Chapter 10: Systemic Imperatives for Activist Scholarship in South Africa: The Case Study of the San and Khoi Research Centre, University of Cape Town

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Introduction

This chapter reflects on a five-year period (2017 to 2022) at the University of Cape Town (UCT) which involved San and Khoi community dialogues with the university, raising questions about its institutional transformation and the establishment of the San and Khoi Research Centre (SKRC) in 2020. The reflection here also covers the first two years of foundational research and work which commenced in a co-design research and knowledge partnership with the Khoi-San communities. This request for the co-design process was initiated by the civic activists and explicitly named as such in the first meeting at the Centre for African Studies (CAS) in August 2017. The process was, as expected, complicated and presented various dynamics and challenges for activist scholars at the CAS at UCT.

Over a decade ago, the CAS at the University of Cape Town made a conscious and strategic decision to open its gallery doors to local and national community activists. The aim was to encourage the communities in their diversity to hold regular dialogues and exhibitions on social and economic justice, especially after the Marikana mineworkers' massacre on 16 August 2012 by the post-apartheid Black regime. These intense and socially engaged research dialogues with social movements were initiated by well-known social activist scholar and professor, Lungisile Ntsebeza, who took up the National Research Foundation (NRF) Chair and A.C. Jordan[1] Chair (as Director of CAS) in 2012.

In August 2017, a highly motivated small delegation of the Western Cape Legislative Khoisan Council[2]

1 Named after African Literature scholar Archibald Campbell Jordan (1906-1968), former senior lecturer in African languages at UCT who famously committed to keep the doors of the White university "ajar".

2 Established as an informal network under apartheid in 1980.

requested a meeting with CAS after attending the annual Neville Alexander[3] Commemoration event in its gallery. From the outset, they raise 'the unfinished business of the TRC' in response to the dialogues at the event on the ongoing unresolved land and language questions in South Africa. These unresolved issues (from the community's perspectives) were: one, the land question; two, the language question; three, the Khoi-San genocide of the 1700s and four, the "unmarked" grave sites of people enslaved in the previous Cape slave colony on what is today the university's middle campus. The grave sites represent slavery and continued exploitation in the present for descendant communities. These unmarked graves are located, ironically, immediately outside the entrance door to the university's "Africa House" and where students do not (as became generally apparent in the #RhodesMustFall student critiques of the Eurocentric university) study, for instance, the relationship between these grave sites and South Africa's history of exploitation of indigenous and Black people.[4]—The UCT Rhodes Must Fall Mission Statement (undated),[5] states the following, 'the history of those who built our university - enslaved and working class black people - has been erased through institutional culture'. The statement goes on to call that the university 'pays more attention to historical sites of violence, such as the slave graves beneath the buildings in which we learn'.

The Khoi-San delegation questioned why the historically White university been allowed to commit the crimes of racism towards local indigenous and enslaved people with impunity? The delegation focused its attention on this question and identified their four concerns (as outlined above) as "directly related" to the late Neville Alexander's activist scholarship on land and language in South Africa, including the erasure of indigenous languages such as *Khoekhoegowab* in the colonised present Western Cape. The CAS had a responsibility to ensure these truths in historiographical scholarship. Exploitation of farmworkers and foetal alcohol syndrome, they stressed, are all related to the Land Question.

Addressing historical economic and political injustices of colonial conquest over roughly 200 years in the Cape earlier than the 1800s has remained largely unspoken in the national narrative except since the emergence of "Khoi-San revivalism" in the late 1990s and related scholarship undertaken by the late historian Jatti Bredekamp as director of the Institute for Historical Research at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) at the time.

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3 Neville Alexander (1936-2012) was a well-known social activist scholar on the Cape Flats who advocated multilingualism and non-racialism.

4 A point made by #RhodesMustFall activist Wandile Goosen Kasibe (2015) in general about UCT's culture without reference specifically to the grave sites.

5 These were often anonymous and undated statements due to security police surveillance and victimisation of student activists on campuses at the time. Here, the author also draws on her own experience with teaching the UCT #RhodesMustFall student leadership at CAS in the aftermath of 2015 when the "deep architecture" of the university was discussed in seminars in the course she convened from 2017 on 'Decolonial Theory and Practice'.

With the United Nations Declaration of the Decade of Indigenous People (2000-) and the repatriation from France and the burial of Khoi woman Sarah Baartman (2002) shortly after, the questioning of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the sacrifices/compromises made by the negotiated settlement had gained renewed impetus amongst Khoi-San-identified communities. A further impetus came with the work of the Minister of Higher Education, Blade Nzimande's National Institute of Human and Social Sciences (NIHSS) precolonial catalytic project founded in December 2013, which gave traction to critically address the colonial archive, and to ask questions about who writes and validates our pasts before 1652. Lungisile Ntsebeza was appointed NRF chair of this NIHSS precolonial project at UCT and the delegation approached CAS knowing this. They insisted not only on a knowledge and research partnership on these issues, but also requested an ethical accountability from UCT beyond the basic terms of the San Code of Ethics of 2017 (!Khwa ttu n.d.), such as accounting to the community on the unethically acquired human remains of the Khoi-San people, which had to be urgently repatriated to "source communities". These remains were considered "title deeds" to the land, the "race"' collections harked back to the days of race science that once flourished in South Africa's White universities in the 1920s, and in some instances, into the present. This to them was evidence that the university, despite its occasional Black leadership and transformation in student demographics and staff, was still systemically racist, and a place of "Aboriginal"[6] exclusion and 'othering', causing ongoing trauma to the local Cape communities where the institution was historically located and implicated. The community called for a TRC on higher education in apartheid South Africa.

At the time of the delegation's visit, social activist campaigns for Khoi-San "Aboriginality" and related claims for restorative justice were already around 30 years in the making in urban areas in South Africa, and the limitations of the TRC were widely engaged within extant scholarship for at least two decades. However, what was indeed a first was its direct approach to a historically White university to establish a community activist research and knowledge production partnership with Black activist scholars on these issues at CAS, and to locate such a partnership within "African Studies" discourse on land and democracy. The community's approach was also opportune in the post-RhodesMustFall (#RMF) and FeesMustFall (#FMF) contexts (2015/2016) when these student movements had by then attempted to wrench open public dialogue on persistent colonial and apartheid "heritage symbols" on historically White campuses, starting with the questioning and removal of the statue of mining magnate Cecil John Rhodes on UCT's upper campus (March-April 2015).

The #RMF and #FMF student movements had given the local Khoi-San communities the confidence to

6 A term used by the delegation to denote a symbolic acknowledgment of genocide in the South African context—not as understood in the Australian context.

physically enter the corridors of knowledge power at UCT and the self-assurance to push the knowledge production frontiers even further, starting with local pre-colonial history. CAS was also considered the "safe"' home for #RMF student activists who did its popular post-graduate courses on "The African Studies Archive", "Problematising the Study of Africa"[7] and "Decolonial Theory and Practice". The community demanded access to the "inaccessible" African Studies Library and Collections, which they felt held the colonial and apartheid "secrets" of their "denied" pasts. The question of the land that UCT occupies as settled in precolonial times for thousands of years by the San and later, the Khoi, was raised.

Co-designed dialogues at CAS

The dialogues and co-design process with this community came with expected complicated "race" dynamics. Not only was the issue of "tribalism" a troublesome one for activist scholars at CAS, but also the notion of "descendant" communities as 'related by established or recognized lines of descent' (Peterson et al. 2015: 147), which held 'the dangers of an ethnic framework'. Legassick and Rasool had by then, almost twenty years earlier, brought to light the secret "race" collections in museums in their seminal work *Skeletons in the Cupboard* (Legassick and Rassool 2000), and Peterson et al. (2015) problematised various Khoi claims to the indigenous body of Sarah Baartman in 2002. As scholar activists in African Studies, we ourselves were ideologically schooled in Marxist historiographical intellectual traditions in the 1970s and 1980s (in our political activism) with its critical take on "tribalism" and its emphasis on non-racialism and class. CAS also chose an intellectual strategic vision in promoting Archie Mafeje's often marginalised scholarship—such as his critique of the application of dogma in Marxist revisionist theories on social and capital reproduction. The inaugural African Studies major included Marxist feminist critiques of structuralism and "capital" that followed much later than Mafeje's scholarship on same in the early 1970s (for example, works such as Bhattacharya 2019). Scholarship in the Global South has particularly critiqued the limitations of Marxism in its wide scope and variations as a methodological framework and a form of cultural and epistemological "capital" (Bhattacharya 2016: 19–20). Imposed on political and economic realities through the hegemonic language of English and related cultures and intellectual thought, such dogmatically imposed frameworks of analysing society validated knowledges as an 'imperialist style of doing history' (Bhattacharya 2016: 33).

Given the largely shared scholarly, ideological and political backgrounds we came from at CAS (social movements, feminism etcetera), we were from the outset immensely sceptical and suspicious

7 The course controversially introduced by Mahmood Mamdani which led to his expulsion from predominantly White UCT in 1996.

of the "tribal" formation and positioning of the delegation. Unlike feminist scholarship and research in Indian historiography which decades ago already offered critiques of Marxist analysis on structural reproduction theory as in the work of Tharu and Lalita (1991) on *Women Writing in India from 600 BC*, feminist scholarship critical of Marxist theories by indigenous scholars in South Africa remains significantly marginalised and invisibilised by mainstream western feminist theory. Disconcertingly, even Black male patriarchal leftist Marxist theorists tend to see such scholarship as "exclusionary" or as not "scholarly"; such critique is often embedded in pointing out lack of reference to feminist scholarship in the west. It is only very recently that South African Black and indigenous feminist activist scholarship has emerged to position itself substantially through edited volumes in mainstream historiography as in the work of Lewis and Baderoon (2021), Muthien and Bam (2021) and the monograph by Bam (2021). And even then, these scholars, who come from Marxist activist traditions, are very careful not to find easy validation in theorisations on "culture", "reproductive theory" and "capital" outside of local African material and social realities. Tharu and Lalita (1991: 37) argue for 'powerful and complex feminist inheritances that trouble universalisms', and that 'patriarchy is not isolatable' (1991: 42) from what we could possibly understand as the 'political economy' of not only knowledge, but also capital.

Despite our decades of activism and scholarship on "race" and democracy as scholars at CAS, we could not simply dismiss the delegation's request for dialogue because of the "race" talk. We were aware that UCT remained largely untransformed in significant ways and visibly alienated from the local communities and their knowledges. This was an uncomfortable reality. "Socially engaged research" at the university was largely limited in its mandate to scheduled "fieldwork" with alienated communities. What would it have meant for Rhodes to 'fall" at UCT in how we conduct research and produce knowledge? Should we listen openly to what was brought to us by the community? We could not simply in response, capitulate to the safety of academic seminar rooms, scheduled short field trips in remote areas, or find refuge in pristine "peer-reviewed" journals. It was clear from the outset that we had to engage diverse working-class articulations in the absence of a broad social activist movement such as the non-racial United Democratic Front (UDF) which was launched by over 400 organisations in the Cape Flats "Coloured" township of Mitchell's Plain in 1983 and was abruptly disbanded by the African National Congress (ANC) to make way for political negotiations in 1991. Members of the Khoi-San delegation to CAS were former lead Cape Flats UDF civic activists on the issues of housing, and we had to find with them a new shared language of activism as scholars and civic activists in tackling the four issues (outlined above) with academic rigor and intellectual honesty—however difficult.

Engaging new and uncomfortable hauntologies

From the beginning, finding this "shared language" was challenging given the tensions and contradictions in the dialogues around discomforting "othering" terms like "the Nguni people", the "us" and "them". Another troublesome term that kept coming up persistently was "tribe". In the non-racial UDF years, identity issues seemed politically and ontologically far less complex, and what seemed on the surface to be "Verwoerdian" apartheid ideologies could be easily dismissed by the collective. However, after 1994, activist scholarship became more complicated as we could simply not ignore the silences and visceral contradictions that come in their various ontologies of "race" that persistently haunt both ourselves and communities in South Africa. There were factual realities connected to these new ontologies of "race" such as the omission of Khoi and San languages in the post-apartheid Constitution of 1996 when the / Xam language in the Coat of Arms was a political concession embarrassingly granted with hindsight. Enslavement at the Cape constitutes the largest percentage of South Africa's almost 400-year period of colonial history—yet it is mainly assigned as a "provincial" tourism curiosity, though it could be argued that it marks the foundations of the development of apartheid racial capitalism (the infamous pass system and the creation of racialised Bantustans). Hence, if it is racial capitalism that we are trying to undo together with higher education's complicity in this, then surely this discomforting delegation brought with them the ghosts we could no longer ignore in South Africa.

Some two decades ago already, Muller (2000) reflected on this new emerging reality for activist scholars in higher education in South Africa when we did not anticipate that an intellectual elite that was part of the liberation struggle, with its ostensibly shared vision with the masses, would gain political and economic power to the exclusion and suppression of communities of the oppressed and socially marginalised. However, Muller was not entirely correct in this claim, as these predictions were made by the Unity Movement and other Marxist intellectuals in their various political writings in the 1980s and early 1990s. To them, it was anticipated that there would in fact be a "changing of gear" in South Africa in February 1990, which meant a "repositioning" for activist scholars. What the Unity Movement missed was to anticipate what this would mean in terms of new post-Apartheid working-class articulations (such as through expressions of indigeneity) and the practical implications for activism grounded in such a reality. Muller's accurate prediction of engagement in a future South Africa 'with a messy complexity of lived experience' (Lather 2000: 62, as quoted in Muller 2000:) should however be noted.

These lived experiences of the working classes in post-apartheid South Africa are relentlessly haunting. McLaren et al. (as cited in Borg et al.2002) point out that this 'haunting' of the oppressed and exploited is found in the Communist Manifesto of 1848 when Marx and Engels wrote of "the spectre" of Communism that was "haunting" Europe at the time. The term "spectre" was, therefore, not new

when it was taken up by Derrida 148 years later, who defined 'spectre' in philosophical terms such as in 'the frequency of a certain visibility – the visibility of the invisible'. The spectre can by its very enforced invisibility 'violently pay us a visit', 'demanding to be understood in the singularity of its temporality or historicity', calling for the haunting to be resolved in its inherent contradictions to become a reality. It is the suspicion of negative "hauntology" (the "spectre" assumed as pathologically "demonic") that, one could argue, some South African Marxist activist scholarship has rigidly inherited, refusing to engage the unfamiliar, discomforting, unpredictable, indeterminist and horrific forms that such "spectres" do take in the present diverse working-class articulations, such as "Khoi-San". This observation on the persistence of Marxist dogma was amongst a wide range of self-proclaimed Marxist scholars and civic activists who identify invariably along the spectrum of the various post-Eurocentric Marxisms in responding to the community and their interpretations of present societal issues at the CAS conference held from 23-24 January 2020 (Centre for African Studies n.d.) . If this spectre is not recognisable, such as in the articulation of structuralist class struggle, then it is assumed by such Marxist scholars as disavowing "class struggle" in favour of "tribe" and "race" and therefore rendered "reactionary". It is often assumed by such scholars that "intersectionality" discourse founded through Black feminist scholarship in the 1970s in the United States somehow settles the debate on validation of new forms of struggle from a Marxist perspective. Yet even very contemporary scholarship within Marxist feminism that stresses the importance of intersectionality persists with the 'mode of production' discourse (Mojab and Carpenter 2019).

McLaren et al. (as cited in Borg et al. 2002: 149) argue that 'global capitalism has a way of reshaping, reflecting, reinflecting and rearticulating dissent'. It is therefore, imperative for radical scholar activists to engage working class hauntologies in whichever form they choose to visit the corridors of epistemological power in post-1994 South Africa. These ghosts 'speak through the lips of the dead and serve as the medium through which subjugated histories are released into the present' (Borg et al. 2002: 151). The dead is hauntingly present amongst us in the way that the Gramscian spirits haunt the cultural Marxists in their post-modern intellectual diversity (Borg et al. 2002: 151). We need to, therefore, engage discomforting hauntologies as social activist scholars 'in order to understand our own histories' (Borg et al. 2002: 151).

Praxis and new theorisation within a local African realities

South African activist scholars within the Marxist Unity Movement Tradition[8], for instance, drew often

8 Based on primary source archival research by the author on the content and analysis within the Teachers' League of South Africa's *The Educational Journal*, from 1915-1989. See Bam (1993).

dogmatically on Marx in the 1980s, such as atheism and the evolutionary nature of societies from the indigenous "primitive" to the more "evolved" socialist state. Whilst Marxism was informed by class analysis, it was never really decolonial as we understand it as African feminist activist scholars engaged in praxis within social movements, including indigenous women's movements in South Africa, today. New scholarship in African Studies on understanding the material pasts considers ritual, and that which can be understood beyond biologism as determining gender—but doing so by engaging research methodologies within the African realities of indigenous languages, proverbs and cultures such as kinship (which is not western-gender defined). Scholarship over the last few decades on the limitations of Marxist structural reproduction theory is well-known and needs no rehash here. The essence of the critique is that such theory should not be universalised as they do not speak to local realities. As stated by Nigerian scholar Oyekan (2014: 8), western socialist feminism based on Marxist interpretations in its occupation with gender and class debates, has not met the needs to provide helpful analytical tools for African feminism that concerns itself beyond the grasp of western feminism and African-American feminism. This critique has long been studied in Indian feminist historiography on the "precolonial" which troubles Marxist structuralism. The work of Tharu and Lalita (1991: 60) illustrates this critique with their discussion on the development of women's idioms in 'precolonial' India through poetic ritualistic performances of the bhakti movements in 'the open fields' against the upper castes. They note that these resistance movements were critiqued within Marxist intellectual traditions as 'without political importance'—yet these could be considered as 'a rejection of patriarchy' (Tharu and Lalita 1991: 60).

Importantly, the aim of this chapter (in its very limited scope) is clearly not to provide a detailed overview of Marxist theories, critiques and interpretations globally and locally—but to merely illustrate the challenge of engaging the persistent inherited Eurocentric frameworks as encountered in this case study. The community shared their narratives of how they make sense of contemporary lived realities and interpretations of the precolonial past at the conference at CAS in January 2020. They performed and narrativised their various articulations on "indigeneity". Some of the Marxist scholars responded critically, revealing dogmatic frameworks of thought (as expressed as critiques of the community's feminist water rituals and circles, for example). Such critique expressed notably by mostly Black male Marxist scholars, showed that until recently, South African scholarship in historiography needed a rethink of how knowledge is produced and validated. How do we theorise these new articulations of class struggle beyond inherited and persistent dated Marxist frameworks? The question of "indigeneity" as new articulation of working-class struggle was never really explored within the South African historiographical context, which compelled the need for recent scholarship on historiography to do so. Examples are Bam et al. (2018) which arose out of two NIHSS national conferences organised by CAS with historians (including from the leftists and various Marxists traditions), archaeologists and

communities who participated respectively in 2017 and 2020 (Bam 2021; Muthien and Bam 2021). The 2014 conference highlighted the "knowledge trap" of discourse and methodologies on "the precolonial" and the Eurocentric inability to read the indigenous past in new ways that matter. The communities were absent from this conference which took place at UCT prior to the RhodesMustFall student protests that erupted on its campus. Because of the fixed and repeated western discourses and methodologies at the 2014 conference, we realised at CAS that the trap lay in the disciplines and that the discourse had to be opened up across the disciplines and through the inclusion of scholar activists, feminists, civic activists and communities who identified as "indigenous". The second conference held in 2017 was organised in partnership with the Centre for Non-racialism and Democracy (CANRAD) at the then Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University,[9] which included a strong cohort of leftist and Marxist scholars and activists who were prepared to critically reflect on their own theorisations in dialogical engagement with the communities. This conference resulted in the publication of *Whose History Counts? Decolonising Precolonial Historiography* edited by Bam et al. (2018). At the conference, the communities questioned the prevalence of Eurocentric theories and theorisation of their realities instead of theorisation from the people and in their own languages, proverbs, rituals and ancient philosophies. When were the European classical texts written and what were the intellectual and knowledge traditions in southern Africa at the time? The latter was pointed out as signalling a colonial epistemicidal approach to knowledge, that is, a dismissal of ancient traditions of knowledge-making that existed into the present.

An important key classical text that influenced Marxist doctrine—notwithstanding there have been many and diverse interpretations and influences—is Marx *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1981), which was first published in 1859. Wang and Iggers (2015: 20) argue that this text is considered key for understanding Marxist doctrines globally because in it, Marx formulates his conception of society and history, hence its relevance for historiographical critique as it analyses economic production of the structure of society and historical consciousness. This key Marxist text has been influential in South African activist scholarship, yet it was written in Europe at a time when South Africa was already colonised for almost two centuries. Chakrabarty's (1992) critique of Marxist theoretical universalisation in the seminal '*Provincializing Europe: Postcoloniality and the critique of history*' is focused on Marx's "capital" discourse that does not consider local specificities outside of Europe, including knowledge and culture. Marx ([1859] 1981: 216), therefore, writes with expected Eurocentric prejudice about African civilisation, such as the claim that 'Egyptian mythology' 'could never become the basis of or give rise to Greek art'. And Marxist historical materialist philosophy, derived from Hegel, is equally prejudiced

9 Since named Nelson Mandela University.

towards African indigenous ontologies, arguing that the 'mythological attitude towards nature' demands 'artistic imagination independent of mythology' (Marx [1859] 1981: 216). Marx argues further, 'Greek art and poetry give us only aesthetic pleasure, like childhood pleasure – but a stage we should not return to' ([1859] 1981: 217). Unity Movement historiography intellectuals wrote critically about Greek civilisation as "African", departing from this Eurocentric Marxist analysis, however, never embraced the existent and ever-present spirituality of the Khoi and San in their midst, including within themselves. It is, therefore, important to break through the limitations of still present structural Marxist thought as expressed at the national conferences hosted by CAS in 2014, 2018 and 2020 in engaging communities and even dismissing their identity articulations and positioning against (what they consider as) "western" and "Eurocentric" theorisation of their lived social and economic realities in the present.

Lenin (1951: 20) informs us that the doctrine of Marx was shaped and influenced by German philosophy, English political economy, French socialism and French revolutionary doctrines. Our Marxist activist sensibilities, therefore, missed the importance of spirituality in dialoguing with the dead (our ancestors) on the unfinished tasks of transformation from the spaces they were excluded and only hosted as "bones" for scientific study. Intergenerational community knowledge practiced since ancient times on the land on which historically White universities stand, such as through the "Khoi-San" *Ausi,*[10] predates nineteenth century Marxist theory of society and progress by centuries. By the time Marx was writing about praxis, rock paintings which recorded daily activities and theories of everyday materialist struggles, and resultant historical consciousness, had already existed for close to 20 000 years in southern Africa. It is no longer a debate that these communities sit with these unacknowledged and insightful deep knowledges of the long *durée* (duration).

Furthermore, whilst acknowledging an established tradition of Marxist feminist critique of structural analyses that admittedly go back decades, it is more helpful to draw on our own recent feminist scholarship in Africa on matricentricity and discourse beyond reproductive biologism.[11] Scholarship on limitations of feminist theorisation outside our lived realities in southern Africa (even by Marxist and leftist scholars in their diversity) is widely critiqued. Discourse in analysing and theorising our own African realities is widely recognised—at least since the days of Mafeje's critical scholarship on Marxist "articulation" theory (Mafeje 1981) which has only been recently recognised in higher education. Mafeje's critique of this Marxist theory on "modes of production", for instance, still circulated in the disciplines of archaeology as late as the early 2000s. Adesina (2008) notes Mafeje's critiques as countering "alterity" and "extroversion". Similarly, limitations of scholarship from outside in theorising our own realities from

10 The *Khoekhoegowab* word that survives on the Cape Flats for "matrilineal knowledge holder".
11 See for example the work of Babalwa Magoqwana in Bam et al. (2018).

a feminist critique of structural Marxism have been well argued in recent work such as by South African feminists Lewis and Baderoon (2021), Magoqwana (2018) and Muthien and Bam (2021)—notably all come from Marxist historiographical traditions as activists. Nigerian feminist scholar Oyewumi (1997) inspired South African Black feminists in her critique of western and White feminist misrepresentations (including Marxist feminists) disavowing African realities. New questions have been asked, such as how do we liberate the narrative of who we are through more helpful and relevant theories that speak to our African realities such as rematriation, and against universalising theory with its origins from outside, rather than as authentically embedded within local intellectual traditions and realities? How do we recognise omissions in even our own scholarship and presumptuous theorisations? In other words, what *kind* of knowledge matters and *whose* knowledge matters (Lewis and Baderoon 2021: 2)?

The establishment of the A/Xarra Restorative Justice Forum

With the delegation's visit to the University in 2017, the ancestors came to commune at CAS as they rose from the quickly covered shallow graves of South Africa's TRC. They had metaphorically woken up in the drawers of the university's bio-medical sciences laboratories and the unmarked graves on its middle campus and entered swiftly through the gallery doors where the #RMF student leaders chose to routinely gather since April 2015. CAS became a site of hauntology for intellectual seances communing with the late Steve Biko, the late Archie Mafeje and the controversial Mahmood Mamdani who returned to UCT in August 2017 (after a deliberate absence from the racist institution for 20 years) to deliver the T.B. Davie Memorial Lecture.

The delegation raised this "haunting" as their consciously chosen points of departure in engaging CAS on their concerns for transformation at UCT. Boesten and Scanlon (2021: 10) contend that highlighting impunity for historical wrongs can be a powerful tool in the struggle for accountability in the present.

We agreed with the delegation to meet once a week and commenced with the process of acknowledging the university's epistemological complicities in race sciences and the systemic exclusion of radical African scholars like Archie Mafeje,[12] Mahmood Mamdani,[13] and intellectuals within local indigenous communities.

In these regular dialogue meetings, several community members focused on the strategic use of

12 Archie Mafeje (1936-2007) was a renowned African anthropologist who suffered discrimination and exclusion at UCT, leading to the known "Mafeje Affair" and student protests of 1968.

13 Mahmood Mamdani is a Ugandan African professor and former A.C. Jordan Chair (Director of CAS), who suffered discrimination and exclusion at UCT, known as the "Mamdani Affair" in 1996.

the past for present political and economic aims, rather than for a rigorous scholarly engagement with the past and how it explains our ontological racialised and "tribalised" present. The tensions we were challenged with as a result of our chosen focus, could probably be described more closely by Todorov in *Hope and Memory* (2003: 197) in the depiction of Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory, as a woman with two faces, one turned toward the past, the other toward the present. One of Mnemosyne's hands held a book in which memory can read the past, the other a quill (which we assume refers to Todorov's writing of the chapters that followed). This image is similar to the inspirational Ghanaian Sankofa bird metaphor; looking back in order to look forward. Todorov argues that the work of memory, thus, respects two requirements—fidelity to the past, utility in the present.

After the many dialogues on academic rigour versus the San and Khoi community's agendas, the A/Xarra Restorative Justice Forum (comprising community leaders, civic activists, academics and students) was formed at CAS in 2018 as a knowledge and research partnership to address the community's issues. The forum comprised the delegation members, civic activists, students and academics. The author was Acting Head of African Studies in 2017-2018 and had the default role of facilitating the meetings and dialogues with stakeholders and various communities, with gender studies professor Gertrude Fester. Social Movements activist Lungisile Ntsebeza was director of CAS and co-facilitated community engagement as part of his long tradition of work in social movements around land and democracy in the Eastern Cape. The CAS gallery is traditionally used as a space for regular meetings of trade unions, farm workers, youth, gender activists and women's groups. Other academics who participated regularly in the dialogues included Ana Deumert (professor in Linguistics), Shahid Vawda, (head of the School of Anthropology, Linguistics, Gender and African Studies) and Horman Chitonge (professor and permanent head of African Studies). Other participating scholars were Leslie London (professor and head of Public Health), Loretta Feris (professor of Law and Deputy Vice Chancellor Transformation), Advocate Norman Arendse (chair of the Naming of Buildings Committee), Leslie Green (professor of Environmental Humanities), Medee Rall (director of Extra Mural Studies), and various scholars from Library and Information Sciences, Architecture and Science. The students were represented by the Student Representative Council (SRC) and members of the #RhodesMustFall student movement. Activists came from a broad ideological base comprising workers, civic activists, women's groups and Khoi-San leadership structures from the broader Western Cape region, including the metropole, the Cape Winelands, the West Coast, and South Cape. There was also regular representation from communities who suffered genocide—San communities from the Northern Cape (particularly from the Richtersveld), Namibia (descendants of the Herero and Damara genocides perpetrated by Germany in the early twentieth century) and San communities in Botswana. The Forum established various research

commissions in indigenous languages, the land question, human remains, women's issues, youth issues, ethics and others. One of its first tasks was the renaming of Jameson Hall at the university in collaboration with the DVC Transformation of UCT (Loretta Ferris) and the Naming of Buildings Committee.

The communities insisted on dialogues across the frontiers of the nation state and a critical engagement with the persistent Marxist academic discourse in archaeology on "mode of production" in the simplified language of "hunter gatherers" and "herders"'. They viewed this structural approach to "production" as inherent to the extinction discourse. In other words, if there are no longer visible existent Khoi-San practices as "hunters" or "herders", then these communities must by logical implication be "extinct". This resilient "mode of production" theory persisted far beyond the Marxist revisionist 1980s in archaeological theory as was highlighted by archaeologist Nick Shepherd (2005). Yet, almost ten years later, the 2014 national conference at CAS with archaeologists and historians revealed no significant departure from the Marxist "mode of production" discourse.

Symbolic reparations and humanising knowledge

Boesten and Scanlon (2021: 2–3) contend that symbolic reparations (such as renaming of buildings) are important and that memorial arts often embed critiques of both past and present-day violence and injustice as a critical tool in forging reflection and communicating complex issues to wider audiences. They point out that South Africa is a prime example of unresolved intergenerational trauma, with its 'underlying intersectional inequalities and violence that have largely been ignored in the transitional project' (2021: 5), to 'communicate what is impossible to express either because no one is listening or because authoritarian regimes silence dissident voices'. Bhambra et al. (2018: 218)), in *Decolonising the University* write that we need to promote an ethos of 'caring across the disciplines' because higher education 'weeds' out caring (quoting Precod-Weinstein). This erasure of care and humanising knowledge happens due to the disciplinary Cartesian approaches to the validation of knowledge, theorisation, interpretation of evidence and objectivity. Todorov (2003) contends further that memory connects with the highest human values—justice and love, and quotes French historian Hippolyte Taine to the effect that 'science seeks only the truth but in the end discovers an ethics' (2003: 21). In this sense, the founding of the A/Xarra Restorative Justice Forum in 2018 and its work in transformation at UCT set an important precedent in the higher education transformation landscape (Muthien and Bam 2021: 5, 156) through applying deep and open listening in its many dialogues which dispelled by its very engagement the erroneous White scholarship 'Khoisan extinction discourse'.

Ethics are not just about the research permissions that universities often emphasise, but about

caring through applying deep listening research methodologies through which we gain insights into more rigorous and "scientific" knowledge important for human survival. Gumede et al. (2021: 49) argue that this knowledge gained through experience of the landscape, over centuries, is of a practical nature in fields, such as agriculture, fisheries, health etcetera. The authors point out that The United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development has, therefore, called for inclusion of indigenous knowledge for sustainable development as we face deforestation, desertification, wildlife siege and multinational foreign land grabbing, yet environmental conservation is an ancient practice inherited from taboos about wildlife exploitation (Gumede et al. 2021). One could argue that our global environmental crises is a result of the deficient theorisation of western perspectives and its extractive "fieldwork" practices in place of an organic engagement with diverse knowledges that are tried and tested over millennia. These are also expressed in the recognisable but invisibilised present in "Khoisan" communities at the Cape through the intergenerational *Ausi* (Bam 2021).

Ethics and care, however, get compromised in the neo-liberal university as argued by Giroux in writing about the work of Gramsci (Borg et al. 2002) and the corporatisation of the culture of the university which reduces the university-based intellectual to a technocrat. According to Aronowitz (Borg et al. 2002: 118), it should not be about attaining 'certainties' or to 'observe the rites of passage of institutionalised disciplines in order to get jobs and win promotion and tenure', but to transform scholarship into education, by even engaging the unrecognisable with love and care. Freirean scholar Antonia Darder (2023) points out, for instance, that South Africans must rethink Black Consciousness and Freire for acknowledging 'the particularity of cultures'.

Communities and the co-production of knowledges that count

Gramsci wrote about acknowledging indigenous ancient knowledge and cultures and marginalisation. Knowledge does not only reside in universities. When we stick to dogma as practice as activist scholarship, from which we theorise the world, we could create even more deficient models of knowledge production. And in fact, we are in danger of duplicating and perpetuating structural knowledge systems of unequal power and marginalisation, allowing also for more nuanced exploitation of the knowledge data of communities considered "essentialist" in articulating their archives of knowledge that have always been kept out of, or at the margins of scholarship. In doing this, we capitulate to Eurocentric notions of what counts as knowledge, which archives matter, and which research methodological practices should be taken seriously.

If we rethink Gramsci's theorisation within an African context (in terms of what should count as

"knowledge" and how it is validated or invalidated in cultural hegemonic structures), we might think differently about the relevance of community and working-class rituals, such as water circles and pipe ceremonies, in higher education—because it is these cultural practices that bring us closer to the source (in the Amilcar Cabral sense). If we rethink Mafeje, in taking up the contemporary challenges of the activist scholar in decolonisation, it would help us to untangle coloniality more realistically in practice in the local sense—to see the insufficiencies of our Marxist structuralist theories of the 1970s or 1980s. In a Freirean sense, we are relational, incomplete and constantly becoming through dialogue, reflection and action. Structural, dogmatic leftist thinking originating in nineteenth century Europe—still being expressed as evident in the dialogues at CAS at the January conference of 2020 and notably, mostly by Black leftist male scholars and activists—is clearly not helpful in a contemporary local African context.

Successes, systemic barriers and political challenges (2020-2023)

The challenges and incredible difficulties encountered against White racism at a historically White university notwithstanding, the outcomes of the series of dialogues over two years within the /Xarra Restorative Justice Forum from 2018 to 2019, led to a few transformation milestones at UCT, which included the successful renaming of Jameson Hall, the first university-certification of approximately 200 community members in collaboration with the Extra-Mural Studies (EMS) department, including mothers and unemployed youth, the establishment of community research commissions and admission of community members to join faculty through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). Community members felt free and confident to access the African Studies Library and Collections, considered by both them and the students as previously "inaccessible" due to its strict security systems and "exclusionary ambience". Community members were for the first time sitting together with #RMF students in seminars and conferences, critically and candidly engaging on contemporary issues in our country today. The one issue that remained difficult and impenetrable was that of the repatriation of human remains because of the tensions around "source" community and scientific approaches.

One of the major outcomes of the A/Xarra Restorative Justice Forum dialogues at UCT was the historic establishment of the San and Khoi Centre, launched by Vice Chancellor Mamokgethi Phakeng in September 2020. The San and Khoi Centre established a strong relationship with several departments (African Feminist Studies, Library and Information Sciences, Music, Archaeology, Linguistics, Medicine and Public Health and Environmental Humanities). RPL. Pathways were opened up through CAS for community fellows for access to higher education on precolonial research, and the SKRC successfully nominated Ouma Katriena, the last fluent speaker of *lNuu*, for an honorary doctorate which was conferred

on her by UCT in March 2023. The early successes of the Centre were made possible, in large measure, by the significant commitment from senior professors at CAS and across faculties, the dean, DVCs and Vice Chancellor Phakeng who actively championed its cause, and lead social and environmental justice activist Tauriq Jenkins and indigenous language activist Bradley van Sitters. The Department of Sports, Arts and Culture (DSAC) also provided important seed funding to establish the Centre through the indigenous languages programme.

The work of the A/Xarra Restorative Justice Forum had wider impact in the Western Cape, such as at the historically White Stellenbosch University. These include the renaming of a humanities building in late 2021 in honour of seventeenth century Khoi woman Krotoa (Stellenbosch University n.d.); the university's website offensively showcasing its "coloured" peoples "skeleton collection" (Alblas et al. 2018), has now been renamed simply as *'The Kirsten Collection'*. The university also introduced free *Khoekhoegowab* classes to the community in 2019,[14] though not certificated courses as offered by UCT from 2019 (Stellenbosch University Language Centre 2019) and online during Covid lockdown from 2021 (Swingler 2020).

Despite its early successes, its local impact in higher education, and the strong systemic support and the research commissions established and led by the community (admittedly repeatedly pointed out that these were far too many and therefore, impossible to implement in the short term), the Centre battled to deliver on the four issues (outlined above) which were brought initially to CAS in 2017 and taken up further in the A/Xarra Restorative Justice Forum. These barriers were largely caused by the impact of the Covid lockdown as a result of which the community could not access the campus and the funding office did not succeed in raising the requested funding for data for the community to allow online community dialogues. The passing of the Traditional Leadership and Khoi-San Leadership Act in January 2020 led to vying for chieftanship and divisions within communities around position, recognition and resources such as land and capital from the state. Some community leaders were also seduced by offers to buy fake degrees from "international" universities. This undermined the rigorous RPL process that was in place for them at CAS. In this regard, Motala and Vally (2022: 12–13) warn against 'false promises' and 'gifting' from the 'us' (academics) to 'them' (communities) in a knowledge co-production partnership. They argue instead for an open, and socially conscious-' engagement that is principled and mutually respectful.

It became increasingly apparent that there were definite forces that desired to break up the Centre

14 The Stellenbosch University introduced free Khoekhoegowab classes to the community in 2019 as part of its broader initiative to promote Indigenous language revitalisation. This effort aligns with national policies on multilingualism and responds to calls from local Khoi and San communities for greater recognition of their linguistic heritage. Similar programs have been implemented at other South African universities, such as the University of Cape Town's Xhosa language courses.

and to discredit it through public defamation of the activist scholars who supported the campaign against the Amazon development on the floodplain of the local Liesbeeck River. Scholar activists of the Centre (Tauriq Jenkins as lead activist against Amazon, in particular, and the author as his alleged "handler") were receiving death threats (Bartlett 2023), gangster-like intimidation communications (Front Line Defenders n.d.)[15] and subjected (with fellow lead activist scholar Leslie London, professor and head of Public Health, and indigenous language activist Bradley van Sitters) to public defamation on social media as 'fake' professors and scholars who were working against the interests of the community (University of Cape Town Faculty of Humanities 2021). Worse still, the A/Xarra forum community members and CAS scholars watched in devastating horror when high-leaping flames engulfed the much-treasured African Studies Library and Collections on 18 April 2021 (University of Cape Town 2021), shattering the new-found dreams of long-desired access to 'Moscow on the Hill'. This loss was indescribable, though the SKRC had fortunately by then already established its own digital archives on indigenous knowledge.

Later, in October 2021, following the devastating fire of 18 April 2021 which destroyed a large percentage of the African Studies Library and Collections, the Centre faced more significant systemic challenges. This was partly due to the death threats issued to both the interim director (the author) and a key staff member and anti-Amazon activist, Tauriq Jenkins, coupled with the imminent departure of a retiring Lungisile Ntsebeza and the anticipated vacuum in the directorship of CAS after ten years of solid community partnership work. In the same year, the interim director of the San and Khoi Centre was offered a permanent position as Associate Professor in African Feminist Studies and was replaced in 2022 by veteran Khoi-San feminist historian Yvette Abrahams. Due to unexpected challenges experienced in the transition from 2022 to 2023, the Centre ceased to exist in its original form and continues at present as the Sarah Baartman Centre of Remembrance Research and Exhibition Project[16] in CAS. The new knowledge-producing partnership is one with communities in the Cape provinces and more broadly across South Africa. The relationship with Nelson Mandela University and the Centre for Education Rights (CERT) at the University of Johannesburg is being consolidated and include participation by the author and feminist scholars such as Babalwa Magoqwana. Engagement with many international scholars and activists is also ongoing, including with the Musee d'lHomme where Sarah Baartman's remains were displaced for close to 200 years. Funding of this significant feminist national project has been made

15 A court interdict was issued for five years by the Wynberg Magistrate's Court on 15 December 2022 in favour of the author. See also case 12994/2021 in the High Court of South Africa.

16 Its mandate is to deliver an Exhibition and Museum as part of the large Sarah Baartman Centre of Remembrance complex in Hankey in the Eastern Cape.

possible through a tender applied for through CAS in 2021 and awarded by the DSAC in 2022. The A/Xarra Restorative Justice Forum continues to exist as an online dialogue, still facilitated by Jenkins, and as an activist forum in social media in partnership with (notably) genocide community activists in Namibia, Northern Cape and Botswana, and indigenous feminist scholars and a few community researchers who remained committed to the collective vision. Gertrude Fester remains Chair of the Women's Research Commission and the young Black women scholars and activists remain active in the Sarah Baartman Centre of Remembrance Research and Exhibition Project in regular community engagements in the Eastern Cape.

Conclusion

Motala and Vally (2022) point out the value of critical participatory action research (see discussion of the methodology as a collaborative commitment to social justice in Kemmis et al. 2014) as there is little scholarship on how "community engagement", as a complex and contradictory partnership process between academics and working class and marginalised communities, can advance the co-construction of knowledge. What emerges from this case study on activist scholarship are the challenges it presents if it remains at the margins of the system of higher education due to being "soft"-funded, and also when it remains under-theorised (hence invisibilised within contemporary mainstream discourse). From a marginalisation point of view, this creates a precarious fiscal situation and associated reputational risks as the community could be easily divided, seduced and manipulated by competing and corrupt capitalist and political forces (especially in a pre-election period) in an already exacerbated economic crisis of unemployment and poverty. Yet, these interventions on languages, knowledge production and access to higher education pathways are important to assist in attaining the United Nations Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs). For example, the Youth Research Commission of the A/Xarra Restorative Justice Forum never succeeded in taking off, as major funders seemed reluctant to fund "dialogues" on pertinent issues in society. Freire (1974) argues in *Cultural Action for Freedom*, that dialogue dismantles bureaucratic constructions, preventing the entrenchment of vested interests, which subverts the 'culture of silence' (see preface by Coutinho). This, Freire advocated as 'the right to pronounce its word' (1974: 17), which becomes 'the authentic word' and a method of true knowledge (1974: 37), in the way that 'slum dwellers' have 'scientific knowledge of their own situations themselves'. This is not 'inferior mythical knowledge' (1974: 39). According to Freire and Macedo (1987), naming the world becomes a model for changing the world, and in research, we should speak with the people, not to them and not only listening as long as people are responding to the questions the 'specialist' [researcher] asks (1987:

46). These cultural dialogues are, therefore, essentially theoretical in an organic, authentic sense (1987: 66)—meaning, the theory is arrived at through practice, rather than inserted and validated in scholarship in the dated "armchair intellectual way" of theorising without real engagements in social movements. These forms of scholarship based on community partnerships in social activism should, therefore, be core-funded and be moved to the centre in higher education with the necessary systemic support to sustain community development to reduce economic and social inequalities in South Africa. Moreover, it becomes important to tackle climate change through such knowledge partnerships in scholarship activism as Satgar (2019: 16–17) points out that dialogue has globally emerged between non-Eurocentric Marxism and indigenous movements advancing anti-capitalist alternatives, crucial for attaining climate justice. Engaging indigenous identity social movements should, therefore, not simply be dismissed by dogmatic South African Marxist scholars as "reactionary" or "Verwoerdian". It is worth noting the argument by Vally and Motala (2018: 30) on the imperative to find alternative ways to describe—and for that matter also analyse—oppression and exploitation beyond 'race ... phenotype' categorisation in a contemporary post-1994 South Africa where 'racial nomenclature continues to haunt the public consciousness ... as ghosts of an unrequited past'.

What is called for is a rethinking and systemic repositioning of scholarship activism in higher education in a democratically young and still deeply fractured South Africa.

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