African Studies at UCT: An Overview

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Introduction

This article is about the notion of 'African Studies' at the University of Cape Town (UCT)[1]. Its main conclusion is that, more than 43 years after the formal establishment of the Centre for African Studies (CAS) here at UCT, a serious debate and discussion about what we understand and what we mean by African Studies at UCT has yet to happen. The article is based on research that I have been conducting intermittently since the end of 2007, when I did research for the then-Vice Chancellor Njabulo Ndebele on an issue involving UCT's non-appointment of a South African born African academic, Professor Archie Mafeje in 1968 and the early 1990s. The results of my research led to UCT making a formal apology to the Mafeje family (Ntsebeza 2008 and republished with slight amendments in 2014). This initial research aroused my interest in the Centre for African Studies at UCT, and I started a more extensive research on the Centre towards the end of 2009. This new research project was interrupted by my involvement in a process that eventually led to the establishment of a new School of African and Gender Studies, Anthropology and Linguistics (AXL). I led the discussions for the establishment of this new School between March and October 2011. In June 2012, I was appointed as the holder of the A.C. Jordan Chair in African Studies, which carried the responsibility of being the Director of CAS, among others. Although the archival aspect of the research on CAS, as well as the conducting of interviews have been affected by my added responsibilities, my involvement in the discussions about the new School, as well as

[1] This paper is based on the presentation at the conference in Bayreuth in 2017. A slightly different version was published as 'The ebb and flow of the fortunes of African studies at the University of Cape Town: an overview', *Social Dynamics*, 46:2, pp. 356-372, 2020. DOI: 10.1080/02533952.2020.1815335.
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directing CAS, put me in a position to comment knowledgeably about developments regarding African Studies at UCT.

This is by no means a detailed account of the evolution of the concept of African Studies at UCT, but an overview based on work-in-progress; it is thus more suggestive than conclusive.

The Genesis of African Studies at UCT

The roots of African Studies at UCT go much deeper than the establishment of the Centre for African Studies in the mid-1970s. These can be traced as far back as the 19th century when missionaries such as W.A. Norton were keen to have a Chair of Bantu philology established in the Cape (Gordon 1990: 17). Norton, according to Robert Gordon, was a Church of England missionary "who was on friendly terms with several Cape Town professors" and also assisted missionaries to "overcome barriers of misunderstanding by providing them with proper language training" (Gordon 1990: 17). Howard Phillips tells us that Norton "had mastered several African languages in the course of his mission work in Africa earlier in the century" (Phillips 1993: 21).

At the same time, the "native question" posed by the dilemma of a foreign minority ruling over an indigenous majority, in the vein of Mahmood Mamdani's theory (Mamdani 1996b), pre-occupied colonialists and became a subject of serious discussion when moves were afoot for the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910. The Milner Native Affairs Commission of 1903-5 is a case in point. UCT was not an uninterested party in these processes. According to Gordon, the University publicly announced the establishment of the School of African Life and Languages "at the height of the Parliamentary debate on the Native Affairs Bill which created a permanent advisory Native Affairs Commission" (Gordon 1990: 18). It seems clear that UCT saw a role for itself in providing resources in the formulation and implementation of the 'Native policy'. However, the formation of the Union of South Africa, as well as the First World War, shifted focus away from the common interests between state and university.

Soon after the War, Norton resuscitated debates around "the scholarly study of the indigenous African population", eventually convincing "several leading men" in academic and government circles of the importance and urgency of the issue (Phillips 1993: 21). This time round, Norton explicitly linked this endeavour with the development of govern-

ment policy in its attempt to deal with the 'Native problem'. He argued that knowledge of the African population would lead to a solid 'Native policy'. Earlier on, in 1916, he had addressed the South African Association for the Advancement of Science in these terms: "Many a fatal mistake not only in dealing with individuals but also of general policy might have been avoided by a grounding in ethnology and comparative religion" (quoted in Phillips 1993: 21). Norton published a paper in 1917 entitled, "The Need and Value of Academic Study of Native Philology and Ethnology" in which he reasoned that "the study of language was the best 'index to their [Natives] psychology'" (Gordon 1990: 17). For him, it was absurd for a South African university to ignore, as Gordon puts it, "the languages and customs of five-sixth of the population" (Gordon 1990: 18).

Norton's efforts were rewarded when the government approved the creation of a chair in Bantu Philology in 1917, a chair which he was to occupy. However, this chair was "suddenly frozen as part of the state's wartime economy drive and Norton had to bide his time until it was re-instated in 1920" (Phillips 1993: 21). Norton never tired and gave evidence to a Government committee of inquiry into university grants in 1919. This inquiry wanted to address "problems whose solution is necessary for the future safe development of a country in which white and black are to live side by side" (quoted in Phillips 1993: 27). In the final analysis, the Union government endorsed the idea of establishing a school at UCT and the latter presented a plan of the school to the government in 1920. According to N.J. van der Merwe, the vision was that the school would be "a sizeable faculty presided over by a dean, teaching in languages as far afield as Swahili, and with research interests in such diverse subjects as the ethnology, religion and psychology of African peoples" (van der Merwe 1979: 62). A recommendation was made for the establishment "of a comprehensive, two-professor School of Bantu Life and Languages at UCT with a 3000-pound p.a. grant guaranteed for five years" (Phillips 1993: 22). Norton, at the time 50 years of age, was appointed chair of Bantu Philology in April 1920. He suggested a name change to "African", so as not to limit his chair to "Bantu-speaking zones only". The second chair was named "Social Anthropology", rather than "Ethnology", the name suggested by the committee of inquiry (Phillips 1993: 22). Although an initial budget of 3000 pounds was approved by the government, it was cut in half on the 24th of December 1920 (van der Merwe 1979: 62). Norton was appointed, initially, at a professorial level

in Bantu Philology, but for financial reasons was eventually appointed a lecturer in Bantu Languages and Literature, a position that was converted into a Professorship of Bantu Philology in 1921. The other chair of the School went to Alfred R. Radcliff-Brown, a 39-year-old Cambridge graduate.

Based on the above, it can be argued that the University of Cape Town must be the first university on the African continent to form a school that would focus on African Studies. Furthermore, it is clear that the genealogy of the concept of African Studies at UCT cannot be divorced from the colonial strategy of ruling over the indigenous people. The role that Radcliffe-Brown and by extension anthropology played in this regard is of particular interest. According to Gordon (Gordon 1990: 15), there was clear complicity between Radcliffe-Brown and the colonial project, something which had far reaching implications for the discipline of Anthropology and its implication not only in the colonial project but also in the elaboration of the apartheid project in the 1940s and later (Gordon 1990: 15). Gordon cites Paul Rich (1984) in noting that General Smuts personally invited A.R. Radcliffe-Brown to establish the social anthropology course at the University of Cape Town in 1921, leading to the establishment of the first distinctly South African anthropological journal, Bantu Studies (Gordon 1990: 16). Meyer Fortes remarked that "at the time" there was "not a single full-time professorship of anthropology in any British university" (quoted in Gordon 1990, p. 16), suggesting that the first full-time professorial position in the British system was awarded to Radcliffe-Brown, at UCT.

According to Phillips, Radcliffe-Brown tried to convince the government of the importance of the school. As Phillips puts it:

> Thus, he organised intensive vacation courses in African life and languages for missionaries and civil servants, testified before a Government commission of inquiry, gave several extension lectures in the Peninsula and beyond and delivered a series of impressive talks to the annual conference of Transkei magistrates in 1924. (Phillips 1993: 24).

As Chair of Social Anthropology, Radcliffe-Brown was also head of the School (van der Merwe 1979: 62). He was seemingly a popular teacher, drawing large numbers of students.

Relations between Radcliffe-Brown and Norton were apparently not the best. Norton's main interest, Phillips seems to suggest, was research, rather than teaching. His courses never attracted more than one student

a year, something that was not appreciated by both Beattie, the principal, and his colleagues. He enjoyed collecting "native lore and history" from the elderly which he wrote up and published as "intellectually lightweight papers" between 1921 and 1926 (Phillips 1993: 2). On his part, Radcliffe-Brown despised the work of Norton as the following quote shows: "[A] trained anthropologist with no knowledge of the languages will do work of infinitely more scientific value than an untrained man with a perfect knowledge of the language" (quoted in Phillips 1993: 23). Radcliffe-Brown wanted the chair of Philology to go. This eventually happened in 1923. Although he was supposed to resign effective from the 1st of April 1925, Norton was forced to leave on the day of his resignation. This, according to Phillips, spelt the decline of African languages at UCT, with the school being a school in African languages only in name (Phillips 1993: 24).

Radcliffe-Brown resigned in 1925 and went to the University of Sydney to take up a newly created chair in social anthropology, "frustrated by trying to extract research funds from unimpressed colonial bureaucrats" (Gordon 1990: 16). Indeed, on the year he assumed duties in 1921, the government grant was halved again, from 3000 to 1500 British pounds. He apparently left the School in a state of disarray, under the leadership of "his erstwhile research assistant, AJH Goodwin, who became acting professor and two postgraduate students as temporary replacements" (Phillips 1993: 25). Whilst assisting Radcliffe-Brown, Goodwin developed an interest in "archaeological artefacts" (Phillips 1993: 25). He went on to introduce a new course in Ethnology and Archaeology in 1929.

Tom Barnard took over from Radcliffe-Brown from 1926 to 1933. According to Phillips, he "left no mark as an anthropologist on South Africa; in fact, after leaving Cape Town, he dropped anthropology altogether for botany" (Phillips 1993: 26). During his tenure, the School's grant from the Government was further cut. His response was to forge closer ties with the colonial government and try to attract students by offering "vocationally-orientated courses", geared towards "'native administrators' and missionaries" (Phillips 1993: 26). However, the response to these courses was poor for the simple reason that, while the Native Affairs Department offered bonuses "to officials who gained the diploma", the Public Service Commission "refused to recognise the diploma for promotion purposes" (Phillips 1993: 26). This, naturally, did not make the Diploma attractive to administrators. According to Phillips, between 1923 and 1930, the courses "drew exactly two Native Affairs Department

men" (Phillips 1993: 26). Politicians saw the School as dealing with "the 'native problem' in a far too academic way" (Phillips 1993: 27). As a result, it never had a direct influence on policy, something that had been envisaged when the school was established. However, Phillips does concede that "by its focus on the traditional elements of African society, it is possible that [the School] contributed in some degree to the development of the ideology of segregation which became the direction 'native policy' took between the wars" (Phillips 1993: 27).

By 1933, eight years after the resignation of Radcliffe-Brown, the then Principal of UCT, Sir Carruthers Beattie, was to confide "to his old friend C.T. Loram" as follows:

> At present I look upon the school as our worst effort. We were unfortunate in many ways in getting Radcliffe-Brown – a careerist – and Norton – a fool. I have taken on my job for another three years […] One of the objects will be to pull this school together or get rid of it. (Quoted in Gordon 1990: 22).

As will be seen below, Beattie did not jettison the idea of the school, only the name changed.

Notable is that in his account of the formative years of African Studies at the University of Cape Town up to 1948, Phillips makes sympathetic observations about the school that may have important lessons for UCT today, particularly in relation to debates concerning the sizes of departments, as well as debates on inter/trans/non-disciplinarity. According to him:

> UCT's School of African Life and Languages provided the exemplar for the study of African societies at university level in South Africa. By 1930 three similar schools had been founded at the country's main universities, all of them based on the UCT interdisciplinary model. Moreover, such a framework permitted the new disciplines of social anthropology and archaeology to develop at a time when their practitioners would have been hard put to justify their creation as independent university departments – the fate of Bantu Philology shows what could happen to a department which did not prove its raison d'etre to the academic community. It should also be borne in mind that, though neither Social Anthropology professor undertook much original research, the School itself acted as a fruitful training ground for several of South Africa's pioneering anthropologists and archaeologists and as a conduit for generous research funds from the Government. (Phillips 1993: 26-27).

Important as these lessons are, the colonial heritage of the school is important to bear in mind as the story of African Studies at UCT unfolds.

The School of African Studies: 1933-1974

As already noted, Beattie, despite his sharp criticism, never closed the school. When the Great Depression was over, Beattie persuaded the University to reinstate the chair of Social Anthropology which had been frozen when Barnard resigned in 1933. He also recommended the establishment of a full-time chair of Bantu Languages (Phillips 1993: 270). The name of the school was changed to the School of African Studies.

The first Chair of the 'new' school was Isaac Schapera, who assumed duties in 1935. As with Goodwin, Schapera was Radcliffe-Brown's student, did a "Masters with the master" (Gordon 1990: 23). Apart from social anthropology, the other departments that were associated with the School of African Studies were: African languages, archaeology and native law and administration. The latter changed its name to Comparative African Government and Law under the headship of Jack Simons from 1938 to 1966, the year in which he was banned by the apartheid government. Notable names in the other departments include G.P. Lestrade (Chair in Language, 1935-1962) and A/Prof John Goodwin (UCT staff in archaeology between 1923-1959). The latter, according to van der Merwe, co-authored The Stone Age Cultures of South Africa with Clarence van Riet Lowe in 1929. In 1945, he founded the South African Archaeological Society, "with Prime Minister J.C. Smuts as the first life member" (van der Merwe 1979: 63).

The following quotation from Phillips provides an idea of the activities of the school up to the introduction of apartheid in 1948:

> With two committed and industrious young men filling these core posts from 1935, the School was revivified. Under the new name of the School of African Studies, it launched a multidisciplinary survey of life in Langa location with the aid of a grant from the Carnegie Corporation, instituted a sub-department of Native Law and Administration and in 1942 recommended publication of its research in a new series of "Communications from the School of African Studies". By 1948 nineteen such "communications" had been produced, emphasizing that, though students might be few and the School's prime purpose, training administrators and missionaries, largely unfulfilled, its output of original research was high. This helped temper the feeling in more traditional academic circles that the School and what it taught were otiose oddities, with as dubious a claim to a place in a university curriculum as Norton's Bantu Philology Department had been in the 1920s. (Phillips 1993: 270).

The "two committed and industrious young men" Phillips is referring to were Schapera and Lestrade. With regard to the series, "Communica-

tions from the School of African Studies", most reviews sang songs of praise of the School of African Studies at UCT.

Once again, and as Phillips has observed, the study of Native life was, as was the case with the previous school, the main focus of the successor. As before, the purpose was to inform government and equip it with strategies of ruling 'Bantu people', as the following quote by Beattie clearly shows: "People were often apt to forget that the European race was not the only civilised one, and they could never hope to legislate for the Bantu people without a knowledge of the civilization of those people" (quoted in Phillips 1993: 167). For Phillips, Lestrade was "so immersed […] in the peculiarities of individual Bantu languages that he energetically campaigned for their use in African schools as part of the promotion of what he perceived as a distinct "Bantu culture", a fact not unnoticed by the Bantu Education authorities in the 1950s as they drew him into their syllabus-planning committees (Phillips 1993: 271). This, however, was not the case with Schapera who, according to Phillips, did not share his colleagues' "one-dimensional view" and never succumbed to the training of the founding fathers of the discipline: Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski at the London School of Economics (LSE).

In the mid-to-late 1940s, the School of African Studies was joined by two scholars of repute: A.C. Jordan in 1946 and Monica Wilson in 1948. Jordan was a lecturer in Lestrade's Language section of the School of African Studies and had by then published his classic, Ingqumbo yeminyanya (The Wrath of the Ancestors). He became the first black African to be awarded a PhD in African Languages at UCT. Electronic correspondence with his wife, Phyllis Ntantala, paints a picture of the calibre of Jordan. She recalled how Jordan responded to criticism of him leaving Fort Hare University for UCT in these terms: "I am going to UCT to open that door and keep it ajar, so that our people too can come in. UCT on African soil belongs to US too. UCT can and will never be a true university, until it admits US too, the children of the soil. I am going there to open that door and keep it ajar!" (Ntantala 2012).[2] Monica Wilson had also briefly lectured in the Department of African Studies at Fort Hare University before taking up appointment at Rhodes University where she was when she joined the Department of Social Anthropology

[2] A.C. Jordan, alongside Archie Mafeje and Mahmood Mamdani, will be a subject of detailed study in my longer term and in-depth study of African Studies at UCT.

within the School in 1948, the year the National Party came to power and introduced apartheid.

In 1952, Monica Wilson became the head of the School. This was at a time when the apartheid regime was formulating legislation that would entrench separate development in South Africa. One such legislation was the so-called extension of Universities Act of 1959 which effectively introduced Bantu Education in tertiary education. A.C. Jordan found apartheid unbearable and ended up resigning from UCT to, in the words of his wife, "go start afresh somewhere, thus forfeiting all his Pension Rights except what he had paid into" (Ntantala 2012). Things were not becoming any easier in the 1960s, as Jack Simons was banned from teaching and forced to leave on an exit permit in 1965. His daughter, Mary Simons, who taught in the same Department as her father, was also banned from teaching in 1976. There was also what has since been referred to as the Mafeje affair of 1968, when Archie Mafeje was appointed senior lecturer but his appointment was rescinded as a result of what the UCT Principal at the time, Sir Richard Luyt and Council, claimed was interference by the apartheid regime. The decision to rescind Mafeje's appointment was roundly criticised.[3]

The actions of the apartheid regime suggest that the once cordial ties between some members of the School and the government were becoming a thing of the past. But it is not clear what conception, if any, of African Studies was upheld by the school. What seems clear is that the resignations and harassments of members of the school weakened it. Apart from the external threats from government, van der Merwe introduces internal dimensions and sees the weakening and eventual demise of the School as firstly, "a process of internal fission with the establishment of independent departments of African Languages (in 1967) and Archaeology (1968). These sections had grown to the size of departments in their own right" (van der Merwe 1979: 63).

Secondly, van der Merwe observes that "courses with the "African" prefix were starting up in subjects like history and economic history" and "many other departments", concluding that "having achieved its goal of making UCT community aware of the continent they live in, the School engineered its own demise". The last reason was the retirement of Monica Wilson in 1973, "who had laboured hard and long on behalf of the school" (van der Merwe 1979: 63).

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[3] For a detailed account see Hendricks 2008.

It is worth noting that the first two internal reasons advanced by van der Merwe for the demise of the School can be instructive for current debates and discussions about Centres and Institutes of African Studies, not only at UCT, but across the African continent. Also of current interest would be an examination of the notion of an 'Africa'-focus in Departments. What did it mean then and what does it mean now?

The Centre for African Studies

The demise of the School of African Studies did not deal a death blow to the notion of African Studies. Barely a year after the resignation of Wilson, discussions on African Studies at UCT were underway. Interviews I conducted and van der Merwe's account show that there were members of the academic staff, students and administrators who were keen to pursue the study of Africa. This led to a series of public meetings. Van der Merwe, who joined the Archaeology Department in 1974, recalled that he found himself chairing these fiery sessions, probably because he "did not really understand what was going on". Later, he remarked that the way universities operate is "by catching you unawares" (van der Merwe 1979: 64), an observation I would certainly agree with, given my own experience. These discussions led to a proposal for the establishment of a Board of African Studies "to coordinate research and teaching among the many departments involved in the subject" (van der Merwe 1979: 64) in 1975. Interviews show that young academics and students in departments that constituted the School of African Studies worked hard to ensure that African Studies as an interdisciplinary space was revived.[4] The possibility of revitalising African Studies at UCT received a boost with its approval by the Vice Chancellor, Sir Richard Luyt, and the Senate.

Another important development that took place at the same time as these discussions were taking place was the involvement of Harry Oppenheimer, who was at the time Chancellor of UCT. In my interview with UCT academic Ron Davies, he recalled that senior members of the Anglo American and De Beers Chairman's Fund were scouting to establish a 'special project' in UCT to commemorate the Chancellorship of

[4] These academics included the then recently appointed Nick van der Merwe, Mary Simons from Comparative African Government and Law (CAGL), Martin West from Social Anthropology and Martin Hall from Archaeology and Ron Davies. Amongst students can be mentioned Mugsy Spiegel and Patrick Harries.

Mr Harry Oppenheimer and at the same time mark the UCT 150 Appeal then gaining momentum. In that exercise Sir Richard Luyt, on 10 June 1975, at a meeting with its Chairman, Mr Michael O'Dowd, drew the attention of the Chairman's fund to the idea of supporting the development of African Studies at UCT.

Interview with Ron Davies at UCT on 8 April 2011

The outcome was a donation for the establishment of a Centre for African Studies. Some of the funds were to be used to develop a library on African Studies so as to support the work of the Centre while the rest would be invested so as to generate income for the Centre's activities. Apart from the library, it was envisaged that the activities of the Centre would include invitations to prominent scholars in African Studies, recruitment of post-graduate students from countries on the African continent, as well as the facilitation of visits within the continent of UCT staff members.

The Centre was approved by the Council on 28 July 1976 and was affiliated to the Harry Oppenheimer Institute which would provide funding for the activities of the Centre. Professor C. de B. Webb from the Department of History was the first chairperson of the Board of African Studies, with Professor Nick van der Merwe from the Archaeology Department the first Director of CAS. The Centre was not based in any particular department but the following Departments formed its core: African Languages, Anthropology, Archaeology, African History and African Economic History. It was open to any interested member of the academic staff or post-graduate students involved with African Studies in its broadest sense. There was no dedicated budget to employ permanent academic staff members. Administrative support was provided through projects such as the South African Labour Development Research Unit (SALDRU) which had been doing research on the broad field of African Studies and had affiliated to CAS. At the time CAS was established, it did not offer any courses of its own.[5] The reasoning was that CAS would promote African Studies across the University by influencing Departments to have an African Studies component in their courses.

[5] Note the striking similarities with CAS when it was resuscitated in 2012.

The main activities of the Centre in the initial years took the form of weekly lectures on "the historical background of South Africa's diverse peoples" and on "contemporary problems and planning in education, medicine, urbanization and economics" (van der Merwe 1979: 65) and, in 1979, "colloquia on current research" (van der Merwe 1979: 65). As part of the celebrations of 150 years of UCT, the Centre hosted the national conference of the professional societies of anthropologists, archaeologists, economists and geographers in 1979. However, the greatest achievement of the Centre appears to have been the establishment of the African Studies Library, which, as van der Merwe puts it, "amassed a vast amount of primary source material at which scholars […] [were] just beginning to nibble" (van der Merwe 1979: 65). Research results were also striking with members associated with the Centre, making up about 30% of members of the Arts Faculty and yet producing "nearly 50 per cent of its research publications in 1978" (van der Merwe 1979: 65). In his response to Mahmood Mamdani in their exchange over the teaching of African Studies at UCT (see below), Martin Hall gave a succinct account of the activities of the Centre in the 1980s:

> [S]ince the beginning of the 1980s, the Centre had developed an interdisciplinary curriculum, both in an undergraduate "introduction to Africa" and in post-graduate Diploma and Honours courses that linked a wide range of disciplines […] and framed them within contemporary affairs […] In the face of attempts by the apartheid state to stifle all opposition […] the Centre organised seminars and conferences that critiqued the state and presented the policies of banned organisations. All of this is on record: the Centre's publications, the long Africa Seminar series, reports, documents and curricula. (Hall 1998: 87).

The dramatic developments of the late 1980s and early 1990s, leading to political negotiations for a democratic South Africa resulted in discussions in the Centre that led to the establishment of the A.C. Jordan Chair in African Studies in 1993. For Hall, this was part of a "drive to reverse isolation and connect South Africa to its continent." (Hall 1998: 88)

It is clear from the discussions of the selection committee for the A.C. Jordan Chair (Ntsebeza 2014) that the Centre was still grappling with what African Studies would entail at UCT, particularly given the looming possibility of the demise of apartheid and rule by the ANC. The first

meeting of the selection committee was on the 11th of October 1993.[6] The "nature of the Centre and what African Studies should be" were central to the discussions of this and subsequent meetings. These were some of the requirements for the incumbent: "somebody with an established research record, a commitment to multi-disciplinary approaches, admin experience as at some time this person will serve as Director of the Centre; and also have considerable contacts in Africa". It was also disclosed that "(p)art of the reason why Anglo American has given the funding for this chair is to develop links with the rest of the African continent". One member was clear that they did not want "somebody who would be a clone, the same as before", the Centre, according to the member wanted a person who would take it in "new directions and who has a new network and new background". At the same time, the new person was expected "to also consolidate the work that is being done in the Centre". It is also clear that the selection committee was committed to appointing a black person.

There can be little doubt that the above process was destined to set UCT on a new path in terms of African Studies, radically different from what UCT had ever known and experienced. However, as I argue in my article published in the Codesria Bulletin in December 2008 and in Social Dynamics in 2014 on the relationship between Archie Mafeje and UCT, the manner in which some senior members of the selection committee handled themselves casts serious doubt on their commitment to the sentiments expressed in their discussions about the qualities of the incumbent. Mafeje's pedigree, based on his writings, international standing, referees and the fact that he was appointed at UCT on merit in 1968 as Senior Lecturer, made him a natural candidate for the job. It is now common knowledge that he was not even interviewed (Ntsebeza 2008; 2014).

However, the appointment of Mahmood Mamdani in the second round of the selection process for the A.C. Jordan Chair could in many ways be seen as a corrective measure, if not, as developments below show, an accidental appointment based on possibly not knowing the person. Mamdani was appointed in September 1996 and within a month of his appointment put forward his vision of African Studies at UCT. Very succinctly, Mamdani's key question was what a centre for African

[6] The proceedings of the meeting are recorded in File 300, Box 44.1.3 (2), *Administrative Archives, UCT*. The rest of this paragraph will quote from this source.

Study should be in the context of post-apartheid South Africa (Mamdani 1996a: 1). He contended that "there is hardly any comparative work that relates South African themes to developments north of the Limpopo, much less to north of the Zambezi", leading him to come to the conclusion that the name, Centre for African Studies is "a misnomer" (Mamdani 1996: 2). Mamdani was particularly critical of the colonial study of Africans as 'the other' and the notion of what he referred to as "South African exceptionalism", emphasising the importance of "locating South Africa in the African experience" (Mamdani 1996a: 4). According to him, African Studies should be "an institutional home for the study of ourselves" and "a way of understanding the world we live in from different, multiple and simultaneous vantage points" (Mamdani 1996a: 6).

He continued along this line of criticism in the much-publicised seminar held at UCT on the 22nd of April 1998. The circumstances leading to this seminar are part of my much broader study of the history of African Studies at UCT and will not be subject of discussion in this contribution. Suffice it to say that Mamdani was, after a year of his appointment, requested to draft a curriculum for an introductory course on Africa. A committee was set up to assess the curriculum. There was disagreement between Mamdani and members of the committee over the teaching and content of the course. He was subsequently suspended from the committee and a substitute course replaced the one he had designed. Mamdani felt that this response warranted open debates. The April seminar was the outcome of this. Mamdani (1998) launched a scathing criticism about how Africa was taught in the past, that it was developed outside the African continent, studied by non-Africans within the context of colonialism and later the Cold War and apartheid. He again raised the issue of South African exceptionalism, largely drawn from his award-winning book, Citizen and Subject (Mamdani 1996b). He attacked the substitute course for having a racialised periodisation along the lines of suggesting a pre-colonial past without the white person, Africa under white rule and Africa after the White Man relinquished political control. He championed a de-racialised curriculum, which would draw primarily from discussions forged in the academy in independent Africa.

Mamdani's provocation elicited responses from Johann Graaff (1998), who was a member of the committee, and Martin Hall, who was not a member of the committee but was drawn in in the drafting of the substitute course. Again, it is not my intention to get into the nuances of their responses in this overview. What I can highlight here is that Graaff's

response was largely based on pedagogical issues with an emphasis on the importance of focusing on the honing of the academic skills (argumentation, essay writing, synthesis and analysis) of first year students. Both Graaff and Hall, who held similar views, suggested, in my view, that Mamdani raised the bar too high in terms of course content and prescribing primary texts written by African scholars. Mamdani had interpreted this as of form of or an extension of Bantu Education to UCT, a claim that his colleagues strenuously rejected. Hall's response was more substantial and tackled Mamdani on his claims about racism and South African exceptionalism.

Almost all the people I interviewed and who witnessed these discussions were of the impression that they were acrimonious and according to Ron Davis, "unnecessarily conflictual". However, none doubts that the positive outcome of this process was, in the words of one of my interviewees, "an exceptional and invigorating level of verbal and written academic debate between senior role players". These discussions, unfortunately, were never pursued as Mamdani resigned and took up appointment in the United States. From there on, the Centre for African Studies was never the same and, for reasons best suited for another discussion, gradually "deteriorated" to a point where by 2009 there was a distinct possibility that it would be "disestablished".

The Current Situation and Beyond

The possible disestablishment of the Centre was not only viewed by some academics at UCT with concern, particularly considering its history, but was seen as something of a contradiction, given that Vice-Chancellor Max Price (2008 – 2018) had a vision of making UCT an Afropolitan university. Although for the two terms he served, he never elaborated on what the term meant, there was an expectation from some UCT academic that the Centre for African Studies would play a role of clarifying the meaning and significance of the term. In this regard, the possibility of closing the Centre down would seem to be a contradiction. A task team, of which I was a member, was set up, whose brief was to conduct a series of consultations and discussions both inside the faculty and across the university more widely in order to develop a number of possible scenarios, to offer debate and decision by the faculty and the university which relate to the future role of the Centre for African Studies. However, just

as we were beginning to focus on the task, two more departments, the Institute for Gender Studies and Social Anthropology, were included.

Following a series of discussions, members of the task team came up with a proposal for the establishment of a new school that was tentatively named The New School for Critical Enquiry in Africa. This proposal was accepted by the faculty executive but there were problems with its implementation resulting in the collapse of the process at the end of 2010. A series of developments, not least the involvement of students mainly in defence of CAS, led to a Humanities Faculty forum meeting which was held on the 25th of February 2011 to discuss possible ways of taking the collapsed process forward. At a subsequent faculty board meeting, I was appointed to facilitate discussions that would lead to the establishment of the new school – involving the three departments, the Linguistics unit and three NRF research Chairs, including mine, based in the Humanities Faculty. After lengthy discussions, all participants, including students, agreed to establish a School of African and Gender Studies, Anthropology and Linguistics. The proposal was accepted by all university structures and the school started its business at the beginning of 2012.

The importance of articulating an intellectual direction for the school was acknowledged, but there was also recognition of the fact that time was needed to debate the differences that led to the collapse of the earlier attempts to set up a school. In this regard, it was proposed and agreed that these debates would take place within the new school and that the process would be reviewed after four years. A review of the School was conducted in 2016 but it is beyond the scope of this article to go into details of the outcome of the review save to say that the School is established and has a Director, Professor Shahid Vawda, who is also the holder of the newly established (2017) Archie Mafeje Chair.

At the same time, there was agreement that the A.C. Jordan Chair in African Studies, which was held by Mamdani and was frozen when he left at the end of 1998, would be re-advertised, with CAS assuming its original role of being a University facility promoting African Studies across UCT and beyond. In June 2012, I, the author was appointed the AC Jordan Chair of African Studies and Director of CAS. The main mission of the revived CAS is to promote African Studies across departments and faculties at UCT and beyond, particularly within the African continent and the global South. CAS is committed to creating an interdisciplinary environment facilitating discussions, research and teaching on Africa, while at the same time taking a leadership role in establishing

and consolidating links with universities across the African continent and the global South in particular.

In line with its mission of promoting African Studies, conversations were initiated with colleagues who do and/or are interested in doing research and teaching on Africa across departments and faculties. Preliminary research was conducted to get a sense of research and teaching on Africa done at UCT. This initial stage focused on the Humanities Faculty and involved the collection and analysis of departmental course outlines and the UCT Humanities handbook, for Africa related courses and literature sources. With course outlines in particular, the research aimed at also identifying how literature by African scholars was prescribed or not prescribed. This is ongoing research which will gain intensity, especially given the research questions that arose with the eruption of the student-led protests ignited by the #RhodesMustFall campaign of March 2015.

Although not formally assigned with teaching responsibilities, an activity that is in the hand of the African Studies Unit of AXL, CAS initiated the establishment of a University-wide course on the study of Africa. In this regard, CAS invited the then Director of the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana, Legon, Professor Akosua Adamafo Ampofo, to facilitate a workshop drawing lessons for CAS based on the university wide course that is taught at the University of Ghana. The workshop was held on the 3rd of October 2012, four months after the relaunch of CAS. The University of Ghana made this course compulsory to all its graduates since the early 1960s. The thinking in CAS is that a university wide course on the study of Africa would be the most effective way of promoting African Studies at UCT, that is, through teaching and curriculum design. Following this, CAS established in 2013, the African Studies at UCT committee, comprised of colleagues who participated in the workshop and others from various departments and faculties at UCT, including colleagues from the newly established School of African and Gender Studies, Anthropology and Linguistics (AXL), CHED, African Languages and Health Sciences. Discussions for the establishment of a University-wide course are high on the agenda and there are various proposals as to how that course should be taught that are under discussion.

CAS has also played a prominent role in the establishment of an Undergraduate Major in African Studies which is taught under the auspices of the African Studies Unit in AXL. The need for this course came in the midst of discussions for the promotion of a University-wide course,

outlined above and the eruption of the student-led protests of 2015 and 2016 which demanded, among others, curriculum reform and putting Africa in the centre of knowledge production. The course was launched in 2017 at a first-year level and is now, 2019, offered up to the third year.

In terms of research, CAS hosts a range of projects, including the following flagships: the meaning of democracy for people living in areas under the control of traditional leaders (chiefs of various ranks); farm workers and dwellers on commercial farms; land use and livelihoods; the pre-colonial historiography of southern Africa and the role of land-based social movements. Apart from the A.C. Jordan Chair in African Studies, CAS hosts the National Research Foundation (NRF) Research Chair in Land Reform and Democracy in South Africa. The two chairs have since 2018 been linked and are both held by the author.

Important to note is that UCT has up to now refrained from making a long-term commitment to CAS by way of providing funding to employ a permanent Director at professorial level and an administrator. This is the least that one would expect the University to do. This, as can be seen from this overview, is the history of UCT and African Studies.

By Way of Conclusion

This takes us back to the point I raised at the beginning, namely the place and space of African Studies at UCT and what this means, has yet to be discussed in earnest. The discussions leading to the establishment of the school in 1920 did not address the issue; the discussions were more about setting up a school and postponed dealing with the tough issue of what the intellectual business of the school will be and how, if at all, the school will address the issue of African Studies at UCT. We have seen that in the period leading to the demise of the School of African Studies in the early/mid 1970s, there were attempts to challenge the need for an independent school that would focus on Africa. The claims made were that it should be task of each Department to have a component of Africa in its course, thus making a separate school or centre redundant. These claims continue to pop up whenever the question of African Studies at UCT is raised. They question the very notion of Africans studying themselves, which sounds absurd in the context of objections that Africans are "othered" by North scholars who regard themselves as Africanists.

The above raised questions as to who should study Africa, if not by Africans themselves and by non-Africans. This is an issue that UCT must

grapple with and rigorous and vigorous research in this regard should be encouraged and promoted. Given the distinct possibility that most academics would not be in the forefront of these debates and discussions, largely due to their disciplinary anchors, CAS has to take the lead and use its strength of being by nature inter-trans-disciplinary to create platforms for academics from various Departments to come together and discuss their research, methodologies and findings on similar topics with their counterparts in other Departments.

CAS should also take a lead in discussing the history of African Studies at UCT. While it might be true that no clear-cut notion of African Studies can be discerned at UCT, it is obvious that certain individuals or groups of individuals in various positions of power have held their own conceptions of African Studies. These need to be uncovered and put on the table for robust debates. Crucial to this project would be a review of the Mamdani debate of the late 1990s as well as the selection process for the AC Jordan Chair that the late Archie Mafeje applied for but was not even interviewed (Ntsebeza 2008; 2014). The latter would entail a deeper understanding of the intellectual and scholarly contributions of Mafeje that established him as a world-renowned scholar. There is a lot that can be learned if this exercise were to be allowed to take place without interference. To make this task possible, University records would have to be opened to those who are keen to pursue this task.

Finally, there seems to be no better time to intensify research, debates and discussions of African Studies at UCT than 2020, when UCT will be commemorating the centenary of the formal establishment of the School of Bantu Life and Languages Bantu Life in 1920, arguably the first to formalise the study of Africa and its people in the Western world, if not the world over.

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