

UHURU

Unit for Humanities at Rhodes University



THINKING
HUMAN
EMANCIPATION &
POPULAR
EXPERIENCES OF
STRUGGLE



RHODES UNIVERSITY

Where leaders learn

UHURU

Unit for Humanities at Rhodes University

CONTENTS

Unit for Humanities at Rhodes University (UHURU)

Introduction: Unit for Humanities at Rhodes University (UHURU)	5
Towards new theories of human emancipation <i>Prof Michael Neocosmos, UHURU Director</i>	9
New forces are with us <i>Prof Richard Pithouse, Senior Researcher, Programme Coordinator and Supervisor</i>	19
Diverse approaches to human emancipation <i>Postdoctoral Researcher and Postgraduate Students</i>	29
Dr Chika Mba	30
Mikaela Nhondo Erskog	35
Jonis Ghedi Alasow	40
Camalita Naicker	45
Fezokuhle Mthonti	48
Sarah Bruchhausen	51
Yolisa Kenqu	54
Paddy O'Halloran	58
A selection of publications by UHURU postgraduate students	62
<i>#FeesMustFall: The new wave of human emancipatory movements in SA</i>	63



Universities throughout South Africa require vibrant Humanities Faculties to drive the critical debates and discussions of the day.

Unit for Humanities at Rhodes University (UHURU)

(Uhuru is the Swahili word for 'freedom'; it is a term used throughout Africa.)

Equality, freedom and justice are ideas that are central to any understanding of human emancipation. This was the case for the European Enlightenment, for the American, French and Haitian revolutions and during the struggles for national liberation and freedom in Africa and the Global South.

It was these struggles for freedom that gave birth to the humanities and social sciences from the 18th century onwards. Intellectual innovation and popular struggles for freedom have historically always developed hand in hand.

In Africa, people fought long and hard for freedom during their liberation struggles, yet the promise of emancipation from poverty and oppression for all has not been met. The achievement of human emancipation remains a central,

largely unresolved problem on our African continent. It therefore needs to be a prime concern of the humanities and social sciences today, just as it has been in the past.

Established in January 2014, UHURU is a site of critical debate and research for the development of thought about human emancipation and popular experiences of struggle.

UHURU is concerned with rethinking:

- How human emancipation is to be understood today in the 21st century;
- Why the human emancipation project has failed in South Africa and throughout the African continent; and
- How to begin to think an emancipatory future.

Within UHURU, postgraduate and postdoctoral candidates from any discipline within the Faculty of Humanities are addressing these and other questions.

A new cadre of critical thinking intellectuals

UHURU sets out to develop and enable the formation of a new cadre of critical thinking intellectuals from South Africa and Africa. Emphasis is placed on the development of critical thinking black South African and women scholars who will significantly contribute to the human emancipation debate and to the transformation of the South African higher education landscape.

Drive the critical debates and discussions of the day

Universities throughout South Africa require vibrant humanities faculties to drive the critical debates and discussions of the day. It follows that the issues concerning human emancipation need to be at the top of the curriculum. After all 'the idea of the human' is the basis on which the human sciences were founded

to investigate. The idea of the human is obviously of universal significance and quite distinct from (although always related to) more specific concerns.

UHURU provides a site of thought for the Faculty of Humanities at Rhodes University to discuss, debate and research issues relevant to human emancipation in the context of higher educational institutions where the need for transformation is key.

The Director of UHURU, Prof Michael Neocosmos, emphasises that within this space it is imperative for the humanities and social sciences in South Africa to recognise and understand that we are part of Africa, an understanding that will help to decolonise our institutions of higher learning in general, and to avoid reinventing the wheel regarding post-liberation outcomes in particular.

African research and post-liberation outcomes

The authoritarian trajectory of post-colonial states in Africa, so clearly noted in the work of the great humanist intellectual, psychiatrist, philosopher and revolutionary, Frantz Fanon, should have taught us about potential post-liberation outcomes in this country. Yet the social sciences in particular in South Africa, have, in the main, shown themselves to be dominated by an obsession with exceptionalism, which tends to link South Africa more to the Global North than to the rest of Africa.

Without forgoing our links with Western thought, UHURU extends its intellectual reference points to be more inclusive of those from Africa and the Global South.

Gender in Africa

In the same vein, UHURU places gender and the theoretical work done on gender issues in Africa and the Global South at the centre of its work. For example, research within UHURU explores the possible liberatory features of the matriarchal foundations

of traditional African society discussed, inter alia, by the Senegalese historian, philosopher, physicist and politician, Cheikh Anta Diop and in the work of Nigerian poet, anthropologist and essayist, Ifi Amadiume.

In South Africa, by contrast, the debate on the contradictions between ‘human rights’ and ‘tradition’ has typically been characterised by an emphasis on the former over the latter, as ‘tradition’ has tended to be seen as uniformly oppressive to women. The possibility of rethinking this from within the parameters of African tradition needs to be thoroughly investigated.

The Concept of UHURU

The concept for UHURU originated with Rhodes University Sociology Professor, Fred Hendricks, and the former Vice-Chancellor of Rhodes University, Dr Saleem Badat – now the Programme Director of International Higher Education & Strategic Projects for the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

They envisaged a unit that would attract postgraduate and postdoctoral researchers interested in grappling with current ethical, moral and political questions, and with rethinking human emancipation today.

UHURU is such a unit, where postgraduate and postdoctoral researchers can learn from each other, and extend their research beyond the traditional confines of disciplinary learning. Students are brought together in reading groups where they share transdisciplinary texts that all South African and African intellectuals should read, including new and/or alternative thinkers from Africa and other parts of the world.

Collaboration

UHURU has links with a number of universities and research centres in South Africa and internationally. The Unit strongly supports trans-university collaborations and encourages investigation without borders.

Strong partnerships have been established with the Centre for Indian Studies in Africa (CISA)

and Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER), both at Wits University, and the Centre for Humanities Research (CHR) at the University of the Western Cape, amongst others.

All three are also funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and collaborate on research projects, speaker seminars, academic exchanges and fund-raising initiatives to afford students and academics the opportunity to spend time at each other's institutes, and at others outside of South Africa.

UHURU and its partner universities in South Africa are constantly working on attracting postgraduate and postdoctoral researchers from the continent and other parts of the world. An important aspect of this is to reverse the trend whereby a considerable number of scholars from South Africa and the continent head for Europe and the United States to pursue their postgraduate and postdoctoral studies.

South Africa strives to attract top researches and to nurture a vibrant academic environment for human emancipation research.

Towards new theories of human emancipation

“It is worrying and terrifying to witness the oppression, inequality and corruption occurring in South Africa, Africa and the world today,” says UHURU Director, Prof Michael Neocosmos.

“At the moment, few new ways of thinking are being provided by intellectuals and even fewer solutions. We seem to be confronted only with questions without answers, so that the youth in particular are unclear regarding a way out of what seems to be a constant crisis.

“In Africa, the emancipation from poverty and oppression that liberation from colonialism and apartheid originally promised all people has not materialised. Uhuru is still elusive; freedom seems unattainable.

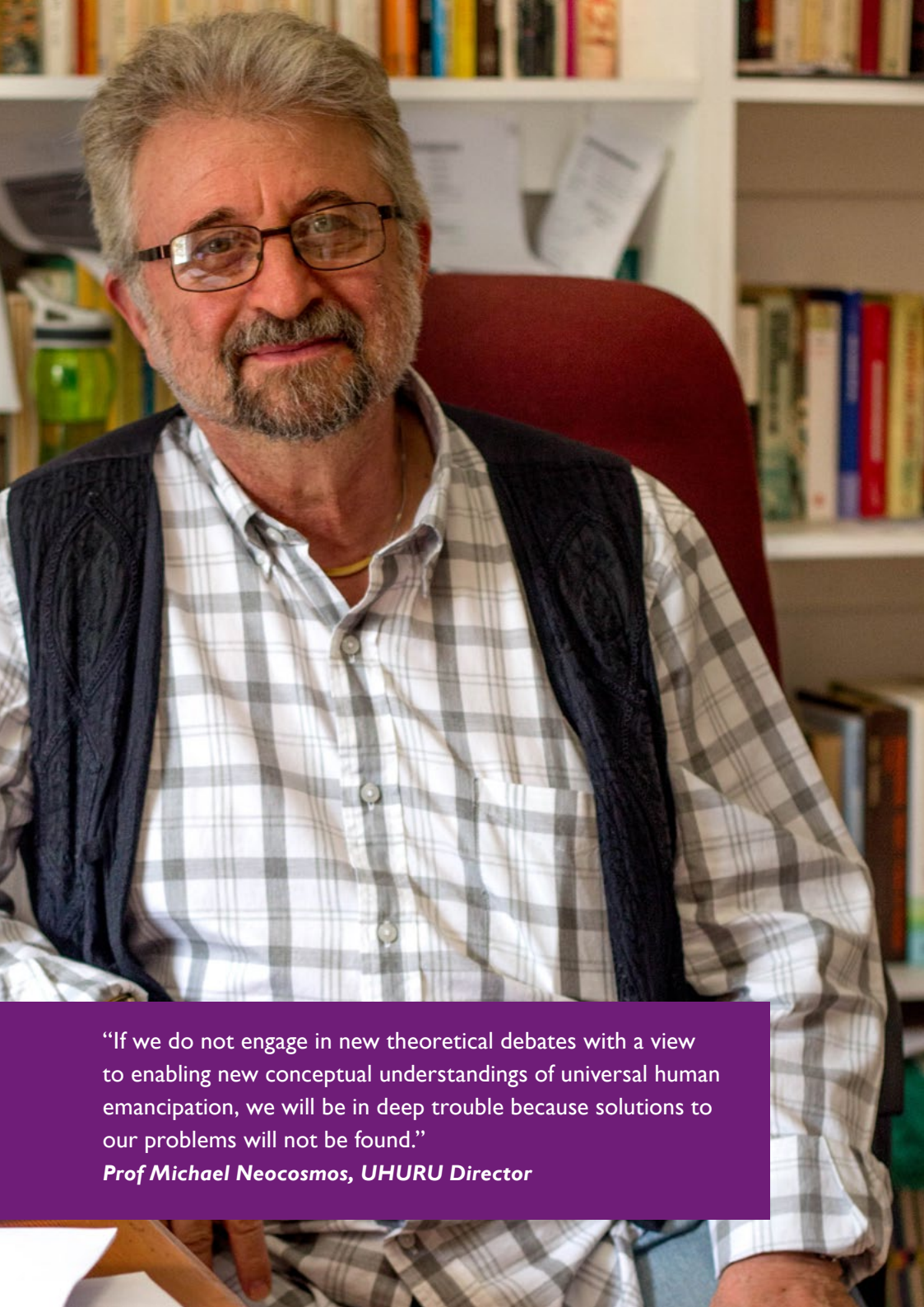
Corruption and the enrichment of a few

“In South Africa, more than two decades after the first democratic elections, the ANC government is finding it increasingly difficult

to convince people that the struggle for liberation has led to anything other than corruption and the enrichment of a few. This is extremely disappointing for so many South Africans because the achievement of democracy came with so much hope.

“This achievement, which was the product of ordinary people’s efforts, ushered in a new way of thinking about emancipation for the first time on our continent with President Nelson Mandela calling for a peaceful transition to democracy with the participation of all the people,” explains Prof Neocosmos, citing what Nelson Mandela said in Durban in 1990:

“Since my release, I have become more convinced than ever that the real makers of history are the



“If we do not engage in new theoretical debates with a view to enabling new conceptual understandings of universal human emancipation, we will be in deep trouble because solutions to our problems will not be found.”

Prof Michael Neocosmos, UHURU Director

ordinary men and women of our country; their participation in every decision about the future is the only guarantee of true democracy and freedom.”

Up until that point the overwhelming dominant view of how freedom was to be achieved in Africa had been through the barrel of the gun.

The promised emancipation

Millions of young people are now questioning why they have not experienced much of the promised emancipation. They are questioning why racism has not been overcome, why the ANC government is not representing the interests of the majority, why they are denied access to a good education, employment or careers.

“We are seeing the frustration of young people everywhere, including in our universities. They want their lives and their dignity to be taken seriously, which is why we are experiencing the *#RhodesMustFall* and *#FeesMustFall* campaigns, the municipal services and education

protests, and increasing support for the Economic Freedom Fighters,” continues Prof Neocosmos.

“South Africa is not alone in its experience of such protests. We are seeing protests and uprisings throughout Africa and the rest of the world. We are seeing young people reverting to fundamentalism of a quasi-fascist religious or ethnic nature, whether it is Islamic fundamentalism or fundamentalist Christianity or indeed ‘tribalistic’ Zulu-ness for example.

“In our country, such identitarian fundamentalisms are unfortunately allowed to overflow into xenophobic violence as we witnessed in 2015 in KwaZulu-Natal.”

These are frightening trends because the solutions to humanity’s problems cannot be found by reverting to crude ethnic and identity politics. Rather, the imperative today is for all of us to rethink in universal terms about humanity, democracy and human emancipation.

Prof Michael Neocosmos

B.Sc (1972, Loughborough University, UK); MA (1973, Wye College, University of London, UK), Ph.D. (1982, Bradford University, UK)

He has lectured and undertaken research at a number of universities in Africa since 1982, including:

- The University of Dar-Es-Salaam, Tanzania;
- The University of Swaziland;
- The National University of Lesotho where he headed the Department of Development Studies;
- The University of Botswana and the University of Pretoria, South Africa, where he was a Professor of Sociology;
- The University of South Africa (UNISA) where he was a Professor of Sociology and a Research Professor in the College of Graduate Studies; and
- Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa, where he took up his Directorship of UHURU in January 2014.

He has written numerous articles in the areas of social theory, the political economy and history of rural production systems in Latin America and Africa; national elections and rural politics in Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland; ethnic and gender identities and migrant labour in southern africa; democratisation, development, and, more recently political subjectivities in Africa; and political transition, xenophobia and human rights in South Africa.

His forthcoming book entitled *Thinking Freedom in Africa: towards a theory of emancipatory politics* will be published by Wits University Press in 2016.

Prof Neocosmos has been involved in research collaborations over many years with the Nordic Africa Institute (NAI) in Uppsala, Sweden and with the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) in Dakar, Senegal.

He is an NRF-rated researcher who has held various visiting fellowships in Sweden, Denmark, Finland and France.

His recent publications include:

Neocosmos, M. 2014, "What does Democracy Name in South African Politics?" *Grace and Truth: a journal of catholic reflection for southern Africa*, Volume 31, No 1 April pp. 57-71

Neocosmos, M. 2014, "Thinking Political Emancipation and the Social Sciences in Africa: some critical reflections" *Africa Development*, Vol 39 No 1 pp.125-158

Neocosmos, M. 2015, "The Sociology of Crisis and the Crisis of Sociology: academic Marxism and the absence of a thought of politics in South Africa" *Development and Change*

Neocosmos, M. 2015, "Editorial Introduction: the Marikana Moment, Worker Political subjectivity and State Violence in Post-Apartheid South Africa" *Journal of Asian and African Studies*

The last item is the introduction to an edited collection of essays on the Marikana Moment, presented initially at a colloquium held at UHURU in April 2014 which gathered together academics and postgraduate students from Rhodes University, Wits University, the University of the Western Cape and the University of Lille1 in France.

Research in the humanities requires reinvigoration

Research in the humanities to date has largely been concerned with studying identities, including political identities, and engaging in largely technical policy research or empirical studies. This is not getting us any closer to finding solutions to democracy and human emancipation.

Central to what needs to be emphasised intellectually is a reinvigoration of theoretical debates, which have mostly been lacking in South African universities since the 1980s, the period of mass political upsurge against apartheid.

“If we do not engage in new theoretical debates with a view to enabling new conceptual understandings of universal human emancipation, we will be in deep trouble because solutions to our problems will not be found,” says Prof Neocosmos.

Thinking beyond identities

“In particular we need to affirm that all people can indeed think politically beyond their identities, whatever these may be. If we do not, then it will be impossible to hold consistently to an idea of rational agency because identity politics will simply override reason, simply by reflecting specific interests.

“Identity politics are not founded on universal reason but are reactions – more or less coherent – to perceived attacks on one’s social, economic or political interests as defined by power in society.

“Today we are experiencing far too much inertia and traditional thinking at universities. It’s difficult to be innovative or pioneering in your thinking in an environment of inertia,” he explains.

Views of freedom

The views of universal freedom theorised by the social sciences and humanities in the 19th and 20th centuries might have made sense at the time but they are now largely redundant, at least

in some fundamental respects. To continue in the manner we have been thinking and doing for the past fifty years is no longer tenable. There is no historical subject (the 'working class' or the 'multitudes') that will lead us to a better world. We need to struggle to achieve this ourselves.

If you wear a suit for too long

Prof Neocosmos explains that in his own intellectual trajectory, understanding the shift from people's politics to state politics in South Africa in the late 1980s and early 1990s marked a major turning point:

"After 1990 in South Africa, a process of depoliticisation occurred when former freedom fighters donned suits and took up positions of power. They started telling ordinary people who had fought long and hard for liberation that it was no longer up to them to engage directly in politics, that those in power would now do this for them so that leaders 'should be given a chance'.

"I had to seriously rethink what was happening at this time, which I did in two long articles, one of which was entitled '*From People's Politics to State Politics: Aspects of National Liberation in South Africa*'. It was an attempt to come to terms with the fact that popular political agency which had prevailed in the 1980s was being depoliticised by state power. South African political leader Joe Slovo summed it up perfectly when he said, 'If you wear a suit for too long, your thinking changes'.

"Within a short period of time, such leaders stopped taking what ordinary people think and want seriously," says Prof Neocosmos.

People think

UHURU's scholars are arguing for a reversal of this; for an expansion of the social sciences and humanities to include the idea that 'people think', and that therefore reason is not exclusively the prerogative of academics and politicians. In 1875 Karl Marx observed, "The state has need ... of very stern education by the people". This remark holds true today.

“In South Africa today and throughout the world, the state and our higher education institutions, need a stern education by the people.

“We need to listen to the voices of the people and together debate why liberation movements have not brought greater opportunities for everyone and why most lives have not been transformed for the better. How can South Africa, after liberation, be the most unequal country on the whole planet? We need to question whether emancipation was improperly or inadequately thought through in the first place,” continues Prof Neocosmos.

Rethinking the whole idea of human emancipation

Of course, such debates would have to be informed by rigorous empirical work, but at their core they would have to be concerned with rethinking the whole idea of human emancipation.

Prof Neocosmos explains that in order to develop new critical thinking out of Africa, we

need to assess why the human emancipation project has failed throughout the continent.

Broadly speaking, there were three ways of thinking emancipation in the twentieth century in Africa:

1. The Marxist/Socialist model which ended up being embodied in authoritarianism and authoritarian states;
2. The national liberation struggle model which also ended up in various forms of authoritarianism; and from 1980; and
3. The neoliberal model, which has also turned out to be totally problematic with only a small minority benefitting in Africa, and also worldwide. This model has also shown itself to be authoritarian, as evidenced at Marikana in 2011. Global wars have also not ended with the end of the so-called ‘cold war’ but have continued unabated.

All three approaches have failed to provide a minimum of freedom for the majority of people globally. In Africa, the majority of people are living under conditions that worsen daily as the crisis of capitalism deteriorates.

In all three, we find a common denominator: achieving power through the state and then assuming the responsibility of transforming society, supposedly for the benefit of all.

It is impossible for the state to do this alone because it is founded on inequalities, hierarchies and interests, and thus driven by its inability to think beyond interests and identities in its very nature. This is the case with any form of state.

The interests of the majority

“The ideal of transforming society in the interests of the majority – in other words in a manner which places equality at the centre of thought – no longer seems to be guiding politics anymore; politics seem to have been reduced exclusively to the

management of interests and identities; there is no vision of a better world for the currently excluded,” says Prof Neocosmos.

“The world over, people get into power to manage their personal, class or group interests and enrich themselves, rather than thinking about the common good. This leads to the centrality of corruption, with a few benefitting at the expense of the many.

“The consequence is that the majority of people continue to be exploited and oppressed. Young people feel lost and are wondering where we are going. Young people in South Africa in particular are questioning what their parents meant when they fought for freedom, because what does freedom mean today?

“These are the big questions we need to address in our universities.

“We need to re-think how to democratise society and achieve the emancipation we have all hoped for.

“We need to relook at how ordinary people take their lives into their own hands and transform their own futures,” Prof Neocosmos explains.

From state politics back to people

Prof Neocosmos and UHURU believe that we need to re-theorise how political and emancipatory agency can be redirected from state politics back to people:

“It is no good relying on dominant Western theories for this. These theoretical perspectives have not been particularly appropriate to Africa or anywhere else in the world for that matter.

“In addition to this, it is clear that the West is no longer the only dominant power in the World with the rise of China, India, Brazil and others.

“At the same time, we cannot rely on the East for new theories either, we need to rely on ourselves, we need to rethink our own history and our own emancipation.

“This is what we are proposing to do at UHURU, and we are extremely excited about it.”

New forces are with us

“Everybody knows, to borrow a line from Leonard Cohen, that the deal is rotten. Everybody knows that we can’t carry on as we are. Everybody knows that Zuma can’t take us out of the morass into which we are sinking.”

So reads a paragraph from an article entitled ‘Grahamstown Spring: As real as the smell of rain on dry earth’ by Prof Richard Pithouse, published in the Daily Maverick* on 26 October 2015 during the #FeesMustFall protests.

In the article, Prof Pithouse explains that underlying the #FeesMustFall campaign – the largest and most effective student protest campaigns in post-apartheid South Africa – is not only anger amongst students but a rising anger amongst all South African citizens. The context speaks to UHURU’s core scholarly enquiry: human emancipation.

People are angry

“People are angry that they are not experiencing the promise of democracy, the touchstone of which is human emancipation. With this comes, at least, good education, employment opportunities, and some sense of a better life. But for most people this has not materialised. The youth in particular are feeling the fallout and are angry that they are being robbed of their future,” Prof Pithouse explains.

“We are a divided nation. On the one side we have a president who advances the politics of authoritarianism and an increasingly ruthless chauvinism, surrounded in the main by like-minded ministers and public servants who are turning the state into an increasingly authoritarian and predatory force.

* The Daily Maverick is a leading South African online news, analysis and opinion platform.

“On the other side, some of the brightest and best of our young people are at the centre of a rising rejection of key aspects of the status quo, often organised and sustained around a set of emancipatory, and at times, insurgent ideas.

“The resulting protests, articulation of demands and meetings with the heads of the universities and government have brought a lot of repressed dissatisfaction, pain, anger and anxiety to the surface,” says Prof Pithouse.

“At the same time,” he emphasises, “new possibilities have been opened. These are contradictory but there is no doubt that they include emancipatory dimensions.

A watershed era

“President Zuma’s agreement to a zero percent increase in university tuition fees for 2016, and university commitments to insource support staff and address the feasibility of free education are important steps forward. Further progress requires full

measures to be taken between what our universities claim to be, and what they actually are; and between what liberalism claims to be and what it actually is. There also needs to be massive state investment in universities, and other social projects like housing.

“Rising from this is an evident new resolve, bright and resilient, which affirms that the conversation about all this, which is at its core a conversation about freedom, needs to be taken up by young people, most of whom are black. It should be done on their own terms and in conversation with the long struggles and strivings of colonised people in South Africa and around the world,” continues Prof Pithouse, who eloquently expresses this in *Grahamstown Spring*:

New forces are with us

“The figure of the student in the occupation, on the barricade and in the street has taken its place alongside that of the miner on strike and the person, often a woman, rebuilding their shanty, again and again, on an urban land occupation as an image of contemporary militancy. New forces are with us.



“UHURU aims to be a welcoming space for all ideas; a space of constant debate, discussion and engagement that sets out to create a vibrant intellectual home, committed to serious work.”

Prof Richard Pithouse, Senior Researcher, Programme Coordinator and Supervisor

“New voices have taken their place in the nation. New ideas are with us. Young people have taken their place in the world and set about the work, the insurgent work, of building it. Young women are at the heart of this moment.

“New possibilities are opening, new possibilities forged in struggle by courageous young people, new possibilities that, like the songs of sadness, are as real as the promise that comes with the smell of rain on dry earth.”

Analysis at UHURU

This, says, Prof Pithouse is a moment that although contradictory, contains much that is to be welcomed, and is being closely analysed and rigorously debated at UHURU.

This is one of those rare moments in history when new evidence about outdated, unjust beliefs becomes so clear that it can no longer be ignored or denied.

As Frantz Fanon wrote in *Black Skin, White Masks*:

“Sometimes people hold a core belief that is very strong. When they are presented with evidence that works against that belief, the new evidence cannot be accepted. It would create a feeling that is extremely uncomfortable, called cognitive dissonance. And because it is so important to protect the core belief, they will rationalise, ignore and even deny anything that doesn’t fit in with the core belief.”

Shattering core beliefs

Prof Pithouse believes the ‘Student Spring’ could become an important part of a generational shift in South African politics, and debates.

“Intellectually it demands a reinvigoration of theoretical debates across the humanities, and in particular rethinking the idea of human emancipation in the current conjuncture,” he explains.

He is excited about the work that UHURU’s postgraduate and postdoctoral candidates will produce during these times, particularly given the gender

ratio and international aspect of the current group. It has more women than men; this will bring the voice of women to the fore, and it has candidates from South Africa, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and the United States, which internationalises the discourse.

New academic voices

“We have brilliant students, most of whom are black women, who are taking their place in the academy, and bringing new energies and ideas into the conversation.

“UHURU aims to be a welcoming space for all ideas; a space of constant debate, discussion and engagement that sets out to create a vibrant intellectual home, committed to serious work.

“The work that we are doing is fundamentally rooted in the African context and the Global South.” We are serious about contributing to an epistemic shift that can, to borrow a phrase from Prof Lewis Gordon, ‘shift the geography of reason’.”

UHURU in full flight

This moment in South Africa’s history could not be a better time for UHURU to be in full flight.

“The time has come to take our history more seriously, to bring in new evidence and ideas, including that which makes some people uncomfortable, and intensifies feelings of the ‘cognitive dissonance’ that Fanon wrote about,” says Prof Pithouse.

“As part of this work, we are reading the classic texts of the African canon, from the black experience in the modern world and from the South more broadly – many of these texts retain a disruptive power in a university still too often rooted in the logic of colonialism. We try to share access to ideas more broadly through our public lectures and workshops.

“Our core area of enquiry is the question of human emancipation in South Africa, then Africa, then the South and then the global context. We are open to new ideas, as many as possible. South Africa is at a make or

break crossroads, of which *#FeesMustFall*, *#RhodesMustFall*, popular protests in shack settlements and the mines, as well as xenophobic attacks are all, in different ways, symptomatic.”

Prof Pithouse says it is no coincidence that as the Rhodes University *#FeesMustFall* student march got under way on one side of Grahamstown, an attack on migrant Muslim traders began on the other side.

He argues that as the liberal consensus breaks down under the weight of the failure of the post-apartheid order to achieve emancipation. Reactionary and progressive alternatives, sometimes entwined and sometimes clearly distinguished from each other, will emerge from above and below.

Very dark times

“In some respects we are entering into very dark times in South Africa,” he adds. “Our economy is in crisis, there is mass unemployment, people’s most urgent basic needs are not being

met and the state is increasingly taking on predatory forms.

“Torture and political assassination have returned as forms of social control in some parts of the country. Chauvinistic responses to this crisis are being actively encouraged from various quarters. The aspirations for a non-racial society have not been realised.

“The failure is not just on the part of the ruling party. The media, civil society, the academy and other actors have failed to meet the challenges of the the last two decades. There is a general complicity with the bifurcated nature of the society under construction. We are rapidly moving away from the society envisaged in the Freedom Charter or the Constitution, into the sort of bitter crisis of the post-colony described so well in so many novels by people like Salman Rushdie or, Ayi Kwei Armah.

“That is why Franz Fanon has always been important to me. He speaks not just to the pathologies of the colony but also

to the crisis of the post-colony. He speaks to our particular circumstances with real intellectual power and lucidity,” Prof Pithouse explains.

New thinking in the world

Prof Pithouse says we do not yet have a South African Fanon, a theorist who can size up the movement, illuminate its contradictions and openings. But there is a new generation of brilliant young people on the cusp of taking a prominent place in society.

“Our students here at UHURU are already participating in the national conversation and bringing new insights and fresh energies into the national discussion. I have no doubt that UHURU scholars will make a serious contribution to new thinking and the building of new kinds of institutions. It is a privilege for me to participate in, and to witness their intellectual development,” says Prof Pithouse.

He adds that Rhodes University, like most South African universities, has significant issues

to deal with internally, including racism and the transformation project that has largely failed to deracialise the institution, and to decolonise its approach to teaching and research.

At the same time it offers scholars a space like UHURU in which there is a possibility to engage in critique and discussion that is directly aligned with strivings and struggles within, and beyond the university.

Exposed to exceptional thinkers

To inspire UHURU postgraduates to the greatest heights, they are exposed to a range of exceptional thinkers from every part of society, including academics, writers, poets, political theorists and filmmakers.

Some of the people UHURU has invited to give guest lectures include:

- **Prof Achille Mbembe:** philosopher, political scientist, author and public intellectual. He is a lecturer at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER) at Wits University

- **Prof Pumla Gqola:** leading feminist theorist who lectures in the Department of African Literature at Wits University
- **Nomboniso Gasa:** gender activist, researcher, and political and cultural analyst
- **Prof Lewis Gordon:** trans-disciplinary academic in philosophy, politics, Afro-Judaic studies, Africana studies and the study of race and social thought, based at the Philosophy Department and the Africana Studies Institute at the University of Connecticut in the United States
- **Prof Steven Friedman:** political analyst and Director of the Centre for the Study of Democracy at Rhodes University and the University of Johannesburg
- **Prof Nivedita Menon:** leading feminist thinker at Jawaharlal Nehru University in India
- **Prof Abdul R. JanMohamed:** major figure in post-colonial studies at the University of California at Berkeley in the United States
- **Prof Raquel Gutiérrez:** political theorist at the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla in Mexico
- **Prof Ananya Roy:** leading figure in urban studies and important feminist thinker based at University of Los Angeles California in the United States
- **Prof Lungisile Ntsebeza:** Professor at the Centre for African Studies at the University of Cape Town
- **Prof Premesh Lal:** historian and social theorist based at the University of the Western Cape
- **Prof Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba:** philosopher, activist and prominent Congolese and Pan-African intellectual

Prof Richard Pithouse

Prof Richard Pithouse began his academic career in 1995, teaching Philosophy at the then University of Durban-Westville and has taught Politics at Rhodes University since 2010.

He is a highly regarded as a compelling and innovative teacher whose curricula have been at the cutting edge of epistemic transformation.

In 2015, 85 students collectively nominated him for the Vice-Chancellor's teaching award. In their nomination they wrote:

"Richard establishes the classroom as a democratic space in which students are always able to ask questions and shift the discussion. Yet he remains a rigorous facilitator – framing and re-centering the discussion on the content and relevance of the original texts he prescribes."

Prof Pithouse has more than 50 academic publications, more than 500 citations and an H-Index of 14. The H-Index is an author-level metric that measures both the productivity and citation impact of a scholar's publications. He has published widely on political theory and on urban politics in South Africa. He is interested in the philosophy and politics of equality and freedom. His theoretical work draws extensively, although not exclusively, from the work of Frantz Fanon.

He is also a well published journalist who, over the last twenty years, has written about music, poetry and politics. A collection of his recent journalism is currently in press.

Prof Pithouse has taught and presented ideas in spaces ranging from shack settlements in Durban, to leading universities in the United States, an artists' collective in India and a movement of the landless in Brazil.

He is currently working on two books, one on Frantz Fanon and the other on urban struggles over the *longue durée* in Durban.

He sustains a lifelong commitment to active participation in popular struggles.

His recent academic publications:

Pithouse, R. 'An Urban commons? Notes from South Africa'. *Community Development Journal* 49.suppl 1 (2014)

Pithouse, R. 'The Shack Settlement as a Site of Politics: Reflections from South Africa'. *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy* 3.2 (2014)

Pithouse, R. 'Nelson Mandela, 1918–2013 The Crossing'. *Radical History Review* 2014.119 (2014)

Pithouse, R. 'Imperial Debris: On Ruins & Ruination'. AL Stoler (ed.), *Canadian Journal of History* 49.2 (2014)

Pithouse, R. Book review: Ekhaya: 'The Politics of Home in KwaZulu-Natal'. *Journal of Asian and African Studies* (2015)

Diverse approaches to human emancipation

UHURU's postdoctoral researcher and postgraduate students are exploring diverse approaches to human emancipation, including forms of popular resistance, past and current.

One of the students is looking at the link between the struggles against the apartheid imposition of tribal authorities in Pondoland in the Transkei homeland in the late 1950s and 1960s, and those of the Marikana miners, most of whom are from the Eastern Cape.

Another is exploring women's political thinking in hairdressing salons in South Africa. Extensions and braiding take several hours and during this time the women discuss their lives, what they lack, want and hope for, and how they interpret the state of the world.

Throughout history, African women have played an extremely important yet undervalued political, social and economic role.

Women dominate many of the social movements today, one such movement is *Abahlali baseMjondolo*,

a shack-dwellers movement that originated in Durban in 2005 and now operates in Pietermaritzburg and Cape Town. It campaigns to improve the living conditions of poor people and to democratise society from below.

We need to be re-educated in all sorts of ways in order to develop new theories of human emancipation, which will hopefully prove far more universal than what has come before, and improve the lives of the majority of people worldwide.

UHURU is extremely proud of its first cohort of postdoctoral and postgraduate researchers, and we offer some insight into their thinking and approaches in the questions and answers that follow.

Dr Chika Mba

Postdoctoral Researcher

What is your background?

I grew up in Enugu and Ikom in Nigeria where I studied Philosophy at the University of Ibadan, Ibadan Nigeria (B.A., Master's and PhD)

How did you hear about UHURU and Rhodes University?

I learnt about UHURU through Prof Richard Pithouse via the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) and the African Humanities Programme (AHP).

What research you are pursuing with UHURU?

The working title of my research is: *The Dialectics of Emancipatory Universalism: Engendering Fanon's Political Aesthetics in a World of Neoliberal Dominance*.

The contours of my research focus are as follows:

It may be argued by stalwarts of the 'free market', that neoliberalism has successfully enveloped the entire global economic structure, especially within its heydays in the 1990s when governments and peoples of different countries across the world freely adopted it. This seemingly global endorsement of neoliberalism would suggest that neoliberalism is not a cultural or political imposition on any part of the world by some hegemonic power; it would, in short, be regarded as a *universal*.

Yet Reaganomics developed very differently from Thatcherism; while an in-depth study reveals that Deng Xiaoping's China and other 'middle-income countries' owe their economic transitions to the vagaries of social and political needs, probably unknown to other developing countries that embraced neoliberalism at that time.



Widening disparity

If we take this a step further we see widening disparity in income and the ability to 'take advantage' of the global 'free market' between the poorer Global South, and the affluent Global North. This cannot and should not be explained away in cultural essentialist terms as the product of 'backward' versus 'progressive' cultures, with no link to neoliberalism.

A dead-end global silence

A dead-end global silence has so far been the lot of the groaning global poor, in the face of globally 'escalating wealth'. The question is why is this so? Why has the world chosen to look the other way in the face of the destructive consequences of neoliberalism? Why does it seem that the very survival of some societies currently appears to depend on their ability to work hard to get back into the 'neoliberal universal'. Where and for whom should we be looking for an alternative to neoliberalism?

A colonial false universal

Relying on Frantz Fanon's anti-colonial writings, the research I am undertaking views neoliberalism as a colonial false universal in need of emancipation. It attempts, via critical multidisciplinary pathways, to trace the contours of *emancipatory universalism*. The overall trajectory of emancipatory universalism engenders a new ethic of economic relations that opens the way for alternate engagement with divergent but mutually reinforcing human interests that trace non-linear and asymmetrical routes in different regions of the world.

The study I am undertaking will probe the possibility of a vertically dispersed global economic regime that is sensitive to the hegemonic inclemencies of current dominant paradigms, and that would constantly review and reconstitute the shibboleths of such paradigms to accommodate weaker economies. In clear terms, the research invokes anew, Frantz Fanon's call to urgently

humanise this world, precisely by defending human dignity and freedom against false universals and oppressive institutions. This is by no means an easy task.

What do you hope that UHURU can achieve in the South African and African context?

I believe that if UHURU's policy thrust is followed through, it would bring to light specially equipped public intellectuals in the humanities and social sciences in South Africa and on the continent. They would, amongst other things, be able to coalesce serious ongoing theoretical works in the universities with the thoughts and actions of those directly involved in the politics of the streets and liberation movements, which cut across local identities in South Africa and on the continent.

I believe that UHURU can:

1. Generate and be in the vanguard of critical public discussions surrounding popular political struggles in South Africa and other African states;
2. Harmonise empirical and theoretical continuities and discontinuities between the successes and failures of emancipation struggles in South Africa and elsewhere on the continent;
3. In specific cases, directly influence government policies and legislation on issues related to human rights; and
4. Fashion critical alternatives to neoliberalism for the post-colonial economy.

What does re-thinking the whole idea of human emancipation mean to you and why is it necessary in scholarly research?

Based on what I have been saying above, human emancipation is first of all about understanding what the idea itself means, could and should mean, and that simultaneously justifies its necessity as a scholarly subject.

More than the conceptual question, rethinking human emancipation, for me, is about counting or including those who are always already forgotten or excluded from discussions and discourses about human freedom and social equality in specific and wider contexts.

Human emancipation is about elevating human well-being in general above sectional interests and political calculations, while the process of its realisation in South Africa and on the continent lies readily within UHURU's statement of intent and achievable goals, as enunciated above.

Mikaela Nhondo Erskog

Master's student (History)

What is your background?

I am a South Africanised, Zimbabwean-Swede. I was born in Sweden and I have a Swedish father and Zimbabwean mother. I grew up all over the African continent: in Zimbabwe, Uganda, Mozambique and South Africa where I have lived for about 10 years. I think of South Africa as my home more than anywhere else. I matriculated from Uplands College in White River, Mpumalanga, and got into Rhodes on an English Olympiad Scholarship. I completed my BA undergraduate degree at Rhodes University in English literature and politics, followed by a joint Honours in history and politics at Rhodes.

What brought you into UHURU?

After completing my Honours degree I wanted to pursue my Master's, and I was interested in the Unit's commitment to growing alternative scholarship through a student-centric approach i.e. engaging and nurturing students to pursue their own intellectual interests in a trans-disciplinary way. Trans-disciplinarity is a key scholarly principle, and significantly departs from inter-disciplinarity, which assumes that disciplines are pre-fixed, when they are actually a combination of several disciplinary streams that should constantly be undergoing change.

What is the importance of trans-disciplinarity?

I started to understand the importance of trans-disciplinarity when I was fortunate enough to do a postgraduate course with international scholar and philosopher Prof Lewis Gordon on 'Theories from the Global South'. During this course, we explored the issue of disciplinarity and discussed what he calls 'disciplinary decadence'.



According to this thinking, a discipline reaches its limits (and becomes decadent) by insisting on conforming to its supposedly unique practices, and, in the process, closing off the possibilities for new ideas to emerge.

So, for example, if a discipline insists that it can only function if a particular historically-located epistemological framework is followed, then it runs the risk of erasing any other possible outcomes of the research. It does not seek to transform itself but rather only 'borrows' ideas from other disciplines, in an inter-disciplinary manner, that promotes its agenda.

Trans-disciplinarity requires of the discipline to engage and absorb a wide range of thought processes and theoretical paradigms that constantly enliven its practices. Trans-disciplinarity recognises that knowledge production practices should go beyond rigid disciplinarity, precisely because it is only through exploring new and different practices that one can go beyond the limitations of the particularities that come with singularised disciplinarity.

What is the topic of your thesis – why did you choose it?

My thesis is on black women's discourses and struggles for intellectual being. It is research into the recent history of intellectual production of, and by black women in South Africa.

This is particularly important to me because the realm of ideas, to this day, is often designated and fitted to the historically white western male embodiment. Even when we call on the ideas of revolutionaries of historically oppressed groups, it is men that dominate the conversation. As a black woman, this leaves a lot to be desired. Using a gender studies framework I am looking at why this is, by looking at some of the black women figures in South African history.

So little is popularly known about the political-intellectual strides and contradictions navigated by some of South Africa's founding emancipatory women like Thembi Nkabinde, Manana Kgwane, Deborah Matshoba, Nomsisi Kraai, Thenjiwe Mtintso and Vuyelwa Mashalaba.

They stand out as key anti-colonial and anti-apartheid stalwarts, yet they are too often regarded as the appendages of their male counterparts. They are seldom known for the weight of their ideas or the relevance of their political-intellectual contributions.

Which intellectual women globally have inspired you?

My initial contact with intellectual women came in the form of literary works during my early undergraduate studies, such as Chimamanda Adichie, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Arundhati Roy, Olive Schreiner and Toni Morrison.

They were often taught quite apolitically, almost separately from their politics and philosophies. Later in my undergraduate studies and during my Honours degree, I started reading more overtly political women like bell hooks, Ifi Amadiume, Zine Magubane, Pumla Gqola and Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí. Yet still this came in the form of the particular 'gender' component of the courses, not as ends within themselves, which I believe they should be.

What is the importance of novel research in human emancipation?

We live in times and spaces where the dream of human emancipation was clearly deferred. Only novel research can actually help us navigate the 'why', 'when' and 'where' of how this came to be. Putting it all down to corruption only gets us so far. Only novel research that significantly departs from the same tried and tired tools for research and analysis can push further, and present us with the kinds of questions that might yield some sort of satisfactory lens and perspectives for the pursuit of the answers.

Are you emancipated?

I am a black woman of relative privilege. I exercise many freedoms and yet experience various prejudices. What makes the conversation about emancipation interesting is how my life experience makes me think about emancipation in the context of a society that thrives on oppression. Even with my 'privileges', how do we think of freedom in a society that accounts for you as exceptional when it should be the rule?

What I am interested in is how the process of my Master's will shape me and influence me as I grow as a person. Hopefully it will help me to think more critically and broadly about what it is I should be doing to contribute to greater emancipation for all women and all people.

Jonis Ghedi Alasow

Master's student (Political Studies)

What is your background?

I am the eldest in a large family and I grew up on a farm in an area called Ruiterbos, close to Mossel Bay on South Africa's Southern Cape coast.

My father is from Somalia and my mother is from Germany. My father left Somalia about 30 years ago and met my mother in Germany where they studied together. They came to South Africa in 1995 because they both wanted to farm (my mother because it was her dream and my father more because he wanted to be self-employed). We have been here ever since.

I went to a farm school in Ruiterbos until Grade 7 when I moved to York High School in George. After matriculating I enrolled at Rhodes University in 2011 to study law, politics, history, English, and linguistics. Politics particularly interested and I have continued studying in this field.

What brought you into UHURU?

My personal background as the son of a black father and white mother – who are both 'foreigners' in South Africa – as well as my upbringing amongst rural poor farmworkers' children, advanced my interest in various questions of justice. People, in varying degrees, are always either included or excluded from collectives and very often the reasons for exclusion of certain people are deeply unjust.



At a basic level, UHURU is primarily concerned with questions of freedom and emancipation from unjust exclusion and oppression.

This attracted me as it encourages an exploration of the questions that I had been pondering for some time. Although I came to UHURU not yet having articulated some of the exact questions I had (many concerns I have are yet to be articulated), the broad themes I am interested in pursuing, most certainly have a place at UHURU.

What is the topic of your thesis – why did you choose it?

My thesis launches a general enquiry into the politics of farm dweller communities in the area where I grew up (Ruiterbos). I wish to see how they define the issues they face and how they react to the issues that they articulate (if at all).

I was drawn to this project via the obvious personal connection. I have an affinity to the region and the people who live in this region, and within the academy, I would like to explore the types of politics that play themselves out in Ruiterbos.

At a more theoretical level I am interested in this project as a way of hopefully moving beyond the narrow framework that tends to dominate 'rural' academic engagements. Academics who have done research in rural areas have generally understood issues via questions of land restitution, work and working conditions. Studies of popular politics have also often centred on urban areas and not paid much attention to popular politics in rural areas.

As a result, I think that it is useful to take on this project. I think that the conclusions drawn from this project – whatever they might be – are likely to challenge some of the presumptions that dominate studies of popular politics and rural people.

Are you emancipated?

I define emancipation as freedom from the systemic and structural inhibition of people. For me, emancipation is necessarily a collective process. Hence for me, my personal freedom means nothing for as long as others continue to be repressed.

While I certainly have greater access to various benefits and freedoms that are usually linked with emancipation, I am not however, any more emancipated than the most marginalised in our society because my emancipation is linked to the emancipation of everyone. Emancipation is about granting *everyone* the opportunity to determine their future, and I cannot regard myself as emancipated in the absence of this.

The quest for emancipation is therefore a *principled* quest that is necessarily *collective*. My privileges do not emancipate me if they are at the expense of others. The injustices that are mounting in the world are not a problem for the marginalised to deal with. These injustices are a problem for everyone to fight against.

What is the importance of new innovative research in human emancipation at this time?

Unfortunately the role that is often played by the academy is one that is complicit in the inhibition of human emancipation. Many unjust assumptions that are made about processes and people have their roots in the academy, and are supported by the academy.

Nevertheless, there is potential for the academy to function as an enabler of emancipation through greater solidarity between thought and action.

For researchers this means that work must be done, which on the one hand allows for solidarity between theory and praxis, and on the other hand challenges the ideas and practices in the academy that function as obstacles to human emancipation.

Research seems to be a good place for theory and praxis to meet and combine towards an emancipated future. Between theory and praxis, neither can be very useful without the other.

Camalita Naicker

PhD candidate (Political Studies)

What is your background?

I was born in KwaDukuza (formerly Stanger), a small town on the North Coast of KwaZulu-Natal where I went to primary, and secondary school. I came to Rhodes University in 2007 to study Journalism and then stayed on to study political theory. I am currently studying towards my PhD through UHURU and the Politics Department at Rhodes.

What brought you into UHURU?

I was going to leave Rhodes after my Master's, but then my supervisor, Prof Richard Pithouse, told me about the opportunity to do my PhD through UHURU – an exciting new space for people to think and write about emancipatory theory and also to attend seminars, master classes and reading groups with people who are interested in the same kinds of theory and practice. It sounded really exciting so I stayed.

What is the topic of your thesis – why did you choose it?

My thesis examines the afterlife of the Marikana massacre as a political event. It explores the struggles for urban land and seeks to ask whether there exists a subaltern sphere of politics in South Africa, and if so, what are some of its features?

My Master's thesis was also based on research I did in Nkaneng, Marikana, and it examined the relationship between worker struggles and community struggles. It argued that the strikes and the political modes and forms of organisation amongst the Marikana men on the mountain were part of older forms

of political practice that are not recognised today within elite, official or institutionalised forms of politics.

The failure of Lonmin, the government and the trade unions to recognise forms of political practice that are outside the authorised domain of politics played a major role in what led to the violence we witnessed at Marikana.

My present research follows on from this, and seeks to understand other forms of the political, and how the state and 'civil society' responds to these.

Are you emancipated?

I am not sure what this questions means, I don't believe emancipation can happen purely at the level of the individual.

What is the importance of novel research in human emancipation at this time?

I think novel research is always important, and novel research into human emancipation is perhaps even more important. I'm not sure if this is what I am doing, but to answer the question more generally, I think South Africans are collectively coming to the realisation that there is a certain undecidedness that exists in a young nation like ours.

This undecidedness hopefully means that everything has not yet been worked out, and that we could, if we wanted to (and indeed as we have shown to ourselves we can), change things. There is a positivity about this that suggests it is definitely not too late to move forward in a different direction and to reclaim power from institutions – whether from the state, trade unions, the party, the university or the corporation – through collective action.



Fezokuhle Mthonti

Master's student (Political Studies)

What is your background?

I am from Ladysmith in KwaZulu-Natal. Both my parents were teachers and I was brought up in a tradition of education. My father has since passed away and my mother is today a subject advisor. I gained from them the value and importance of education and the ability to think critically.

What brought you into UHURU?

I was doing my Politics Honours at Rhodes when I took Prof Richard Pithouse's course on Fanon. It was absolutely amazing and it drew me to emancipatory works such as Prof Michael Neocosmos' book *From Native Foreigners to Foreign Natives*. I found it super interesting and since both Prof Neocosmos and Prof Pithouse are part of UHURU, I decided to apply for a Master's scholarship in the Unit, and was fortunate to be awarded it.

What is the topic of your thesis – why did you choose it?

My thesis is broadly on xenophobia, particularly female migrants in xenophobic discourse. My trigger is the emergence of foreign national hair salons all over South Africa, which raises the question as to whether xenophobia reproduces itself or is undone in these spaces, as an approach to thinking more broadly about emancipatory politics.

Does the level of violence reproduce itself in hair salons primarily frequented by women? It would appear not, and if I am on the money, it therefore helps us to think about xenophobia as being a more masculine discourse, where the



hyper-masculinisation of the state in South Africa arguably helps to fuel xenophobia.

This opens the door for us to introduce new ways of thinking about xenophobia, such as black feminist thinking, which might lead us to be able to make interventions around xenophobia and change people's thoughts about the 'other'.

Some of the big thinkers in black feminism who provide an alternative to masculine discourse are Nomboniso Gasa, Nthabiseng Motsemme and Pumla Gqola from South Africa, and bell hooks and Patricia Hill-Collins from America.

Are you emancipated?

I am starting to think through emancipation but it is a long road. I thought I was but I realise it is highly complex and it does not have an end point, as there are ongoing and new struggles for which to continuously fight.

What is the importance of novel research in human emancipation at this time?

It is imperative because of how much is still wrong with the world. We still need to think about how nationalism is failing us in the post-colony.

We need to question why – when the feminist movement has achieved so many gains – are women still systematically excluded from places of employment and continue to be treated like second-class citizens in many ways. This is particularly so for women who happen to be poor and also black, and not only in South Africa, but all over the world.

We need to start thinking in earnest about what didn't work before, and how to re-imagine theory and policy to change the world.

Sarah Bruchhausen

Master's student (History)

What is your background?

I was born and raised in Johannesburg. My parents divorced and I stayed with my mother who was an executive personal assistant at First National Bank. She has since moved to Zimbabwe where she lives with my stepfather. In 2010 I enrolled at Rhodes University for my undergraduate degree and I have been here ever since. I am considering becoming an academic, however, at the moment I am focused on completing my Master's, and I'll give it more thought after that.

What brought you into UHURU?

I joined UHURU in 2014. Camalita Naicker and I were UHURU's first students. The excitement of working with Prof Michael Neocosmos inspired me, as I got to know his work during my undergraduate studies.

What is the topic of your thesis – why did you choose it?

The working title of my thesis is: *A Subaltern History of Rural Resistance: The Mpondo Revolts*. It is a continuation of my Honours research paper, which I completed in the History Department in 2013, entitled *The Moral Economy of the Mountain: Understanding Marikana and the Politics of the Organised Poor through the Mpondo Revolts*.

I chose to continue looking at the Mpondo revolts as the primary focus of my Master's research because I believe that it is an under-researched area of South African resistance history which contains many theoretical insights for re-conceptualising emancipatory theory and the 'history of the struggle' – past and present.



Are you emancipated?

In answering this I am best served by drawing on Friedrich Engels' statement that 'no nation can be free if it oppresses other nations'. I believe the same can be said for individuals. Until we can manifest a world in which oppression of one human being at the hand of another is no longer acceptable, we cannot rightly call ourselves emancipated.

What is the importance of novel research in human emancipation at this time?

It is important at this time and in South Africa, particularly as we have the reputation internationally of being the 'protest capital of the world'. Yet, the way in which protest and popular politics are thought and written about by many high-profile academics and political analysts, is indicative of their shared inability to recognise emancipatory potential in the kind of political praxes that ordinary people are creating in order to affirm their humanity in the face of an increasingly oppressive state.

Yolisa Kenqu

PhD candidate (English Literature)

What is your background?

I was born in the rural Eastern Cape, but I mostly grew up in Soweto. I am from a single-parent home of three children, raised by my mother, who is a police officer. I went to township schools all my life, and was fortunate to have educators who genuinely cared about my progress and development. I discovered books fairly early in life. At the age of eleven, I read Bessie Head's *The Collector of Treasures*, which initiated my interest in African literature. Buchi Emecheta, Richard Rive, Chinua Achebe, Can Themba, Lewis Nkosi, Miriam Tlali and Maya Angelou were my dearest companions throughout high school.

After matriculating, I went to Wits University where I pursued a Bachelor of Arts degree with majors in African literature and media studies. As I completed my Honours degree in African literature, I caught the research bug. After receiving a generous scholarship from the Ford Foundation, I relocated to Rhodes University with my baby to read for my Master's in English Literature, which was awarded with distinction. Admittedly, my move to Grahamstown was heavily influenced by Zakes Mda's romanticism in *The Heart of Redness* of *imithotsho* and long-pipe smoking women. Needless to say they are rare to find in Rhini (Grahamstown).

What brought you to UHURU?

Two reasons: my amazing colleagues, Dr Litheko Modisane (Centre for Film and Media Studies, University of Cape Town) and Prof Grace Musila (English Department, University of



Stellenbosch) recommended UHURU, and I stayed because of my love for ideas and pursuit of African knowledge systems. UHURU is an amazing space for aspiring intellectuals and academics who are switched onto humanity's blues.

What is the topic of your thesis – why did you choose it?

My work mainly explores the black literary imagination in South Africa, coupled with the ideological and existential movements that have inspired black literary projects. It is, in many ways, a continuation of the work I began in my Master's project.

I explored the notion that there is a crisis of representation in black South African protest and contemporary literature. I looked at the continuities and ruptures between Afrocentric theory and black existential philosophy in order to ground my slippery idea that the African aesthetic is distinct from the black aesthetic.

My conclusion was that the race-conscious approach adopted by black consciousness offers a more nuanced grasp of identity politics in the South African context. I wish to return to this work through the lens of African humanism, exploring the ways in which black consciousness philosophy assumes the Afrocentric approach in literary expression.

Are you emancipated?

Trick question, next! On a serious note, we're all aware of the various legacies of slavery, colonialism and apartheid, which not only hold the post-colony to ransom, but also continually resurface and play themselves out in the present. And so, in many ways I'm not emancipated, if emancipation means the absence of historical baggage and structural constraints. At the same time I have always chosen to identify myself as black, which I regard as profoundly freeing despite the 'funk' that my identification entails.

What is the importance of novel research in human emancipation at this time?

Human emancipation is at the heart of what constitutes the human being. A denial of emancipation not only points to the refutation of basic human dignity, but also objectifies –or, as one cultural critic writes “thingifies” – a people.

Research into human emancipation combats, in part, the dehumanisation of those of who are structurally, culturally, politically, and economically regarded as non-persons. It also critically self-engages, challenges and broadens our conceptions of humanity, specifically in the ‘light’ of whiteness, which entrenched itself as the general human standard.

Paddy O'Halloran

Master's graduate (Political Studies)

What is your background?

I am from the state of Rhode Island in the United States. I did three years of my four-year undergraduate BA degree in history and anthropology in the United States at Fordham University in New York City, and one year in Ireland at the National University of Ireland, Galway. I thought it was important for my education to study outside the United States to learn from a different perspective.

What brought you into UHURU?

For the reason I just mentioned, I wanted to do my postgraduate studies outside of the United States, and I liked the openness to different perspectives and paradigms that UHURU encourages.

What is the topic of your thesis – why did you choose it?

My thesis is titled: *Landscapes of Division: Social Movements and the Politics of Urban and Rural Space in the Grahamstown Region of the Eastern Cape*.

I looked at social movements in and around Grahamstown to determine whether perceptions of an urban and rural political division are potentially challenged in popular politics. The basis of this is the idea that urban and rural spaces are perceived as distinct political spheres or politically distinct from one another. I wanted to see how the political division of urban from rural had occurred historically, and whether there are more political links than have been written about thus far. In both the urban and rural spaces, the reasons people choose to be political, as well as many of the issues that people face, such as unemployment, access to land, education, and services, and the influence of political parties and non-governmental organisations upon social



movements, are very similar. Both urban and rural spaces are undemocratic in many ways. I am interested in the similarities and differences in these political circumstances, and how people resist or negotiate them.

Are you emancipated?

As an American in South Africa, I certainly have had access to resources that others do not. However, I live in a global society in which people experience oppression daily, and I believe that the whole of society is oppressed in various ways. The root of what I am doing is to try to think about oppression and emancipation in a different way that also questions the modes in which oppression operates, and the routes towards emancipation.

What is the importance of novel research in human emancipation at this time?

The process of human emancipation faces numerous challenges in our time. I think it is very important to observe that the way in which we perceive, think about, and respond to our societies can be limiting to emancipation. New responses are possible with new thought. This is UHURU's view, as well as my own.

In terms of my intellectual work, my original suspicion that I would have room to think by leaving the United States, and especially through the opportunity of working at Rhodes University and UHURU, has been borne out. UHURU is exactly what I was looking for in terms of thinking differently and thinking with emancipation in mind. Working with many of the staff members and students has been invaluable in this regard.

The students at UHURU are looking to experiences and understandings of people and themselves that make necessary connections between intellectual work and real lives. Theory and theorists are useful to thinking and expression, but we must

always move beyond them – both intellectually and through activism – if human emancipation is actually going to become a reality.

Getting to know people and working with people outside of the University, many of them involved in the popular struggles, has also done more for broadening my perspective and helping my political ideas to mature in a way that I could not have done in any American university.

The fact that Grahamstown is a site of intense inequality and division, and often a place where the worst forms of politics find expression, is a good reminder of the importance of doing work that questions the causes and options for resistance to dominant ways of thinking that reinforce division and inequality. It is also a reminder of the need to think emancipation in the ‘very local’ of day-to-day life.

While there are many political problems and divisions in my home country, I would not have had the same opportunities to think and to move beyond them as I have had here. What I have learned in South Africa will be important in the United States and anywhere else that I find myself.

A selection of publications by UHURU postgraduate students

For full list: www.ru.ac.za/uhuru/publications

Bruchhausen, S. 'Understanding Marikana Through The Mpondo Revolts'. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*. (August 2015) 50: 412-426

Ghedi Alasow, J. 'Book review: Regarding Muslims: from slavery to post-apartheid'. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*. (August 2015) 50: 486-487

Mthonti, F. 'Book Review: Review of Memoirs of a Born Free: Reflections on the Rainbow Nation'. *Journal of Asian and African Studies* (2014)

Naicker, C. 2014. 'Book Review: A long way home, Migrant Histories 1800–2014'. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*

Naicker, C. 'Marikana: Taking a Subaltern Sphere of Politics Seriously'. Diss. Rhodes University, 2014.

Naicker, C. 'The Politics of Specificity: Marikana and the Subaltern', *Economic and Political Weekly*. 2015.Vol. 1. No. 24

Naicker, C. 'Worker Struggles as Community Struggles: The Politics of Protest in Nkaneng, Marikana', *Journal of African and Asian Studies*

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#FeesMustFall: The new wave of human emancipatory movements in SA

‘The doors of learning shall be open to all’ – this reference from South Africa’s Freedom Charter, last heard on South African university campuses in the 1980s, made a resounding return in October 2015, during the national student campaign known as #FeesMustFall.

It is a strong example of the new wave of human emancipatory movements that are gaining momentum in contemporary South Africa.

The trigger for #FeesMustFall was the proposal of university fee increases of approximately 10% for 2016.

It proved a step too far. The gauntlet of student power was thrown down, first at the leaders of the universities, then at the seat of government as thousands of *Born Free*s or *Beautiful Ones* marched on parliament and then on the Union Buildings on Friday 23rd October.

Their demands included free tertiary education and that their universities end the outsourcing

of workers, such as cleaning and security services.

History acknowledged student power on the 23rd October when President Zuma, following a crisis meeting with Vice-Chancellors, the Minister of Higher Education and Training, and student organisations, agreed to a zero percent fee increase for 2016, and committed to addressing the feasibility of free tertiary education.

This short-term commitment needs to be framed in the longer-term higher education picture, where, from 1994, the year of South Africa’s first democratic elections, to 2014, government subsidy has dropped from 50% of university income, to the current 40%. During the same period the

I NEED THIS DEGREE
SO THAT I CAN BE A BREAD-
WINNER AT HOME....!!
#RHODES ~~MIP~~ MI PMUST FALL!!
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number of students has swelled from 440 000 in 1994 to almost 1 million, with a considerable increase in the number of students who cannot afford the fees.

In 2016, undergraduate students needed to find approximately R40 000 to R50 000 per year, excluding living costs, to attend university in South Africa where less than 100 000 South Africans earn more than R1 million per year.

A university degree is one of the surest tickets to a better future. In South Africa, only 7% of all people with degrees do not have a job, whereas the official unemployment rate currently averages at 25.5%.

Underlying the #FeesMustFall protest is a rising anger amongst South Africa's citizens against a government that has failed to advance education, employment opportunities and economic upliftment for all, and a global neo-liberal economic system that increasingly reproduces inequality.

These, after all, are cornerstones of human emancipation. These

are some of the key issues that UHURU addresses, and its postdoctoral researcher and postgraduate students responded as follows to the question:

What does #FeesMustFall mean in the greater emancipatory context?

Dr Chika Mba

Six decades ago, the Freedom Charter was emphatic:

The Doors of Learning and Culture Shall be Opened! Furthermore, Education shall be free, compulsory, universal and equal for all children; Higher education and technical training shall be opened to all by means of state allowances and scholarships awarded on the basis of merit... The colour bar in cultural life, in sport and in education shall be abolished.

It took nearly four decades of national emancipation struggles for most South Africans to begin to entertain any real hope that these wishes could come to fruition.

After over two decades of democracy the #FeesMustFall protests that took the nation by

storm in October 2015, are a direct consequence of the failure on the part of the government and the private sector to actualise the educational wishes of the people of South Africa, as enunciated in the Freedom Charter.

I believe that a major obstacle to realising the dreams of the Freedom Charter is neoliberalism and educational corporatism. Thus, struggles against fee hikes and outsourcing go hand in hand with all the resistance struggles against neoliberalism.

Mikaela Nhondo Erskog

Master's student (History)

The #FeesMustFall movement is an incredible leap forward in terms of the greater emancipatory and decolonisation projects.

Whilst many historically black universities have been putting forward these issues for years, unfortunately the society in which we live only starts to respond when 'institutions of privilege' (historically white and 'higher ranking' universities in this case) join the struggle.

In terms of a way forward, it is important that individual universities do some serious work on how their particular contexts need to be radically confronted in order to fit into the national project of decolonisation and transformation. It needs to be a disciplined dialogical approach that constantly engages the particular (the one university context) with the universal (the national-global aims).

Jonis Ghedi Alasow

Master's student (Political Studies)

The #FeesMustFall campaign in South Africa was certainly a watershed moment. It saw students across the country taking a stand against the structural exclusions that are rife within public tertiary education.

Many of the concerns that were raised by students, as well as the strategies employed by them, mirrored those that have been used by marginalised South Africans for years.

Part of what makes the actions of the students particularly significant is the location from which their dissenting cries



WTO
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#OCCUPY

STOP
Playing
with OUR
FUTURE

AISA

EDUCATION
NOT
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SALE

NON-NET
FELLOWSHIP
IS OUR
RIGHT
AISA

emanated. They transcended their own narrow interests to imagine an alternative future where all those who have been forced to the margins are incorporated in an emancipated future.

Camalita Naicker

PhD candidate (Political Studies)

I think the *#FeesMustFall* movement is an incredible moment in South Africa's political life where students made history and should be supported and heard.

There are always people who don't want to listen, and who think they know what's best because they are older, or more learned, or more professional, or they have more money. These are the kinds of people who need to be brought on board and shown that there is no way that South Africa can continue being as unequal, corrupt and violent as it is in all sectors of its being – social, economic, political and cultural.

Every Marikana, *#FeesMustFall*, land occupation, protest, strike and demonstration is shouting out that we need change and we need to allow change to happen. We need to live in a society

where citizens are safe, where livelihoods and homes are secure, and where education is free. These are the most basic steps that we can take towards a new and better society.

Fezokuhle Mthonti

Master's student (Political Studies)

Decolonisation was a central theme in 2015 as we saw various student movements across the country question the institutional culture, departmental curricula and transformational imperatives of their respective universities.


Institutions of higher learning continue to reflect and maintain some of the irreconcilable inequalities that permeate our society as a result of colonisation and apartheid.

The decolonisation agenda was articulated throughout the year by students from *#OpenStellenbosch*, *#TransformWits*, *#RhodesMustFall* and *#BlackStudentMovement*, amongst others. The call for free education made by *#FeesMustFall* is an integral part of the decolonisation agenda.

#OCCUPYUGA

VIA

#FEES MUST

A group of young people are gathered outdoors for a protest or demonstration. The central figure is a young woman with long brown hair, wearing a grey beanie and a red hoodie with grey sleeves. She is holding a white sign high above her head with both hands. To her left, another person is partially visible, wearing a green patterned top and also holding a sign. In the lower right, two other young people are visible, one of whom has their mouth open as if shouting or chanting. The background consists of green trees and a clear blue sky with a few wispy clouds.

**ALL WE
WANT IS
EDUCATION**

This being said, it is important to acknowledge that the issues that were articulated under the banner of the *#FeesMustFall* protests are not new. Students at historically black universities have been calling for free education, transformation and the decolonisation of their universities for a very long time, and continue to do so under considerable threat from their respective institutions and the state (as has been highlighted by the instances of police brutality during the recent protests).

It is equally important to acknowledge the important political foundation that has been set up by other students across the class and race divide over the past two decades.

We should therefore not read the *#FeesMustFall* moment in isolation but rather, relate it back to a context in which students have consistently questioned and critiqued the model of higher education in this country.

What was significant about 2015, however, was that it was the year in which individual campus

struggles coalesced into a single call for a reformed system. There was a significant political shift in the consciousness of young people, which saw students marrying theory with praxis.

Sarah Bruchhausen

Master's student (History)

What I believe is one of the greatest emancipatory possibilities inherent within the *#FeesMustFall* campaign is the potential to foster political communities that are conceived outside of the conceptual boundaries of political subjectivities.

This is evidenced in the decisions taken by student movements at many different campuses to maintain a strong autonomy from political parties and associated organisations operating within the official sphere of politics.

I believe that this mistrust of party politics manifesting itself within university campuses, is a reassuring sign that there are a great number of people who are beginning to, or continuing to, find creative ways to

organise themselves and practise politics in ways that are new and potentially emancipatory.

Paddy O'Halloran

Master's graduate (Political Studies)

The student movements and protests shows a degree of disillusionment on the part of students with the narratives of liberation that came with the government transition in 1994.

Many of the students involved in the *#FeesMustFall* protests were very young children in 1994 who have become disillusioned and discontent with their own experiences of the South Africa of their adulthood – a national state that increasingly distances itself from ordinary South Africans, that responds indifferently to their needs and repressively to their demonstrations.

#FeesMustFall is important in three ways:

- It demonstrates the political will and power of South African students;
- It has brought about an

important first step in making universities in South Africa more accessible; and

- It has highlighted the links between students and other segments of South African society.

The alliances made during *#FeesMustFall* will have to be maintained and strengthened if further gains are to be made by students. These connections include those with workers (whether through trade unions or not), with academics, and with community members and community struggles.

Furthermore, pushing for international unity during what is becoming a global moment of student struggles will be crucial, both within South Africa's student movements and with students in other countries.

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