

Does Post-Apartheid UCT Need a Centre for African Studies?

As students and indeed clients of the University of Cape Town (UCT), we have chosen UCT for its reputation as a world-class African university. Prior to and during our time at this world-class institution of higher learning, we invest our time, energy, financial resources and intellect, not only to our own work and careers, but to enriching the faculties, departments, clubs and organisations to which we belong. Of course, this is how educational institutions function, which is why we are baffled, appalled, angered, enraged and deeply disappointed by the university's administrative decision to disestablish the Centre for African Studies without our input or consultation. We include our response and position here, hoping that our voices will be heard and taken seriously.

Our question is simple: Does post-apartheid UCT need a Centre for African Studies?

As students in support of the Centre, our resounding "YES!" is obvious. We affirm our support of a uniquely multi-disciplinary department that cultivates critical intellectual work, which interrogates the study of Africa, the African Diaspora and the global South; a department that centralises Africa and its varied, nuanced and many times disparate intellectual histories and ways of knowing in order to challenge disciplinary paradigms and the relations between power and knowledge production.

With this in mind, we are struggling to comprehend the proposed disestablishment of the Centre for African Studies. The Centre has produced groundbreaking work, dynamic partnerships with other universities and is regarded very highly around the globe. It plays a pivotal role in questions that continue to haunt postcolonial, post-apartheid South Africa, and is placed uniquely to examine just what it means to be a South African tertiary institution committed to the ideals outlined in the South African Constitution.

Among the many questions asked at the Centre are those that encourage us to reflect on and question ourselves and our relationships with others. These are not merely academic questions. Rather, they inspire us to examine critically our own identities and how and why we are represented in particular ways. Through this lens, we are given the space to discuss openly what knowledges are accepted as equal, and how power, institutional and otherwise, operates.

Whilst we understand and respect the autonomy of the university as set out by statute, we believe that as students of a South African university, we will suffer losses (material, intellectual and otherwise) if this closure goes ahead. It will damage the reputation of South African universities abroad, as we will be seen as an African university that does not believe that the scholarship of Africa is important.

Crucially, the question is one that centres on issues of transformation at UCT. As we see it, UCT does need the Centre for African Studies, but can the Centre for African Studies

exist in post-apartheid University of Cape Town? This is a space of hope that asks us to imagine different ways of being. It is a challenge that is urgent and one that UCT, in its apparent quest for transformation and Afropolitanism must accept and support.

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