

# *Decolonizing African Universities: The Case of South Africa. Lessons ‘From Africa’ and the African Diaspora.*

University of Ghana, Legon

History Department Seminar Presentation: Wednesday 29 February 2017



Dr Neo Lekgotla laga Ramoupi, PhD.

Email: [Ramoupi.N@che.ac.za](mailto:Ramoupi.N@che.ac.za) & [neolekgotlagaramoupi@gmail.com](mailto:neolekgotlagaramoupi@gmail.com)

AHP Post-Doctoral Fellow: 2016-2017 & Senior Researcher in the Research, Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E), Council on Higher Education (CHE) [www.che.ac.za](http://www.che.ac.za)  
Pretoria, South Africa

The past twenty years of our liberation have disappointed and failed African research and scholarship in South African higher education institutions. In this article, I provide examples of how we have failed to transform the higher education sector. The first example is drawn from two fieldwork studies I conducted at the Universities of Ghana, Legon and of Dar es Salaam on the subject of curriculum and content in higher education in Africa. At liberation, Kwame Nkrumah and Mwalimu Nyerere, founding Presidents of Ghana and Tanzania, respectively, were clear about what they wanted the role of the university and education to be in their independent countries. Nkrumah asked if the university would be permitted to proceed in its established pattern. And the answer for Nkrumah was a confident “No.” A radical shift away from the courses and degree structure already established at the University of Ghana, Legon was required.

The President of Ghana knew that the function of the university in the postcolonial period was to study the history, culture and institutions, languages, arts, and heritage of Ghana and of Africa in new African-centred ways, free from the proportions of the colonial era.

For Tanzania, “our first step,” said Nyerere, “must be to re-educate ourselves; to regain our former attitude of mind”; he spoke “of the need for an African university to provide an “African-orientated education,” an education aimed to meet “the present needs of Africa.”<sup>1</sup> The point I make with Ghana and Tanzania is that there was a bold commitment to radically change the direction of their education systems that was absent in South Africa at the time of our liberation in 1994 (p.1).

Neo Lekgotla laga Ramoupi, PhD.,

“African Research and Scholarship: Twenty Years  
of Lost Opportunities to Transform Higher  
Education in South Africa”

*Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*, 38(1) December 2014  
<http://escholarship.org/uc/item/13m5c5vp#page-3>

---

<sup>1</sup> Neo Lekgotla laga Ramoupi, “Deconstructing Eurocentric Education: A Comparative Study of Teaching Africa-centred Curriculum at the University of Cape Town and the University of Ghana, Legon,” *Postamble*, 7:2, 2012.  
[https://www.academia.edu/12365243/Deconstructing Eurocentric Education A Comparative Study ...Article](https://www.academia.edu/12365243/Deconstructing_Eurocentric_Education_A_Comparative_Study...Article) (<http://postamble.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/NeoRamoupifinal.pdf>)

In attempting to *Decolonizing African Universities*, this presentation focuses on fieldworks carried out between 2010 and 2017 in Ghana at the Institute of African Studies (IAS), University of Ghana, Legon (UGL); in Tanzania, Pan-African Studies Department at the University of Dar es Salaam (UDS); in South Africa at the Centre of African Studies (CAS) at the University of Cape Town (UCT); and at the historic University of Fort Hare (UFH).

The second focus of my presentation focuses on the volatile year -2014 – in the South African Higher Education landscape that, I argue, gave birth, firstly, to the #Rhodes Must Fall Movement in March 2015 at in Cape Town at UCT and which spread nationally into other Universities in South Africa and internationally; secondly, to the #Fees Must Fall Movement in Johannesburg at the University of Witwatersrand (Wits) in October 2015, and which became a truly South African Universities' Protest Movement; and the first nationally organised student movement in South Africa's democratic dispensation that shut down the entire University system for a week. It is likened to the June 1976's Soweto Students' Uprisings. Thirdly, I survey the other Fallist Movement that were born as a consequence of the two 'Must Fall Movements of 2015' into 2016 and expected to continue in the academic year of 2017, just starting right now in South Africa.

Throughout this presentation, I reflect on my own academic education and training in South Africa between 1987 and 1998 when I earned my Bachelor's degree to Master's degree in History at a historically white University (HWU), University of Natal Durban – UND – (renamed University of KwaZulu-Natal – UKZN – Howard College, Durban; and in the USA, at Howard University, in Washington D.C., where I read – on a Ford Foundation International Fellowship – and earned my PhD degree with major in African History, and minors in African Studies, Public History and Southern African History (2003-2006). I graduated in May 2013.

#### **Selected & Related Peer-Reviewed Publications:**

**2017 Publication:** “Africanisation of Knowledge in the Humanities in Africa: A Critique of the Cameroon and South African Experiences” (pp.195-214), in Michael Cross and Amasa Ndofirepi (Eds.), *Knowledge and Change in the African University – Volume 1 Current Debates*, [African Higher Education: Developments and Perspectives], Netherlands: Sense Publishers, January 2017. Link: <https://www.sensepublishers.com/catalogs/bookseries/african-higher-education/knowledge-and-change-in-african-universities-1/> or <http://tinyurl.com/hpt7bc2>. Co-authored with Roland Ndille Ntongwe, University of Beau, Cameroon.

“The Ties That Bind”: African-American Consciousness of Africa through Culture and Sports” in Jim C. Harper, II, Charles D. Johnson, et al, Eds., (Jarvis Hargrove, Tony Frazier) *Topics in African Diaspora History*, USA: Kendall Hunt Publishing Company, November 2016.

“The Black Man in the White Man's Court”: Mandela at Wits University, South Africa, 1943-1949, *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*, Current Issue, Volume 39, Issue 2, 2016. Link below: <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/3284d08q> ([http://escholarship.org/uc/international asc ufahamu](http://escholarship.org/uc/international_asc_uafahamu))  
Publication Date: 2 June 2016.

“Deconstructing Eurocentric Education: A Comparative Study of Teaching Africa-Centred Curriculum at the University of Cape Town and the University of Ghana, Legon,” *Postamble: Multidisciplinary Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2, June 2012.  
[https://www.academia.edu/12365243/Deconstructing Eurocentric Education A Comparative Study ...Article](https://www.academia.edu/12365243/Deconstructing_Eurocentric_Education_A_Comparative_Study...Article) (<http://postamble.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/NeoRamoupifinal.pdf>)

*Imperative of African-Centred Curriculum in South Africa*, Book, No. 16 2012. It is published by Africa Institute of South Africa, May 2012.  
[https://www.academia.edu/12365968/The Imperative of African-Centred Curriculum in South Africa](https://www.academia.edu/12365968/The_Imperative_of_African-Centred_Curriculum_in_South_Africa)

“African-Centred Education and African Languages: Content and Curriculum in Post-Apartheid Education and Training in South Africa”, *Policy Brief*, No.56, August 2011; published by *Africa Institute of South Africa*. <http://www.ai.org.za/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2011/11/No-56.-African-Centred-Education-and-African-Languages.pdf>

“African Research and Scholarship: 20 Years of Lost Opportunities to Transform Higher Education in South Africa”, *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*, 38 (1) December 2014 (UCLA), *Special South African Edition* to mark twenty years since the end of apartheid and a year since the passing of President Nelson Mandela. Link: <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/13m5c5vp#page-3>

“Black Students Speak Their Minds at UCT: Bantu Biko Alive in Their Frank-Talk”, *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*, Volume 38, Issue 3, 2015 (Commemorative Special Edition) <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/3r43z78g>

“A Response to WITS & an Update on a Push for Change in Higher Academia in South Africa”, co-authored with Worger, William H., *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*, Volume 38, Issue 3, 2015 (Commemorative Special Edition) <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/6hw9862v>

“Hairgate: We Must Look at Language Too to Get to the Root of the Problem”, *Mail & Guardian* (M&G), 2 September 2016 <http://mg.co.za/article/2016-09-02-00-hairgate-we-must-look-at-language-too-to-get-to-the-root-of-the-problem>

“Lessons from Rhodes Statue’s fall”, *Getting Ahead*, *Mail & Guardian*, 17-23 April 2015, <http://mg.co.za/article/2015-04-17-lessons-from-the-rhodes-statues-fall>