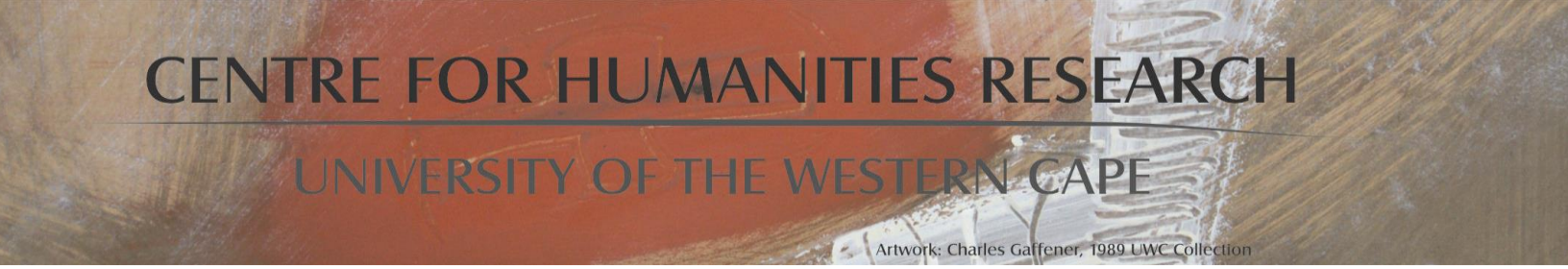

Other Universals: Theorizing from Postcolonial Locations on Politics and Aesthetics

The *Other Universals* consortium will engage with anti-imperial political and cultural thought, internationalist intellectual traditions and practices of solidarity that have emerged from locations marked by the struggle to refuse subordination and negation as embodied in blackness, Orientalism, untouchability and non-normative sexualities in 19th and 20th century Africa, the Caribbean, the Middle East, South Asia and Latin America.

The idea for this initiative emerges organically from the *Other Universals* theory collective that Dr. Ruchi Chaturvedi and Dr. Victoria Collis-Buthelezi initiated at the University of Cape Town in partnership with the Centre for Humanities Research. It is also an intellectual extension of three existing research initiatives that the Centre for Humanities Research has hosted, currently hosts, or of which it is a contributing partner. These are the projects on Aesthetics and Politics, Migrating Violence (supported by the Mellon Foundation), the current revitalization of the Politics Department at University of the Western Cape (UWC) under the auspices of Political Theory and Political Philosophy (also supported by the Mellon Foundation). Whilst each of these explores distinct research questions, mostly within the frameworks of the nation-state, we believe that the questions that they pose require a wider comparative conversation across the previously colonized world.

Other Universals is concerned with political and cultural thought and traditions of the (Global) South and putting them in conversation, but it also bears the mark of the "fever and fret"[1] of its time. Globally, it is almost trite to say that the humanities are in crisis. Austerity measures have taken hold or are threatening to in higher education in all of the regions represented in by the Other Universals Project. From South Africa, but also elsewhere, the question of what higher education can do toward co-creating freer, fairer societies is a keen concern. Epistemic violence is one of three apartheid legacies still alive in South Africa; to achieve epistemic justice—the undoing of epistemic violence and execution of redress

[1] C. L. R. James, "Preface to the First Edition," *The Black Jacobins* (Vintage Books1962, 1989): xi.

Private Bag X17, Bellville 7535, Rep of South Africa
Director: Premesh Lalu • Tel: +27 21 959 2616 • E-mail: plalu@uwc.ac.za
Administrator: Lameez Lalkhen • Tel: +27 21 959 3162 • Fax: +27 21 959 1282 • E-mail: llalkhen@uwc.ac.za

universities must be transformed.[2] *Other Universals* speaks directly to this. We are not only invested in fostering a school of comparative studies of intellectual traditions of the South, but have structured it such that it:

- Contributes to the widening of circuits of knowledge production that often favor the Northern Hemisphere, toward a more equitable inclusion of thinkers based in, and thinking from postcolonial locations;
- Directly aids in shifting the professoriate by fostering graduate students from previously disadvantaged groups (who will join the ranks of academia) and providing emerging scholars space and time to do research and produce scholarship that pushes our knowledge produced from postcolonial locations further; at the same time these emerging scholars will also participate in rebuilding the humanities and social sciences and our universities to meet the call for more equitable societies and spaces of higher learning;
- Fosters national and international networks to which such scholars can turn for intellectual support as well as other resources in the furthering of their research, teaching, and institution building;
- Through this consortium, *Other Universals* will also provide an infrastructure for co-creating curricula that participants can take home to our various institutions to feed the restructuring of Masters and PhD programs.

Given the discussions currently underway in South Africa, as well as other contexts from which other *Other Universals* co-convenors come—around fees, decolonizing curricula, and more equitable universities—*Other Universals* is not only timely, but constructively future-oriented.

As South African scholars grapple with the challenge of decolonizing knowledge, it has become evident that this larger demand might require a range of different processes and interventions that run concurrently. Some of these will include discipline specific conversations—such as those which assess the histories and genealogies of these discreet traditions of thought—and others that ask questions about shifting the orientations of their canonical texts. Others still necessitate engaging with postcolonial elsewheres. *Other Universals* takes up the challenge to decolonize knowledge through explicit cross-pollination with postcolonial locations and traditions outside of South Africa. An organic network of cultural studies scholars, political theorists, anthropologists, historians, literary theorists, sociologists, *Other Universals* will not only deconstruct the notion of South Africa as exception, but also track the ways in which modes of thought and cultural practices generated here are part of a larger story of

[2] See Suren Pillay, "Decolonizing the University, " http://africasacountry.com/2015/06/decolonizing-the-university/.

resistance, and the production of counter-knowledges and creativity. In so doing, *Other Universals* will focus not only on producing a new generation of scholars who may be called "free theoretical subjects" (Banerjee 2016: 43), but will also enable more established g scholars to rethink foundational assumptions inherited from apartheid and its colonial history. At the same time *Other Universals* will be a groundbreaking space for comparative reflections on specific objects of inquiry between parts of the world with shared histories and experiences reanimating alternative circuits of global knowledge. The *Other Universals* consortium is therefore driven by two imperatives: to cultivate a less Northern-centric research agenda, and to contribute towards producing a new generation of scholars in postcolonial locations.

As Drs. Collis-Buthelezi and Chaturvedi were conceiving *Other Universals* in 2015, the South African public sphere was discussing the terrible violence against foreign nationals that had recently occurred in Durban and Johannesburg. Media commentators were exhorting the impoverished and the unemployed black poor of South Africa reportedly involved in the violence to recognize their affinity with fellow Africans and others, typically from other postcolonies; many asked them to be "more human." But if in one instance national affiliations and citizenship seemed to prevent humanistic affinity with fellow Africans and others, in other instances shared national citizenship has emerged as insufficient grounds for recognizing affinity across racial difference. While it is true that national identity and the humanitarian universal are two dominant signposts of contemporary socio-political life, their inadequacies and shortcomings have in fact been an important concern since the beginning of the 20th century.[3] Humanitarianism functions by divesting life of all particularities making it almost bare and bereft of historicity; equal national citizenship is instituted on the grounds of particular, limited, delineable equivalences such as descent and territorial belonging.[4] However neither nationalism nor humanism and

[3] New research on the debates that were happening amongst political activists of different hues across South Asia, Middle East and Africa about the nature of postcolonial political formations foregrounds concerns and anxieties about the nation-state as a desirable political form that many in the colonies as well as in Britain and other parts of Europe shared. See Cooper, Frederick. *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa 1945-1960* (Princeton University Press, 2014); Datla, Kavita. "Sovereignty and the End of Empire: The Transition to Independence in Colonial Hyderabad" (forthcoming); Devji, Faisal. *Muslim Zion: Pakistan as a Political Idea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); Selinger, William. "The Politics of Arendtian Historiography: European Federation and *The Origins of Totalitarianism*," in *Modern Intellectual History* 2015 (April) 1-30; Wilder, Gary. *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization and the Future of the World* (Duke University Press, 2015). Also see Ajay Skaria's insightful analyses of Gandhi's misgivings about republican democracy and formation of majority-minority division in the nation-state. Skaria, "Relinquishing republican democracy: Gandhi's Ramrajya," *Postcolonial Studies* 2011 14(2): pp. 203-229.

[4] On the question of humanitarianism see for instance Arendt's critique of the rights of man in her *Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1951); also see Talal Asad, "What do Human Rights Do? An Anthropological Inquiry," *Theory and Event* 2000 4(4); Giorgio Agamben's Homo Sacer (Stanford: Stanford

humanitarianism exhaust the ways in which equality, solidarity and universality have been imagined and iterated in the last few centuries. Since the 19th century equality and likeness in difference have also been lived and imagined from an anti-imperial vantage point that does not regard nations as the only and primary unit of belonging; furthermore, they have been desired and lived from subject positions located in specific yet shared experiences of marginality across material and geographical locations.

Here we are not only referring to class-based solidarities but also those affinities that emerge from a shared experience of negation as colonial subjects, and as embodied in (the Francophone) nègre or nigger, blackness, untouchability, the fellah, and sexualities often deemed non-normative. One less known example is the vision of transcontinental belonging across the Atlantic, the African continent stretching all the way to South Africa that figures such as the South African Solomon T. Plaatje, the West Indian Henry Sylvester Williams and the Ghanaian Francis Z. Peregrino shared in the late 19th and early 20th century.[5] Crosscutting solidarities that internationalist intellectuals of the anti-colonial era such as C. L. R James, Rabindranath Tagore, W. E. B. Du Bois and Jose Carlos Mariategui upheld is another evocative instance.[6]

These examples bring to mind various historical possibilities and imaginative quests for "futures alternative to our present."[7] They especially remind us to search for and ideas about liberation that did not reduce decolonization to national political sovereignty; instead, as suggested above, internationalists such as James, Tagore, Du Bois, Mariategui as well as Senghor and Césaire amongst others sought to engage with the question of freedom by reimagining a global order in ways that disrupt the "presumptive unity of culture, nationality and citizenship" (Wilder 2015: 4) underlying the concept of nation-state, which most postcolonies inherited from Europe.

University Press, 1998) and Jacques Rancière, "Who Is the Subject of the Rights of Man," *South Atlantic Quarterly* (Spring/Summer, 2004) where he plots the relationship between Arendt and Agamben's insights on humanism and humanitarianism, draws on but also departs from them. Recent, more empirical engagements with the ways in which humanity and humanitarianism have become the governing reference for everything from pharmaceutical industries to conservationists and international criminal court appear in the collection I*n the Name of Humanity: The Government of Threat and Care* (Duke University Press, 2010) edited by Mariam Ticktin and Ilana Feldman. See also Siba N. Grovogui's (1996) *Sovereigns, Quasi-Sovereigns and Africans: Race and Self-Determination in International Law*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press

[5] Victoria J. Collis-Buthelezi, "Caribbean Regionalism, South Africa, and Mapping New World Studies," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism,* 19 (1), March 2015, pp. 37-54.

[6] The historian Manu Goswami reminds us of such solidarities in her essay, "Imaginary Futures and Colonial Internationalisms," in the *American Historical Review* (December, 2012). p. 1484

[7] Victoria Collis-Buthelezi, "Under the Aegis of Empire: Cape Town, Black Victorianism and Early Twentieth-Century Black Thought", *Callaloo* 39.1 (Winter 2016).

This expansive notion of anti-imperial "unnational" belonging not encompassed by or reducible to geographical territories, communitarian unities or class was iterated as much in the South Asian philosopher, poet and statesman Allama Iqbal's speeches and poetry in the early 1900s, as it was lived out by transnational activists and radicals in the 1960s and 1970s in the port city of Dar es Salaam.[8] New scholarship on anti-colonial internationalisms,[9] and the accompanying understandings and practices of equality, solidarity and federalism in late 19th and early and mid 20th c. Africa, Caribbean and South Asia guide us here as we constitute a collective of graduate students and faculty members in the Western Cape who can take forward research projects and courses about these histories, ideas and practices of equality and solidarity.

The question of location is crucial here; what does it mean to not only interrogate the "provenance and pretensions" (Bonilla 2015: 10) of "North Atlantic Universals (Trouillot 2002) but also reconstruct our understandings of concepts such as justice and freedom from southern Africa in conjunction with scholars from other parts of the continent, the Caribbean and South Asia will be a guiding theme of the Other Universals project."[10] It must be emphasized that such visions and understandings of equality and affinity were not being posited from an imaginary 'nowhere.' In 1885, not incidentally one year after the African continent was carved up into so many territories at the Berlin Conference for the powers of Europe to share amongst themselves, the Haitian Anténor Firmin's *De l'égalité des races humaines* (The Equality of the Human Races) fired back at the white supremacist universality that Arthur de Gobineau offered in his *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races). Firmin argued that all humanity is created equal, "without distinction of colo[u]r or anatomical form. The races are equal" (Firmin 1885, 2002: 450). Firmin's universality would influence Aimé Césaire, Leopold Senghor and Leon Dámas in founding of nègritude. Similarly, others such as Anna Julia Cooper and Charlotte

[8] We draw the term 'unnational' from Faisal Devji's brief sketch of the first Indian president, Dr. Rajendra Prasad's pre-independence writings where he reviewed works critical of nationalism and wondered if India might not be able to make itself a political community of a different kind. See Devji. Ibid. 29-30. Javed Majeed and Souleymane Bachir Diagne's writings on Muhammad Iqbal and a universalizing Islam, and C. L. R. James and Henry Sylvester Williams writings on Pan- Africanism are the other important reference points for our formulations here. Majeed, Javed. *Muhammad Iqbal: Islam, Aesthetics and Postcolonialism* (Delhi: Routledge India, 2009); Bachir Diagne, Souleymane. *Islam and Open Society: Fidelity and Movement in the Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal* (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2010); Williams, Henry Sylvester. *The British Negro: A Factor in the Empire* (Brighton: W. T. Moulton, 1902); C. L. R. James, "Towards the Seventh: The Pan-African Congress," in C. L. R. James, *At the Rendezvous of Victory* (London, Alison and Busby, 1984).

[9] See especially n. 4 and 6.

[10] Yarimar Bonilla, *Non-Sovereign Futures: French Caribbean Politics in the Wake of Disenchantment* (University of Chicago Press, 2015). See also Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "North Atlantic Universals: Analytical Fictions 1942-1945," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 4 (2002), pp. 839-58.

Manye Maxeke theorized and organised around blackness (and black womanhood in particular) as the Achilles heel of universal humanism.

Like them, Mahatma Jyotirao Phule, regarded as one of modern India's earliest anti-caste theorists, did not speak to and of humanity as bare physiological life but as imbued with long historical and particular experiences of subjection and abjection.[11] Figures like Phule spoke of universal concepts of freedom and justice albeit from intensely marked marginal locations. In this sense Marx, who similarly questioned bourgeois humanist universals, was akin to Phule; as Sudipta Kaviraj reminds us in a recent article, Marx "insisted on a class fracturing of social experience" (2013: 382). In the next century however Césaire and the Dalit leader B. R. Ambedkar, amongst others, came to question the nature of the universal that Marxist politics of their times offered to the black colonial subject and the Dalit untouchable.

While Césaire famously refused to lose himself in an "emaciated" liberal or a conventional Marxian universal and emphasized a "Negro African re-reading of Marx,"[12] Ambedkar resisted the collapsing of difference in the Indian body politic to a Hindu national subject. Rather in drafting the Indian constitution he sought to maintain a commitment to a universal subject through acknowledgement of difference and particularity; something Césaire himself attempted in his long poem *Notebook of Return to the Native Land*[13] (Cèsaire 1939, 2001: 15). Interestingly, recent scholarship and films on Dalit Marxism in India explore the affinities as well as tensions "between the critique of labour as exploitation and caste as degradation" (Rao 2012).[14] A line of critique that scholars like like Sylvia Wynter have also taken when theorizing blackness. Other Universals offers a platform from which established and emerging scholars can interrogate what kind of universals might the stigmatized Dalit, the racialised black, the Orientalized Arab, and the non-normative queer subject aspire to and iterate?[15] What would it mean to put Firmin in conversation with Phule, and Césaire in dialogue with Ambedkar? And, how might universality be

[11] Phule's formative text *Gulamgiri* or Slavery starts with a note of admiration for "the good people of United States" and their fight against slavery; he hoped that just as they were fighting against "negro slavery," his *Sudra* brethren in India would also seek to emancipate themselves from the Brahmin stronghold. Deshpande, G. P. ed. *Selected Writings of Jyotirao Phul*e. (Delhi, Manohar Publishers, 2002).

[12] Aimé Césaire, "Letter to Maurice Thorez, Paris, October 24, 1956," trans. Chike Jeffers, *Social Text* 103, vol. 28, no. 2 (Summer 2010), p. 152.

[13] Aime Césaire, *Notebook of Return to the Native Land* (Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 1939, 2001): 15.

[14] See Anand Patwardhan's 2011 two part documentary, *Jai Bhim Comrade*, shot over fourteen years amongst Dalit activists in Maharashtra who also had close but fraught ties with the party left, and Rao, Anupama, "Stigma and Labour: Remembering Dalit Marxism," *Seminar* 633 (May, 2012), p. 23-27. Gail Omvedt engaged with the difficult relationship between Dalits and Communists in her 1973 essay, "Non-Brahmans and Communists in Bombay," *Economic and Political Weekly* 8 (16) (21 April 1973).

[15] Our questions draw on the issues that the historian Ajay Skaria raises in his article "'Can the Dalit Articulate a Universal Position?' The intellectual, the social and the writing of history," *Social History,* 2014 39 (3), p. 342.

remade if we also put Arab political, social and cultural thought and aesthetic practice into this circulation of texts, figures and objects?

A figure like Fanon most obviously traverses the link between the Caribbean and the Maghreb in compelling ways. The work by a new generation of scholars in the Middle East is also drawing attention to a range of other scholars and debates. Idris Jebari, for example, points to the figures of Abdelkebir Khatibi and Abdallah Laroui; as he notes, 'by calling on their peers to "think the Maghrib" in the seventies, Abdelkebir Khatibi (1938-2009) and Abdallah Laroui (1933) each made seminal contributions to the radical Moroccan effort to decolonize the social sciences from their colonial and orientalist legacies'. But these were also projects with deep debates at their core and he notes that despite a "shared goal," these two figures disagreed firmly on their conception of socio-historical change and on Moroccan modernity. During this fascinating period of intellectual renewal taking place in Paris and Beirut, Laroui and Khatibi engaged profoundly with deconstructionists, poststructuralists, reformed orientalists, disillusioned pan-Arabists, Marxists and new supporters of cultural heritage, producing an important and often neglected episode of Arab intellectual history.[16]' We may think here too of the gendering critique, as Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab calls it, of Nawal el-Saadawi and Fatima Mernissi, and the late-twentieth-century Arab feminists; or the work of critique in Saadallah Wannous's theatrical oeuvre[17].

In addition to a circulation of colonial difference as raced, and ethnicized, we share the view that the colonial endeavor is central to the making of what is considered 'the modern' today, and to that extent we may think more appropriately under the neologism of the 'colonial modern'. The colonial does not only repress and subjugate political subjects, it also pace Foucault, famously produces new forms of political subjects, crafted, made and re-made from the pre-colonial, in order to not only divide, but also draw together previously discreet cultural formations now hierarchized as political communities under centralized authority[18]. Cultural citizenship names such a point of articulation between citizen and culture that defines political communities in these regions in profound, complex and ongoing ways. The markers of difference may therefore be race in some parts of the world, as much as it is ethnicity, questions of bloodline and origins, and questions of religious ordering of territorial space in others. Thinking from within, and across the geospatial histories, and temporalities of Africa, the Caribbean, the Middle East,

[16] Idriss Jebari is a Postdoctoral research fellow at the Arab Council for Social Sciences and a visiting researcher at one of the partner institutions in this project, the Centre for Arab and Middle East Studies, where he is carrying out a research project titled "Exploring the center-periphery relation between the Maghrib and the Mashriq"

[17] Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab (2016) *Contemporary Arab Thought, Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspectiv*e, New York: Columbia University Press

[18] See for example Karuna Mantena (2010) *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism,* New Jersey: Princeton University Press

South Asia and Latin America, illuminates the 'universal' aspects of a foundational moment that makes our present one defined by the colonial modern, as much as it illuminates what is distinct and specific to the present of our pastness.

The stakes in this endeavor were recently outlined by the Ugandan scholar Mahmood Mamdani (2017)[19] in his piece 'Reading Ibn Khaldun in Kampala'. Mamdani asks, 'why would a reading of The Muqaddimah by teachers and students in the PhD program at Makerere Institute of Social Research (MISR) be of interest to a wider audience? Alternately, why would a reading of a 14th century North African text be of interest to academics in 21st century Kampala? Both questions belong to a wider reflection on the subject of universalization and particularization as aspects of a single process. The universalization of particular modes of thought goes alongside the particularization of other modes of thought. The centuries between the conquest of the Americas and the decolonization movement signified by Bandung witnessed two related movements in the history of thought. On the one hand, Eurocentric thought was elevated to a universal; on the other, non-European modes of thought were containerized as so many "traditions" of no more than local significance. An assessment of the intellectual legacy of this period calls for a double task: alongside a critique of Eurocentrism, an exploration of engagements across various non-European modes of thought bounded as so many discrete "traditions."

We therefore seek to put into conversation scholars and students in a systematic relationship of learning and pedagogy which may be different to the normative aspirations of comparative thought, but that works in relation to comparison; thinking about questions such as: how do we compare distinct moments and traditions of thought and practice in the colonial modern in its universal and specific aspects?[20] How do we think of postcolonial locations, in geospatial configurations such as Africa, the Caribbean and the Middle East, as both commensurable and yet in some ways also as incommensurable? As both translatable, but perhaps also as untranslatable? If comparison assumes a relation of similarity as the grounds from which comparison can proceed- often in modernity's wake, the grounds being liberalism[21]- what is at stake in asking whether comparison is possible rather than assuming it as the grounds from which we proceed? We wish therefore to think of ourselves – the scholars who will constitute this supranational consortium- as speaking from particular locations, and from within particular 'traditions' of

[19] Mahmood Mamdani (2017) Reading Ibn Khaldun in Kampala, *The Journal of Historical Sociology*, vol. 30, no.1; see also Marcelo C. Rosa (2014) Theories of the South: Limits and Perspectives of an Emergent movement in Social Sciences, *Current Sociology Review*, vol.62, no.6

[21] See James Tully (1995) *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in the Age of Diversity*, UK: Cambridge University Press

anti-colonial, nationalist, emancipatory, and intellectual formations, with their own predicaments and lineaments, own points of friction, own questions of consternation. And yet commonly invested in thinking about intellectual formations and aesthetic practice across these worlds, that speak to and beyond the emancipatory or inhibitive contours the framing of 'the nation' has given us.

Various narratives of modernity regard 'tradition' and emancipation as opposing standpoints. On the other hand, we use tradition here in a way that has been offered by the Columbia University based Jamaican scholar David Scott, in relation to his work on the idea of a black radical tradition, which itself parses the thought of Alasdair MacIntyre and Talal Asad on the subject:

> "On this view, a tradition is first of all a socially embodied and historically extended discursive terrain on which the identity of a community is argued out. (Note the accent on argument.) Who are "we"? What pasts have made "us" who we are? What "events" make up our common story? What projects can make us who we might be in the future? These are the stuff of productive historical dispute. A tradition, then, is a contentious dramatic narrative that seeks to make a connection, through a distinctive temporal style of reasoning, between pasts, presents, and futures, and between identity and community."[2223]

As Scott goes on to point out,

> "on this view of a tradition, if I am black it is because there is an historical tradition in which that identity is constituted partly by a continuous argument over precisely what it means to be black. This is why I have argued, many years ago now, that one way of thinking about a black cultural and intellectual tradition is that it is discursively constituted in and through a distinctive common possession, namely, the tropes of "Africa" and "Slavery." Each of these figures, of course, concatenates around itself a whole historical archive of metaphoric and metonymic resources. On this view, "Africa" and "Slavery" are not only ethnographic or historical realities but also semiotically inexhaustible figures that help to organize and authorize a social imaginary of historical identity and community. They do not constitute a unified social imaginary, of course, a social imaginary over which there is—or can be—complete agreement; but they shape a pervasive social imaginary, nevertheless, in which the conflicts of interpretation within and across the temporality of generations only serve to

[23] David Scott, on the Idea of a Black Radical Tradition, p3; see also in a different way Fred Moten (2013) *In the Break, the Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition,* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press

underline the common possession of a distinctive past in the present."[24]

We are delighted that David Scott, who is also founding editor of the leading journal of Caribbean criticism, *Small Axe*, has agreed to an appointment as Extraordinary Professor at the Centre for Humanities Research at UWC in order to be an integral part of this project. By emphasizing two key areas of inquiry—in the realm of the political broadly conceived, and the aesthetic—we are enabling reflections that have already proven highly insightful in their nascent forms at the partner institutions. Over the last four years various conversations between South African scholars and visiting scholars have persuaded us of their intellectual importance, and that these need to be formalized and supported in a more structured coherent manner. We recall here for example a few initiatives that we are building on:

- A series of lectures on the seminal British Caribbean thinker, Stuart Hall by Professor David Scott of Columbia University, at the Centre for Humanities Research that has culminated in the recently published monograph 'Stuart Halls Voice, Intimations of an Ethics of Receptive Generosity (Duke University Press; 2017)
- A recent visit coordinated by Dr. Ruchi Chaturvedi and Dr. Victoria Collis-Buthelezi of the University's of Cape Town and Witwatersrand, of Dr. Aaron Kamugisha from the University of West Indies, Cave Hill, during which he delivered a series of talks on the Caribbean literary scholar Sylvia Wynter at UCT, UWC and Witwatersrand. These were supported with a grant from the National Institute for Humanities in South Africa (NIHSS).
- The workshop hosted by *Other Universals* and the CHR on the concept of 'political society' as developed in recent times by the Indian political theorist, Professor Partha Chatterjee. He was hosted in Cape Town by the Mellon-supported Migrating Violence project.
- The series of lectures reappraising the politics and aesthetic philosophy of Leopold Senghor by the renowned Senegalese philosopher, Professor Souleymane Bachir Diagne, at the Centre for Humanities Research.
- The colloquium on the work of the Ugandan political theorist Professor Mahmood Mamdani, and specifically on his book *Citizen and Subject*, hosted by the Mellon-supported Migrating Violence project.
- The visit by the Indian philosopher, and well-known scholar of caste, Professor Gopal Guru from Jawaharlal Nehru University (New Delhi), hosted by the *Other Universals* project, University of Cape Town and the CHR, with support from the National Institute for Humanities in South Africa (NIHSS).

[24] Scott, p4

- And, a three-day workshop on "The Caste Question and Black Radicalism" led by young scholars of caste and race such as Dr. Shivani Kapoor (Shiv Nadar University, Delhi) and Dr. Nijah Cunningham (City University of New York) under the aegis of *Other Universals* in partnership with University of Cape Town, CHR-UWC and the Tshisimani Centre for Activist Education in May 2017

These visits, workshops and colloquia opened up debates and reflections on predicaments that define postcolonial societies in Africa, the Caribbean, South Asia and the Middle East. They alerted us to the need to think about these concrete predicaments as the grounds from which we might offer theorizations about new modalities of postcolonial futures. Among the specific questions raised were the need to more systematically consider traditions of thought, practices of politics, and aesthetic practices and embodiments that traffic between the phenomenon of caste, race and sexuality as it plays out in Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia, and other modes of difference in places like the Middle East that fracture on the fault-lines of competing inheritances of belonging, often too simplified as Shia/Muslim, or as sectarianism, intolerance and cultural hegemonies of whether being Muslim, Christian or Jew is an identity of belonging or estrangement, of insiderness or outsiderness. We also believe that each of these postcolonial locations offer us lines of inquiry to think about what it means to be defined by relations of attachments- to race, to ethnicities, to heteronormative sexualities, to religious filiations and affiliations, often presented as the sign of the pre-modern. In all too easy a rendering, these are spaces of the world in which to name the attachment is often taken as the name of the problem, so that identity in and of itself becomes grounds of both subjection and agency- the one enforced, the other subversive. On this view, black is an already constituted name of subjection and a trans-historical name of resistant agency. So too with being queer, Dalit or of a religious minority or ethnicity.

As indicated in the above formulation of tradition, we wish to open up spaces of inquiry about traditions of thought, modes of politics and aesthetic practice, which viewed historically, allow us to theorize the relationship that Stuart Hall pointed out as the relationship between identity and identification. In this line of thinking, how will a learning about, and a learning from, that this kind of consortium enables, help to theorize the ways in which identification has become the horizon of a universalizing politics of difference. As many scholars now accept, the colonial modern was not only created through conquest, genocide and repression, but also through the combination of epistemology and institution; one which not only suppresses, but also produces, and thereby obliges us to inhabit particular always-already scripted forms of life. It is these conditioning powers that go some way to helping us grasp why it is that the now commonplace notions of identity as fluid and constructed—that is, the identity of the autonomous self-

choosing to make and remake herself at will as so many different cosmopolitan selves and different sexualities—often flounders in the concrete political world, and more so in the parts of the world we speak to, speak from and migrate and emigrate in and from. In these worlds identity and identification are intense sites of friction, agonism, and violence as much as they are dynamic, and filled with enabling archives, emancipatory figures, texts and objects.

What these conundrums alert us to are the unspent potentialities that remain in these archives- where archive is itself the name of an object and subject of contention[25]. Identities exist then articulated to other relations in a dynamic field of relations-- to history, the social, the economy, that give us the universal and the particular as mutually constitutive, and constituted by all of these rather any one of them in the final instance. This is a mode of "thinking conjuncturally" that Stuart Hall considered essential: "In our intellectual way" he cautioned, "we think that the world will collapse as the result of a logical contradiction: this is the illusion of the intellectual - that ideology must be coherent, every bit of it fitting together, like a philosophical investigation. When, in fact, the whole purpose of what Gramsci called an organic (i.e. historically effective) ideology is that it articulates into a configuration different subjects, different identities, different projects, different aspirations. It does not reflect; it constructs a 'unity' out of difference."[26]

Identity is therefore the name of a conjunctural process of identification, a specific configuration of a present seeking to authorize its past, bringing coherence to incoherence, constantly fashioning itself—but not always, paraphrasing Marx, under conditions of its own making. As the Senegalese philosopher Souleymane Bachir Diagne nimbly articulates it, identity as fidelity here is less about a return to a source nor to an appeal to something that is static, but rather to movement as that which characterizes tradition, as that very movement that for him makes African art a form of philosophizing.[27]

Thinking therefore about the conjuncture of our present, the one that produces a renewed call for decolonization, one that produces Trump and Brexit, one that produces a demand for something called 'theory' and critical thought, from a place or a relational space called 'the South', implies not taking these

[25] Premesh Lalu (2009) *The Deaths of Hintsa: Post-Apartheid South Africa and the Shape of Recurring Pasts*, Cape Town: HSRC Press; Suren Pillay (2009) 'Translating South Africa: Race, Colonialism and the challenges of critical thought after Apartheid, in Vale, P and Jacklin, H eds. *Re-Imagining the Social in South Africa: Critique, Theory and Post-Apartheid Society*, UKZN Press

[26] Stuart Hall, "Gramsci and Us" https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2448-stuart-hall-gramsci-and-us

[27] Souleymane Bachir Diagne (2011) *African Art as Philosophy, Senghor, Bergson and the Idea of Negritude*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press; see also his (2016) *The Ink of the Scholars: Reflections on Philosophy in Africa*, Dakar: CODESRIA

as available identities into which we graft ourselves in a quest for philosophical coherence. Rather, it might imply putting these assemblages into relation- in specific places, within specific pasts, where texts, figures and objects circulate mostly provincially, but also globally. The texts, thinkers and objects, initially in this project from Africa, the Caribbean, and the Middle East, and South Asia and Latin America, have that in common- that they cannot presume to be universal unlike those from intellectual traditions that come out of 'the West'. And it is partly this subaltern location in the material world of economy, in the symbolic world of culture and civilization that produces an early traffic of figures, texts and objects between Africa and the Caribbean in particular, where figures like George Padmore, and later Walter Rodney, Frantz Fanon, Khatibi, Laroui, and from the new world, figures like W.E.B Du Bois are involved in various and conflicted projects that give us a genealogy of thinking as interventions[28]. We draw on the notion of "intervention" as a self-conscious intellectual and aesthetic effort that seeks to interrupt an existing conjuncture, an existing problem, in ways that shift or alter the given discursive and material landscape—to think a problem differently, to offer a new horizon from which, against which, a past, a present or postcolonial futures might be imagined not just by intellectuals, but also by movements in political life and creative endeavors in their often competing pluralities.

We might think, for example, of the Subaltern Studies collective in South Asia, the Decoloniality project in Latin America, and the founding of Codesria in Africa, as examples of 'interventions'. What does it mean then to think of critical traditions of thought in postcolonial locations, as interventions? For us, this is both a critical-intellectual question, as well as a pedagogic and methodological question (the latter we have alluded to in the discussion about comparison and translation). Can we grasp these interventions without a sense of the problem-space[29] into which they are called upon to produce effects or responses? Can those of us in one part of Africa grasp the interventions of Padmore, Fanon and Rodney in other parts of the continent at specific times? And can those in West and East Africa situate a thinker like Modiri Molema, Sol Plaatjie, or Steve Biko in the problem-space of his intervention? And how do we do so without rendering these inquiries antiquarian but rather as ways to think our present? What would be required of us to do so, in terms of a practice of learning and teaching? And so too for those of us who will need to learn about, and in the process learn to disaggregate 'the Caribbean', and learn about and disaggregate 'the Middle East' through the texts, figures and objects we will pay attention to in this project? We seek therefore to not assume comparison as a ground or end, but to develop it as an ethical-

[28] See for example W. E. B Du Bois's [1946] remarkable *The World and Africa: An inquiry into the part which Africa has played in World History* (reprinted 2013) Africa Tree Press

political and intellectual collaboration that turns on not only producing new knowledge about specific places, and across specific places on the grounds of sameness or difference. We wish to encourage thinking conjuncturally about the moments that produce a need for sameness and at other times and in other places, difference. What conceptual and political work is this sameness and difference doing in these conjunctural moments? How are the predicaments of sameness and difference thought, and given political, social and economic effect in political and aesthetic discourses and practices? Methodologically, we seek also to cultivate though this consortium of scholars, the dispositions of familiarization and defamiliarization. We wish to think of sameness and estrangement as a pedagogic enterprise in dialogue with, but different to the enterprise of area studies, that enterprise of the regional expert which so marks the scholar from postcolonial locations (often unlikely to be authorized the status of universal or global scholar). The members of this consortium share both the intellectual and the ethical will to teach, and to learn from, and bring into our modes of engagement experiments in new modes of collaboration, new modes of intellectual 'friendship', new modes of learning about, and sharing with.

We have identified the following as key research areas around which the participating scholars share an interest, as a basis for participation. These questions will also inform the individual and collective research projects of participating faculty, the graduate students, the Summer Institute lectures and courses, and the Colloquiums:

1. *Revisiting Marxist traditions and the global South*- what has been the relationship of Marxism/s to race, ethnicity, religion and sexuality? What can a living tradition of Marxist thought proffer to our current imaginings of a future beyond coloniality ?
2. *Theorizing and Reading from and across Margins and Peripheries*- Caribbean, African and Modern Arab political thought: how do we read figures, texts and objects in political thought from a location in the South? What does it mean to think about the idea of Black Radical Tradition? What does it mean to think about Arab political thought as modern? How might the difference between settler colonial pasts, such as in Latin America and South Africa, alter the contours of what emancipation looks like in the anti-colonial traditions some of us emerge from? How do we do translation and comparison across and within traditions of political thought? What does it mean to read a text, figure or object conjuncturally?
3. *What is Critique?* How do we historicize the practice of critique? How do we think of it in relation to secular criticism and modernity, and the larger framing of secular knowledge as distinct from religious knowledge, as foundational to the modern university; universal knowledge

and particular knowledge; how does location matter in the articulation of critical thought with universal aspirations?

4. *Identity and Identification: Black, Queer, Dalit, Muslim, Jew, Indio*. What is the relationship between identity and identification in political and aesthetic worlds in the present? What modes of cultural citizenship and idioms of difference define insider and outsider? How do notions of majority and minority work to produce the nation?

Taken together, exploring the research questions above through this Consortium offers us a unique possibility to create a formalized research and pedagogic infrastructure. It will support scholars working on these critical theoretical questions who are largely located at, and committed to help building humanities-oriented institutions in the South. And, it will help them theorize universal predicaments from postcolonial locations and enable a younger generation of scholars to emerge with a graduate degree.