



## **UJ CHARTER ON DECOLONISATION: PURPOSE, PRINCIPLES, AND PRACTICE**

### **1. Preamble**

Institutions of higher learning in Africa have always been confronted with the often marginal position that the developing world holds in terms of global knowledge production. The call for the decolonisation of higher education institutions in South Africa emanates from a history of marginalisation, devaluation, silencing and alienation of local and indigenous knowledge and practices in academia and other public institutions in South Africa. This situation perpetuates the privileging of Eurocentric knowledge, paradigms, worldviews, cultures and ways of being that tend to render the experience of the academy as disempowering for the majority of the community it is intended to serve. This also reflects the slow pace and deep unevenness of processes of engagement within the South African academy around these critical issues.

African countries North of the Limpopo had universities created by their colonial powers only from 1948. They went through the decolonisation of these institutions from the 1960s, replacing both foreign staff and curricula. In the process they created centres of excellence of African knowledge production such as the Ibadan School of History; the Dakar School of Culture; and the Dar es Salaam School of Political Economy. UJ could today lead efforts at enhancing our African footprint and becoming the epicentre of Pan-African intellectual thought.

Efforts at decolonisation are not just an attempt to displace the Western canon, but to place African thought at the centre of these initiatives and enter boldly into a contestation of ideas with Western scholarship. Western hegemony has, over centuries, successfully elevated to fact the myth of the undisputed superiority of its philosophy and thought, and such sentiments continue to dominate large parts of the global academy. As the Palestinian-American scholar, Edward Said, noted, this practice of myth-making and diminution of other cultures was well established in the treatment of the "Orient" by the West. Said promoted instead a positive synthesis of cultures, recognizing the globalising, potentially positive impact of the post-imperial world. Like Said, Kenyan intellectual, Ali Mazrui, advocated the "counter-penetration" of knowledge at the political, cultural, and educational levels as a counter to Eurocentrism, and in order to place "Global Africa" at the center of knowledge production. Ugandan scholar, Mahmood Mamdani, perceptively noted that apartheid-enforced identities were deeply ingrained in the knowledge that was produced in South Africa during this historical era, providing the rationale for the transformation of the post-apartheid university.

Current efforts at decolonization in South Africa thus seek the systematic mainstreaming, promotion, production and generation of decolonised knowledge that is relevant and responsive to

the contexts, histories, cultures, and experiences of a more diverse body of students, academics and academic support staff. Pedagogical dimensions are important here and it is necessary that practices of learning and teaching reflect new approaches and demographic patterns at universities countrywide, as well as seeking to confront a set of new and diverse challenges that the academy faces in its attempts to institutionalise the ethos of a post-apartheid dispensation, and a post-colonial African context. These developments also entail the transformation of knowledge production so as to produce knowledges, rather than knowledge, and to expose teachers and learners to different and competing ideas and paradigms. Students and teachers should be exposed to a variety of worlds of experiences, with Africa at their geographical and intellectual core, rather than imposing a specific universe on students. There is a need to confront the challenge to go beyond discipline knowledges and disciplinarity and to move towards multi-disciplinarity and inter-disciplinarity.

## **2. Purpose**

This Charter outlines principles and practices designed to help UJ continue to move beyond the legacies, remnants and reproduction of colonialism and apartheid; in particular, to continue the journey away from systematically racist and hegemonic structures, systems, processes, epistemologies and pedagogies.

The project of decolonisation at UJ implies developing an institutional ethos, a scholarly practice and an intellectual culture that advance endogenous scholarship, alongside pluralistic paradigms from other parts of the world, including Asian-centric, Latin American-centric, and of course Global African and Continental African-centric perspectives in teaching, research, learning and epistemic pluralism which affirm and restore dignity to marginalised people, their knowledge, and their ways of being. This does not mean that Eurocentric-perspectives are obsolete: they remain important. It simply means that the hegemonic status of Eurocentric perspectives should be challenged by, and placed in contestation with other paradigms, approaches and perspectives, with Africa being at the geographical and intellectual core of this enterprise. This involves the foregrounding of theories and perspectives of Africa and the South. It requires that UJ continues to direct resources, and develop strategic plans, intellectual environments and physical spaces suitable for promoting the production of new decolonised knowledge; that it consistently reviews its curriculum, policies, structures, relations, institutional culture, language use, aesthetics, teaching, learning, and research in light of decolonisation imperatives.

This Charter contributes to UJ's stated vision of: "An international university of choice, anchored in Africa, dynamically shaping the future", as well as the transformation of the University into a Pan-African centre for critical intellectual inquiry.

## **3. Principles**

The University of Johannesburg:

- i. Recognises the need for, and inherent value in, decolonising the university and commits itself to this endeavour.
- ii. Promotes access to higher education and provides a safe and enabling environment with a well-rounded holistic educational experience for the success of its staff and students.
- iii. Promotes, develops and sustains a culture of inclusiveness and equality.

- iv. Views decolonisation as a holistic and interactive process that requires the participation of all university stakeholders: government, council, managers, academics, students, support staff, alumni, communities, and business.
- v. Understands decolonisation as an ongoing and sustainable process that provides an education that liberates the minds of students and academics, and transforms the university environment, as reflected in its people, structures, processes, governance and leadership.
- vi. Envisions, through decolonisation, more just, free societies that value a shared humanity and aims to be dynamic and sure-footed in responding to an ever-changing social, political and economic environment.
- vii. Opposes the abuse of power, racism, class privilege, gender inequality, disability discrimination and other injustices.
- viii. Envisages a learning environment which exposes students to a diversity of epistemologies, methodologies and knowledges which have Africa at its core.
- ix. Acknowledges and promotes African creativity, agency, value systems and languages, and recognises African scholars as knowledge bearers contributing to global scholarship.
- x. Values and encourages the engagement of pedagogical, research and other productive processes from the Global South alongside perspectives from other parts of the world including Africa, the Caribbean, Asia, and Latin America.
- xi. Commits to being rooted in the community, the country, and the continent with recognition as a player in the global academic space for higher education.

#### **4. Practices**

The University will:

- i. Promote curriculum reform by reviewing readings prescribed and recommended to include previously marginalised scholarship that talks to a transformation and decolonisation agenda, with Africa at its core.
- ii. Critically review the curriculum, assessment criteria and research in all faculties to facilitate endogenous scholarship on a regular basis.
- iii. Facilitate re-curriculation at departmental and faculty level, with oversight provided by UJ leadership, Executive Deans and the academic leadership with due cognisance of what shapes attitudes, values and world views and what needs to be learned and unlearned, reformed, deconstructed and reconstructed.
- iv. Ensure continuous feedback and reporting through committees such as the Faculty Teaching and Learning Committees and the Senate Committee for Teaching and Learning.
- v. Demonstrate and promote academic leadership in implementing the decolonisation of the university.
- vi. Create continued safe spaces for engagement on decolonisation in the university at all levels.
- vii. Critically review policies, structures, processes and practices to ensure a decolonised and equitable environment on a regular basis.
- viii. Advance Africa-centredness and create a university that has Africa at its core through deepening relations with African universities and research institutions, producing knowledge with a strong focus on the challenges faced by Africa, and through teaching and learning that has a focus on Africa.
- ix. Collaborate with other African universities in sharing insights and updates on current and ongoing African-centred research, while continuing to strengthen the university's global ties.
- x. Deepen South-South academic engagement through collaborative research and academic exchanges.

- xi. Embed the decolonisation agenda in an institutional strategic plan with clearly defined and measurable indicators over time.
- xii. Focus on active utilization and promotion of African languages.
- xiii. Provide adequate funding and support to sustain this transformation programme.