

Possessive Investments in Whiteness at a Post-Apartheid University

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In 2015, the University of Cape Town's Academic Freedom Committee (AFC) invited *Jyllands Posten* cultural editor, Flemming Rose, "to deliver the annual TB Davie lecture in August 2016". The vice chancellor, Max Price, subsequently withdrew the invitation. In 2005, Rose commissioned controversial cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, which set off polarised debates globally. This paper argues that the AFC's statement about Price's decision and certain op eds offer meaningful insights into possessive investments in whiteness (cf. Lipsitz) in post-apartheid South Africa. Contentions that academic freedom is being compromised mask the vested interests that lie behind inviting Rose. The *Jyllands Posten* cartoons are a form of liquid racism due to their ambiguity. Simon Weaver explains, "Liquid racism is a racism generated by ambiguous cultural signs that encourages the development of entrenched socio-discursive positioning, alongside reactions to racism, when reading these signs. The images are ambiguous because they combine the signs of older racisms alongside those of political and social issues that are not necessarily racist." This resonates with Melissa Steyn and Don Foster's argument that "a characteristic of *White Talk* in post-apartheid South Africa is the interdiscursivity of old and new forms of race talk, providing both continuity and inventiveness." Critics of Price's decision raise concerns about academic freedom and question UCT's fears about violence, which may allegedly come from #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall activists or local Muslims. The issues are ambiguous as old and new forms of racism are articulated along with valid concerns about free speech, which is under threat nationally. Arguments for and against Rose's invitation thus provide important clues about the extent to which white male privilege at UCT is defended and liquid forms of racism and Islamophobia are articulated.