as drama.” He added that, “especially, art restitutes the meaning of the *oeuvre*” (157), the making and remaking of urban everyday life in space and time. Reading Lefebvre closely while remaining open to the specifics of the past and present South African city, and particularly Cape Town allows for a deeper understanding of the ways in which art played a significant role in the struggle against apartheid and for the right to the city.

During Cape Town’s late apartheid-era struggles one key institution was the Community Arts Project (CAP), which was established in 1977 in the aftermath of the 1976 student uprising. During the 1980s CAP came to play a momentous role in the intensified political struggles on the Cape Flats. It attracted practicing artists and provided training in the arts for people from across Cape Town, including township youth, unemployed workers, nurses, teachers, etc.

While also producing explicitly “political” art, such as posters for mobilising resistance, a recent exhibition and publication from the “archive” of the CAP

collection demonstrates multiple ways in which the resistance art of the late apartheid era also contributed to the imaginative (re)making of everyday life in the city (Gruenebaum and Maurice 2012). Such representations of everyday urban life in a less than picturesque way are to be highlighted in attempts to rethink the aesthetics and politics of reimagining the city. In this context it is of special significance that CAP, and other art initiatives of the time grew out of the city's urban resistance and efforts to think beyond the apartheid urban geography of forced removals, which cursed and reshaped Cape Town even more than other South African cities (Western 1981). Forced removals, colloquially recalled as "Group Areas" after the infamous act that legislated them, became a specific focus of Capetonian urban art. Artists thus responded to the historically specific demands of the right to the city in the late apartheid era.

### **What's Marikana got to do with the right to the city**

The connections between the resistance against the spatial apartheid of the past and the urban struggles and community protests of the present expound the significance of the Marikana Day artistic activism for contemporary claims to the city. This means, first of all, going back to Lefebvre's understanding of the right to the city as a "cry and a demand" for urban citizenship towards a transformed and renewed right to urban life, which is based on the freedom of movement and the appropriation of urban space for inhabitation. To think the right to the post-apartheid city in general, and Cape Town in particular, beyond the strictures of capitalism and nationalist conceptions of citizenship, requires contemplating the continuities and discontinuities between the colonial and apartheid city, and contemporary South African urban society.

Nigel Gibson's (2011) discussion of the post-apartheid city helps this understanding tremendously. Drawing from Fanon's critique of post-independence Africa, Gibson's discussion of Fanonian practices zooms in on the popular protests of the early 21st century, and more particularly on new urban movements such as Abahlali baseMjondolo and the Anti-Eviction Campaign. These movements, Gibson (2011, 27) writes, "link the problem of liberation to issues of space and the right to the city." Unsurprisingly hence, some of these urban movements were part of the August 2014 Marikana Day activism in Cape Town. They linked the public interventions in the cosmopolitan urban space of the Cape Town CBD – the renaming of streets, display of banners at Parliament buildings, performance poetry procession, and the ever-present stencil of the "man in the green blanket" – to a march in the informal settlement named "Marikana." This march, which took place on August 16 2014, was in protest against the eviction of shack dwellers as well as in memory of the slain miners. The "Marikana" settlement, so named upon its erection in April 2013 by members of the Cape Town branch of Abahlali baseMjondolo, had repeatedly been forcibly demolished by the City of Cape Town's anti-land invasion unit.

I argue that bringing the commemoration of the August 2012 killings of striking workers at Marikana into the public urban space of the CBD – where post-apartheid



Cape Town prominently exhibits its claim to cosmopolitanism – challenges the dominant politics of space of contemporary South Africa.<sup>10</sup> These interventions emanate from, and speak to the long history of popular struggle for the right to the city as an integral part of the fight against colonialism and apartheid.

The artistic interventions by AFAI, the Tokoloshe and other collaborating activists, poets and artists presented an appropriation of the urban space in the name of those who remain excluded and marginalised in the post-apartheid society, exemplified in its spatial organisation. As Gibson, with reference to Fanon, has it, “the spatial Manichaeism of apartheid” (Gibson 2011, 137) may have given way to the cosmopolitan post-apartheid city, however, “it is a one-sided cosmopolitanism – a cosmopolitanism based on money – which systematically denies the poor access to the city” (184). In other words, the racial Manichaeism of earlier periods of South African history, which excluded Blacks from “white South Africa” has – partially, one needs to caution – turned economic, towards a spatial organisation of the urban, which is leaning more towards “class” than “race” as categories of social organisation. While the “old” South Africa and its cities excluded all Blacks, in the “new” dispensation the “dehumanising and derogating attitudes formerly projected towards all Blacks are now channelled towards the Black poor” (194). Thus, class-linked, racialised cultural politics rather than the unadulterated emphasis on “race” have become significant in the contestations.

As in the racially segregated South Africa of old, the patterns of exclusion consist of spatial relations rather than simply of class. While the neat dividing lines of apartheid South Africa have broken down, the exclusion of the poor and their marginalisation to the “native” quarters of Fanon’s colonial city (read: the townships and shack settlements of apartheid and post-apartheid times) symbolises the dividing lines of post-apartheid South African society at large.

Where South Africa’s new Black middle class asserts its Africanity, including the consumption of ethnic products in glitzy shopping malls (as Gibson points out in his discussion of gentrification [2011,188]), the poor, and specifically migrant labourers of rural origin, such as the miners killed at Marikana, continue to be excluded from the image projected of a cosmopolitan, hyper-modern, democratic South Africa, a stellar part in a globalising world. The media images, from 2012 through to the release of the final report of the government-appointed commission that investigated the events of August 2012,<sup>11</sup> continuously presented the striking miners as “savages,” as prone to violence and, this is significant, as determined by “culture.” They have been renounced for carrying “pangas” (machetes), home-made spears (so-called traditional weapons) while their use of “muti” (traditional healers’ medicine for magical purpose) during the strike has been widely commented on in the South African mainstream media.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, the comments by Black members of the Lonmin mine management (quoted, for instance in Rehad Desai’s remarkable film “Miners Shot Down;” also see Marinovich

(2016)) were disparaging. The report of the Farlam Commission into the Marikana killings similarly came to the conclusion that “Mambush” – the slain key negotiator – was “an instigator of violence,” as described by “Mr X” (a miner who testified on behalf of the police), who emphasised, once more, that the miners’ comportment – crouching and the clicking of their “traditional weapons” – was at the instructions of the *inyanga* (herbalist, “traditional healer”) whom the workers had consulted during the strike (Jika 2015). These representations constitute significant indicators of what I refer as racialised, class-linked cultural politics as the basis of urban exclusion in contemporary South Africa.

In the imagination of “polite” urban South Africa (i.e., the white and today also including the Black corporate, political elites), the migrant labourers at Marikana do not “belong” to mainstream society, and the urban space. Neither is there a place for the “man in the green blanket” in the neoliberal (or corporate) Black Consciousness.<sup>13</sup> In either perspective, the men – and women – in blankets, green or otherwise, are still denied the right to the city (literally and figuratively) in the spatial culture-class politics of post-apartheid South Africa.

### **“Decolonise”: 2015 Marikana activism at the University of Cape Town**

Fast-forward one year to August 2015 and the artistic interventions to commemorate the third anniversary of the Marikana events. Art activism again took on the politics of exclusion in contemporary South Africa. The interventions on the occasion of the Marikana third anniversary saw some of the 2014 actors again. The Tokolos Stencils collective once again emerged as the creator of visual activism in the public space of Cape Town. While the signature stencil of the “man in the green blanket” remained a presence, other interventions differed sharply from those of the previous year. The artistic activism’s aesthetics and politics assumed a much more controversial format. If we wish to understand this, we need to consider how, within a matter of a few extraordinary months in 2015, South African society and politics had changed radically.

On the morning of August 17 2015, a Monday, students and staff of the University of Cape Town (UCT) arrived to find stencils and graffiti spray-painted all over the central parts of campus, which recalled the Marikana massacre. They did more than just commemorate the slain miners though, they charged the university with responsibility. The signature “man in the green blanket” stencil graced the memorial stone for the university’s members who had died in World Wars I and II, flanked by roughly sprayed graffiti in red paint, reading: “Marikana 16 Aug” and “Remember Marikana.” While the memorial stone is a plain square block and rather inconspicuous, it sits in a prominent position on the campus, close to where until a few months earlier another, highly contested memorial had stood, that of Cecil John Rhodes who had donated the land on which central parts of the University have been built.

Walking up the famous “Jammie” steps towards “Jameson Hall,” the place of graduations, university assemblies, prestigious lectures, and other ceremonial events, set against the Devils Peak section of Table Mountain, one enters a visibly rarefied place. UCT’s main (upper) campus, which was laid out from 1918 and built up in the late 1920-1930s, was declared a National Monument in 1979. Jameson Hall, which lies at the heart of it, strikes one with its colossal, European classics-inspired architecture, complete with high pillars. On the morning of August 17 2015, these columns had been adorned with graffiti; on each of the iconic pillars one word of the incongruous slogan “Max Price For Black Lives” had been spray-painted. Thus Max Price, the university vice-chancellor was declared personally responsible for the deaths of the miners at Marikana. Other sites on the campus had not been spared by the weekend artistic intervention. Part stencil, part spray-painted were statements reading “Non-poor only” and “Remember Marikana.”

With this, the artistic activists aimed to indict the university’s complicity in the Marikana massacre. Through a Facebook post the Tokolos Stencils art collective claimed responsibility for the campaign and declared that “UCT has blood on its hands” as the university holds shares in the Lonmin company that owns the mine at Marikana. The university responded with a media release of its own as of August 17 2015 on the UCT website, in which it readily admitted that it indeed held such shares. In the same document, the institution charged that it “condemns the use of vandalism as an irresponsible and inappropriate method of protest that shows no respect for the students and staff of the UCT community” (Lucas 2015).

Students from the #RhodesMustFall movement at UCT also responded and expressed support for activism that acknowledged the slain miners and called on the university to cut its ties with mining companies such as Lonmin. “What we are talking about here is trying to provide solidarity for Marikana, but also fulfilling our core mandate which is to decolonise the University,” student activist Brian Kamanzi was quoted at the time, as listed on the website of the *Voice of the Cape* radio station on August 18 2015 (Hartley 2015). The student activists said that the movement supported the “Tokolos Stencil,” and that they considered the spray painting a form of “creative art,” but that in their view the action did not constitute vandalism, as the University claimed.

The distinctive aesthetic and political forms of the 2015 campaign, and the contrasting perceptions of the university and the student activists indicate a much-changed mood. Compared to the previous year the political argument was aggressive rather than poignant–contemplative. Politically, one of Cape Town’s most revered liberal institutions, UCT, was accused of being directly implicated in the massacre. Aesthetically, the campaign was rougher, less figurative and more invasive than the 2014 largely symbolic creative intervention. These differences need to be understood against a set of events, which had taken place earlier that year and had provoked tremendous changes of politics in South Africa, and the country’s universities, and more particularly UCT, in mid-2015.

## **“Decolonise’: #RhodesMustFall, and beyond**

August 2015, which marked the third anniversary of the Marikana massacre, took place in a society that was in the grip of a massive challenge by a new generation of students who had begun to make their voices heard very loudly from March that year, when students at UCT began a forceful campaign, dubbed #RhodesMustFall to have the statue of Cecil Rhodes removed, which had been sitting on the university grounds in a prominent position for the past 80 years. At the beginning was an individual activist’s spectacular deed. On March 9, UCT student Chumani Maxwele threw a bucket full of human faeces onto the statue of a seated Cecil Rhodes. From the initial defacing act, the movement got traction fast. Over the next few weeks, a growing number of activists, made up of mostly Black but also a number of white students, successfully disrupted everyday business on the campus. They found support amongst academics from UCT and other universities in the Cape Town area, as well as members of the public. The movement also succeeded to find the support of the University’s governing bodies; on April 9, the Rhodes statue was removed under the thunderous applause of a large crowd who had gathered to watch this significant moment.<sup>14</sup>

So why, one may ask, do I introduce the new South African student movement into this discussion of public art and the right to the city? What is the relevance of debates about racism and demands to decolonise education in this context? There is, of course, a dreadful historical trajectory that reaches from the colonial era of Cecil John Rhodes to the present time (Nyamnjoh 2016). With the statue of Cecil John Rhodes the #RhodesMustFall movement brought down a pivotal symbol of colonialism and exploitation. As a mining magnate, Rhodes literally and figuratively stood for exploitative capitalism in South Africa, before and after 1994. So when the third anniversary of the Marikana massacre approached, bridging the residual distance between the genteel spaces of Cape Town and the excluded Black poor, which had been the implied aim of the 2014 campaigns, was no longer considered a possibility by some of the activists and artists.

The 2015 campaign was less symbolic, less poetic, more outraged. It was fiery, angry; angry with the capitalist racist character of the post-apartheid society, angry with the University, which activists, students and artists saw as deeply implicated in the Marikana affair. In 2015 the Marikana dead were seen as having been killed, partially at least, by the city’s revered academic institution, which prides itself on its past anti-apartheid liberalism, and where many of the artist activists involved had been or still were students.

Some preliminary concluding thoughts about public art interventions and the right to the city, 2014 and beyond Even before the public art interventions discussed in this article happened in 2014 and 2015, the role of public art interventions in the urban spatial transformation of post-apartheid South Africa had found attention among urban researchers, planners, and art historians. Makhubu and Simbao (2013, 300) observed that, “[a]mong the generative aspects of the second decade of democracy in South Africa is the growing inclination to interrogate the idea of reclaiming the city through ‘public’

performances that nevertheless speak to limited publics.” Art historians Makhubu and Simbao expressed concern that despite critical intentions of public art interventions in the context of new genre art initiatives such as the annual Cape Town “Infecting the City” public arts festival with its explicit commitment to socially-engaged art, “art” remained seen as a middle-class preoccupation. They argued that art remained exclusive; even where performed or installed in public it was seen as happening in safe spaces such as art galleries and urban spaces under special protection. They consequently advocated an urgent need to reclaim urban spaces in a way that is both more radical and more inclusive, in order to undermine historical urban repression:

Transgressive artistic performances and anti-establishment *alternative* spaces need to find their audience and their place. . . . By examining the ways in which space and time are regulated through economic and political processes, artists can undermine historically repressive configurations. Themes increasingly invoke issues of access and dispossession, movement and migration as well as criminalisation and security. Not only do these works address the spatial arrangement of place along racial and economic boundaries but also the movement of people in and out of the city as units of labour and within the continent and from other parts of the world to South Africa’s economic centres (Makhubu and Simbao 2013, 300, emphasis in original)

The “Remember Marikana” artistic interventions in Cape Town, discussed in this article, allow us to push further. For one, they address “the incomplete victory over urban repression, the continuity of anti-urban and exclusionary forms” (Huchzermeyer 2013, 3) in new ways by bringing together different critical initiatives. Three different strands rallied around the intervention, most publicly in 2014: the human rights-oriented public arts programme of an established culture and development NGO, AFAI (originally founded as the South African branch of the Arterial network), subversive activist–artistic interventions by anonymous groups such as Tokolos Stencils and Xcollektiv, which confront the one-sided cosmopolitan public urban space of neoliberal–globalised post-apartheid South Africa, as well as new urban movements of the poor, such as Abahlali baseMjondolo. This extraordinary alliance contested urban citizenship on the basis of class, as well as the racialised and class-based cultural politics of exclusion.

Artistic–activist interventions like those to commemorate Marikana thus reflect Lefebvre’s conceptualisation of the city as a space to be inhabited in an active process. They bring to life Lefebvre’s notion of the appropriated urban space as *oeuvre* and as a work of art (cf. Huchzermeyer 2013, 10).

### **Coda: writing from the present**

I first wrote about “Remember Marikana” public art interventions in Cape Town in May 2015. The massacre had struck down the miners two-and-a-half years before, and the statue of Cecil Rhodes had been taken down at UCT just the month before. This moment asked in extraordinary measure for reflection on aesthetics and politics and the

urban in Cape Town, past and present. I wrote again about it, briefly, for a presentation at the *Anthropology Southern Africa* annual conference in September 2015. The lively discussion during this well-attended conference session threw open some of the breaches that had erupted by then. Shortly before the conference, the stencil and graffiti activism on the UCT campus had provoked heated controversy about the political aesthetics of these interventions. Was this vandalism, as the University charged? Was it artistic intervention? The lines were drawn politically, as became clear from the opposing statements by the University executive and student activists, which I discussed above.

A few weeks later the massive #FeesMustFall movements shook South Africa. When I went back to writing about Marikana, public art intervention and urban politics in Cape Town in early 2016, the most recent eruption of campus protest had turned even more controversial. There was the Shackville installation in February,<sup>15</sup> and the aftermath of its violent removal when activists tore down and burnt artworks from the University's collection. This "bonfire of colonial vanities" (Van Graan 2016) was denounced as "barbarism" by some in South African public and social media discourses, including the art world. Others insisted on the political significance of putting fire to paintings as colonial signifiers. And then, on March 9 2016, as I was travelling to the workshop on art and urban politics in Basel to present the updated paper, a photographic exhibition to commemorate the anniversary of the formation of the #RhodesMustFall movement, "Echoing Voices from Within," opened at UCT's Centre for African Studies (CAS) gallery. As CAS stated on the Centre's website (Centre for African Studies 2016), this event was disrupted through protest action, involving performative activism and graffiti by a group, which called itself the Transcollective, aimed at challenging the student movement's politics of gender and sexuality. The movement at the core of recent radical challenges to contemporary South Africa's establishment appeared to implode in full view.

Since the Marikana massacre in August 2012 South Africa has changed irrevocably. Before Marikana, there were community protests, and cries and demands for the right to the city. There was engaged art. After the massacre, there was #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall. A new generation of radicalised young activists, intellectuals and artists have challenged the political and cultural status quo of continuing racism under the banner of decolonisation. Some have questioned the politics of gender and sexuality. And, as I showed, some resist the ravages of global capitalism. Importantly, activist practice has revolved around disruption: disruption of the spaces at universities and beyond that insist that "business as usual" has prevented the decolonisation of the post-1994 South African society.

The practice of disruption has particularly challenged established notions of aesthetics and politics. Little is certain but the "Remember Marikana" public art aesthetic interventions show that aesthetic activism is no longer confined to artistic production, not even those earlier forms, which I discussed above, which had arisen from the country's history of liberation politics and struggles for the right to the city.

In 2014 the “Remember Marikana” campaign confronted the space of central Cape Town with the men and women “in green blankets.” This was done largely through symbolic interventions, such as the much-discussed street-renaming, and the poetry procession. The stencil of the “man in the green blanket,” too, though spray-painted without permission, was a signifier of a radical claim to inclusion and the right to the city as a cry and a demand of those who remain excluded from urban citizenship, and whose visions of the city remains invisible.

A year later, the confrontation was politically less directed towards claiming inclusivity, aesthetically it was less symbolic. Instead UCT, which to many radical student activists remains the embodiment of “whiteness” and the colonial in the postcolony, was challenged head-on. The aesthetic forms, except for the iconic green blanket” stencil, had shifted quite radically, too, towards disruption. Whether or not the rough graffiti, which significantly covered – and invaded – the rarefied academic space was a form of public art intervention, as the “Tokoloshe” art collective and the student activists maintained, or “vandalism,” as the university claimed, remains an item for discussion in South African public and social media debate. This discussion about disruptive aesthetics and politics, art and urban politics takes the scholar radically out of the academic ivory tower into a world of extraordinary uncertainty between new openings and closures, new creativity and burning controversy.

## Notes

1. These acclamations are common parlance among the city's residents.
2. For more information in the artist-activists own words, see Gedye 2014.
3. For a wonderfully detailed, sympathetic yet not eulogising account of Noki's life and death, as well as his role in the strike, his attempts to broker peace and the complicity of powers behind the Marikana tragedy, see Davies (2015).
4. Sharpeville, a township near Johannesburg, was the site of the most infamous massacre in South Africa's apartheid history. 69 people died there on March 21 1960 when the South African Police opened fire on a protest gathering against the apartheid pass laws.
5. A note on the use of the racial categories "African," "black" and "coloured" (in the following without quotation marks) is necessary: The apartheid racial categories continue to be used commonly, and even resurge as actually-existing groups. While I do not wish to support the apartheid-induced usage, this paper uses the categories as they are commonly understood and used locally: "African" and "black" interchangeably denominate people who speak an African language as their first language. "Coloured" refers to people of mixed descent, who are being defined as a social group, or a "community" in common parlance, and mostly speak Afrikaans. "Black," with a capital B, in contrast refers to the wider definition of "Black" to include other "people of colour" in South Africa, notably Coloureds and South Africans of Indian descent.
6. The Xcollektiv describes itself on their website as "a creative incubator for collaborative multi-disciplinary projects by visual-artists, writers, filmmakers and performers who are exploring issues of dispossession, trauma, memory and resistance through their work." [<https://xcollektiv.wordpress.com/author/xcolective/>. Accessed August 13 2017].
7. The shackdwellers movement Abahlali baseMjondolo originated in urban struggles in Durban in 2005. It has since branched out to Cape Town and is considered the largest urban social movement in South Africa, see Gibson (2011). Abahlali baseMjondolo also works in global alliances that campaign for the right to the city with organisations such as War on Want in the U.K. [<https://www.waronwant.org/righttothecity/who.html>].
8. The most well-known case is "District Six," an inner-city neighbourhood close to the Cape Town harbour, whose population was forcibly removed between the late 1960s and the early 1980s.
9. This allows for significant theorising of the current urban social movements and popular protests in South African cities driven by an un- and underemployed urban class, adequately dubbed "the poors" (Desai 2002).
10. Noteworthy are the personalised memory of naming and picturing the slain miners in the street renaming intervention by the African Arts Institute and its collaborators.
11. The 600 page final report of the Farlam Commission of Inquiry (named after its Chairperson) was released by South African President Jacob Zuma on June 25 2015. In his "executive summary" speech Zuma emphasised that the findings cleared the national executive of all responsibility, including now President Cyril Ramaphosa, who was in 2012 a non-executive Director of Lonmin and had been implicated in the run-up to the



shootings. Zuma however announced that the top police officials involved in the event would be investigated further.

12. Conversely, Marxist analysts of the strike and killings have denied dimensions of culturally specific politics and imposed pre-conceived theory onto the miners lived lives and politics, as brilliantly pointed out by Carmelita Naicker (2015). Naicker critically engages reductionist forms of Marxism in the writings on “Marikana” by researchers associated with units such as the SARCHI Chair in Social Change at the University of Johannesburg, or the Society Work and Development Institute (SWOP) at the University of the Witwatersrand. The cultural universalism of this body of class analysis, in its dismissal of cultural specificity of popular politics, mirrors the representation of the migrant labourers as “savages.” Further discussion is much needed but goes beyond the focus of the present paper (Becker 2014; cf. Naicker 2015).

13. These are Gibson’s (2011, 65–66) assignments for ideologies of Africanity that emanate from the ANC government and support policies such as the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) strategy.

14. Later in the year, from September onwards, the new South African student movement rose to a mass revolt. Tens of thousands of students shut down their campuses and took to the streets; they marched on the grounds of Parliament in Cape Town, and the Union Buildings, the seat of national government in Pretoria. Under the banner of #FeesMustFall they fought against fee increases in higher education, called for an end of racism and for that of neo-liberal outsourcing practices of support services at universities (Becker 2016). This however was still in the future, when the Marikana commemoration raised the heated debate in August 2015.

15. A symbolic installation to raise awareness about, and protest the lack of accommodation for black UCT students.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

### **Notes on contributor**

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