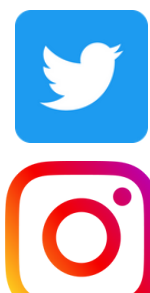**THE POLITICS AND URBAN GOVERNANCE RESEARCH GROUP PRESENTS**

AFRICA HUB 2023 REPORT:

'UNIVERSITIES AS SITES OF PROTECTION'

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IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE UNESCO CHAIR IN THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND THE EXPANSION OF POLITICAL SPACE

UNIVERSITY of the WESTERN CAPE

PUG research

unesco Chair

CONTENTS

AFRICAN HUMAN RIGHTS HUB

The African Human Rights Hub is a university-based initiative seeking to support Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) and expand the democratic space within the African continent. The initiative is a collaboration between the Politics and Urban Governance Research Group (PUG) at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and the UNESCO Chair, Protection of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) and Expansion of Political Space, at the University of York.

In August 2023, PUG and the UNESCO Chair hosted a three-day "Universities as Sites of Activism and Protection Symposium" at UWC bringing together Human Rights Defenders (HRDs), academics and students to explore the role that universities can play as 1) instigators of activism in defence of democratic space, 2) incubators of values and ideas, 3) collaborators and partners in applied pedagogies and 4) protectors of particular people (activist, scholars, refugees). The symposium was well received and the different actors involved in protection work voiced strong support for the formation of an African Hub, located in the university, to support the role of the university as a space of protection.

South African universities, and African universities more generally, have a long history of protest and activism, including their roles in anti-apartheid and anti-colonial struggles. These universities also educate many of those who become key role players in the state and civil society. In many parts of Africa, however, shrinking civic and political space and democratic backsliding are threatening the freedom and autonomy of academics, students and activists. The vision of the Hub is to support African universities to play a significant role in protecting emancipatory human rights, focusing on how universities can support 'protection', both externally (of civil society activists and democratic freedoms) and internally (of staff and students).

To achieve this vision the Hub will act as both an 'ideas lab' and a conduit between activism (i.e. HRDs) and academia (recognising these categories may overlap). It will also provide an ideal space for the incubation of ideas and a reflection on political contexts by HRDs, students and academics. In doing so we will expand the HRD protection ecosystem. The Africa Hub is hosted within UWC, a university with a rich history of being a home for those who struggled against apartheid. The University has continued to fight against oppression, discrimination and disadvantage in contemporary South Africa, and elsewhere on the continent. The Hub will thus draw inspiration from its host university's commitment to social justice, resources and material support from across the different disciplines.

IDEAS ON 'BUILDING AN AFRICAN HUB ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND EXPANSION OF POLITICAL SPACE

Human Rights Defender (HRDs) and academics at the Universities at Sites of Activism and Protection Symposium, in August 2023, were asked to share ideas that would shape effective interventions by the Africa Hub working to support Human Rights Defenders on the African continent. Below is a summary of those recommendations.

1. What research activities should be undertaken?

While PUG and the UNESCO Chair seek to undertake initiatives outside of core academic activities, they also aim to marshal core academic activities - notably research and teaching - to advance their goals. Through such work, universities can position themselves as generators and partners in protecting activists, civil society, and democracy. The following notes outline the recommendations on the kind of research that would be useful for HRDs; how it should be shared and how a HRD Hub at UWC can enhance human rights and the work of civil society in Africa.

The Hub should work on filling research gaps within African HRD scholarship in support of HRDs. Research topics should include:

- critical reflection on the concepts such as "Human Rights Defender" and "protection" on the African continent;
- the Africanisation/Decolonisation/Indigenisation of HRD protection;
- mapping the scope/extent of various human rights violations by context;
- research on capacity building and the assessment of capabilities/resources needed to respond to a given HRD-related crisis;
- the assessment of the suppression of HRDs through digital surveillance and;
- the mapping of HRDs' experiences through auto-ethnographic reflection/storytelling.

The dissemination of research should be through accessible mediums including but not limited to workshops, online databases and other alternative media. Researchers co-author with HRDs and honour the joint ownership of ideas. The Hub should, in all research, take seriously the ethics of 1) conducting research with (potentially) vulnerable groups; 2) the extractive nature of academic research and 3) how research output can and should influence change.

2. What Training/Mentoring and Teaching should the Hub provide?

Universities are key sites for knowledge exchange and skills development. However, unequal access to the university has left many, including human rights defenders on the periphery. A university-based African Hub working to support HRDs is a potential site to address this unequal access. The following notes outline the recommendations on what skills and teaching the Hub can provide to HRDs and what resources within the university and externally are at its disposal.

- The Hub should host skills development programmes that support the work of HRDs and improve the recognition and legitimacy of HRDs and the work they do.
- Facilitate the awarding of Higher Certificates, Advance Diplomas and other qualifications from universities to enhance the capacity of HRDs while providing (temporary) relocation and integration into teaching and learning communities.
- Skills development programs may include, but are not limited to, developing HRD resiliency through context-based/decolonized mental health/wellness programmes; providing training on research methodologies and other forms of capacity building and; critical engagement with literature relevant to their work.
- The resources the Hub can make use include university networks, its multidisciplinary capacity and in-house specialists (e.g. law clinics, gender equity units and research institutes) with a focus on human rights
- Participants highlighted the importance of needs assessments in the construction of these programmes.

3. Organizational structure and networks of the Hub

Universities are highly networked institutions, locally, regionally, and globally. The main connection that PUG and the UNESCO Chair seeks to strengthen is the link between universities and civil society organisations. The following notes are recommendations on the structure of the Hub and the potential networks it could build.

- Organizational structure premised on the idea of equal representation or consensus (particularly between academics, HRDs and donors) which is crucial in addressing the often bureaucratic and hierarchical nature of boards and committees in HRD spaces.
- Hub to leverage human resources found in and around it.
- Recommended partners in the structure of the hub include HRDs outside of the university, relevant human rights actors within the university; collaborating universities and other non-academic partners in the private and public sector.
- Noted need for structural inclusion and belonging within the hub. Many HRDs do not belong to formally structured organizations and can work independently. Hub structures must facilitate a sense of communal support and belonging.
- Draw from existing practices of HRD protection within the university as seen in the University of York (UK) and Makerere University (Uganda). Additionally drawing from the successful practices of other in-university structures showing successes in maintaining their offices independence in light of the challenges with autonomy found in HRD spaces within the university.

The Politics and Urban Governance Research Group has made extensive use of the symposium notes and reflections to map their way forward. For more details on the symposium outcomes please contact us at pugresearch @uwc.ac.za

Truly a 'home away from home' GBVF and the University

In November 2023, a viral video of a 26-year-old Sinoxolo Myalo circulated South African social media. In the graphic video, Sinoxolo, a female student from the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), was shown in a pool of blood after being stabbed 20 times by her husband, Ntembeko Myalo (32), from the University of the Western Cape. Some onlookers at the South Point Student Residence where the act of violence occurred (in broad daylight), took to their phones to capture the attack. Others, having managed to disarm Ntembeko, beat him in 'righteous indignation' before handing him to the South African Police Services. Sinoxolo was rushed to Tygerberg Hospital where she was treated for her wounds and would, thankfully, survive the attack. Her attacker, who had been 'out on a warning' pending a separate rape allegation, was charged with her attempted murder.

The stabbing of Sinoxolo Myalo occurred days after UWC students protested against prevailing cases of gender-based violence and femicide in the university. And in the typical fashion, the campus community, condemned and protested, had dialogue and reviewed policy but - in an unrelentingly violent society - it seemed as if we wait to be reminded that *we were just not doing enough*. As perpetrators of GBVF become as brazen as a mass shooter publicly wielding their weapon - unashamed and welcoming of public fear, scrutiny, or consequence - it begs the question: What kinds of environments breed these confident displays of violence? And in its aftermath, who is responsible?

"...universities are key sites of protection"

Universities are thought to be spaces where students and staff enjoy relative safety in comparison to broader society. They provide often privileged protective services and mechanisms (e.g. fences, campus security, human resource management etc.). And, as intellectual hubs for teaching, research and learning, the often embodied values of social transformation and inclusivity ought to position universities as hubs for critical thinkers and doers. With that in mind, it would seem that universities are key sites of protection. And that they, under such favourable conditions, are inherently inhospitable environments for violence and offer some level of sanctuary from the injustices of broader society. However, acts of violence like the attempted murder of Sinoxolo Myalo, happen within the university. Now unhidden in what is usually confined to the privacy of the home and providing the mirror image of a society unprotected, callous and increasingly challenging what privileges are said to exist. The university truly has become the home away from home. In need of a remedy, what is the extent of the protective role played by South African public universities particularly as they begin to reflect broader society and its increasing precarity?

Societies are built through common goals and values, shared histories and cultures. From the family, the mosque, the stokvel, the community patrol and, by extension, the university - we all agree to play functional roles and adhere to cultural beliefs which give meaning to those roles. Within this are intersecting experiences which overlap the pluralities of where we come from, who we (think we) are, what we do and our visions for the future. 'South Africa', as a constructed society, is shaped by visions of peace and harmony and dreams of redress and restitution. Praised and lauded globally for its democratic transition. Yet, as a society of continuing violence, the haunting memories of violent oppression and violent liberation likely lurk in our unhealed collective subconscious and are carried, beyond generations, as part of a conflicted collective identity.

Scholars have long noted the consequences of the historical use of violence and how, in a given society, violence may be legitimized or condemned along a historical prescription. Not only does the historical use of violence shape the kinds of violence that occurs. Victims unnamed and forgotten can, within the (sub)conscious mind, breed disillusionment (i.e. disappointment) and place doubt on personal and communal dignities. Conversely, perpetrators who may or may not be held accountable, can also shape our understanding of violence, how it is exercised and who gets to make use of it. Not only shaping how societies understand themselves as a whole but also the hegemonic identities that exist in it and work to negotiate individual senses of power and agency.

As it stands, South Africa seems to be struggling to reconcile its collective identity post-1994. Amongst other contributing factors, violence continues to be a key feature within which the country's collective identity is constructed. Quite visibly, from democratization to #FeesMustFall, it is a society making sense of itself and the intersectional experiences within it through a hegemonic use of violence. And for womxn, often neglected in the narrative(s) of oppression and liberation, the provision of power and as agents of change both past and present; this violence (fed by a kind of collective amnesia) has normalized a suffering and legitimized the kinds of violence perpetuated against womxn amongst the many marginalized identities within the country.

For the most part, public universities have made efforts, however slow they may be, to address violence against womxn. At UWC, there are vast improvements in gender representation in academic positions, some effort to mainstream a gender perspective in curricula (moreso in the Humanities), and various policies, campaigns and task teams working towards addressing GBVF through prevention and awareness rather than mere crisis response. While the university could do a lot more to provide physical protection for the campus community, its preventative/transformative efforts move the campus community towards sustainably ending GBVF. However, key challenges continue to inhibit the University's success.

Firstly, high levels of food insecurity, socio-economic disparity, and gross underfunding in public universities (particularly 'historically black/coloured' universities) has been shown to increase staff and student vulnerabilities to GBVF. Secondly, the constant influx and exit of students and staff (particularly those outsourced and contracted temporarily) has made it difficult to maintain cultures of transformation and build systems of accountability and protection. And thirdly, which is more worrying, the ambiguous nature within which the university can condemn violence on one hand yet make monopolized and/or hegemonic use of violence on the other in potentially hypocritical and counterintuitive ways. Ultimately reinforcing prevailing cultures of violence.

If universities like UWC are to claim firmly their stance against GBVF and work towards transformation, they would have to think critically about the scope of their responsibilities (i.e. what can/should a university do?) and define clearly the extent to which it invests in the undoing of historical prescriptions on violence as wells as take seriously its complicity in the denial of personal and communal dignities and the important role it could play in the process of restitution.

"undoing violent collective identities"

The solution, often blurred by the rhetoric of policy, pundits and indignation, is rooted in the uncomfortable confrontation with societal traumas - indirectly and directly experienced and maintained. The reconciliation efforts of 1995 left much to be desired and while public institutions, like universities, can potentially work to manufacture and maintain new collective narratives and engender a spirit of healing and transformation. This would require these institutions to move beyond passive policy, shallow discussions and tokenistic gender representation and mainstreaming. Rather, shifting towards protection against GBVF through a holistic and consistent undoing of violent collective identities.

• BOITUMELO PAPANE, UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

PUG - CENTRE OF APPLIED HUMAN RIGHTS STUDENT PLACEMENT: DEVELOPING AN HRD SUMMERSCHOOL

ABOUT THE PLACEMENT

The Politics and Urban Governance Research Group (PUG) and the UNESCO Chair in the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Expansion of Political Space, based at the University of York, have launched an African Hub in support of Human Rights Defenders. The Hub's programs will include a summer school which will utilise resources found in universities like UWC to provide support for HRDs.

From late November to early December 2023, PUG was joined by Masters students from the Centre for Applied Human Rights to assist in thinking through the kinds of knowledge and skills to be provided by the Hub's summer school as well as its delivery approach. The student placement included:

- Conducting on-site and online interviews with HRDs in the continent to assess their needs.
- Making use of secondary data to further develop findings and map out existing practices.
- Presentation of a final report on the needs of HRDs.

This would provide insights to the PUG team as they prepare for the HRD summer school as well as provide CAHR students with an opportunity to network, develop their research skills and experience the city of Cape Town.

The placement was a great success! PUG would like to express their gratitude to the Center for Applied Human Rights and the human rights defenders across the continent who took part in the needs assessment consultative interviews and focus groups. Thank you all and we look forward to a fruitful 2024.

CENTRE FOR APPLIED HUMAN RIGHTS STUDENTS WITH THE POLITICS AND URBAN GOVERNANCE RESEARCH AT THE POLITICAL STUDIES DEPARTMENT, UWC
From left to right: Fiona Anciano (PUG), Mmeli Dube (PUG), Eric Hobby (CAHR), Madhi Abokor (CAHR), Adul Karim Bin Ujang (CAHR), Mao Suzuki (CAHR) and Boitumelo Papane (PUG)

CAHR STUDENTS WITH ACTIVISTS FROM THE LAND AND HOUSING SOCIAL MOVEMENT #RECLAIM THE CITY, CISSIE GOOL HOUSE

CAHR STUDENT REFLECTION

"It was an invaluable and unforgettable experience for me to participate in this project, researching the needs for the upcoming summer school for HRDs. Thus, I was inspired a lot by passionate, respectful and professional people dedicated to human rights issues in South Africa and the African Continent. Hearing one of them say, "I understand how grassroots definitely can change society through my experiences", significantly impacted me.

I realised that I had never felt the true strength of activism, which is how much people recognise themselves as individuals with powerful potential and believe we can change the situation by uniting with each other at a local level. Unfortunately, in my country, it is still quite rare that people speak out for our rights and constantly act against injustice despite various types of injustice there. However, people who have yet to make it but are keen to do something also exist. The experience taught me what is missing there is "solidarity". At the same time, I've learned not only many beliefs but also their challenges, struggles, and especially fears, which I've also felt before during a protest, and everyone would have it. Nobody is perfect, and everyone feels hurt but not alone if we share the passion and aim to achieve a better world with solidarity. It was a precious opportunity that taught me what a human being who fights for justice should be."

- Mao Suzuki, Masters Student Center for Applied Human Rights

The Role of Universities in Supporting the Resilience and Reinvention of the Activist Diaspora in Africa: The Case Study of Zimbabwe/Southern Africa.

Twenty-five years after the adoption of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) by the UN, HRDs still face persecution for their work in countries with closed or shrinking democratic space (Civicus, 2022). In this context, notwithstanding several and context-specific challenges, universities are seen as having the potential to be sites of protection for activists and contribute to the expansion of political and democratic space (Gready and Jackson, 2023; CAHR, 2018). In Southern Africa, Zimbabwe is one of the countries with a constricted political space where HRDs (student activists, academics, journalists and activists from various civil society and religious formations) constantly face the risk of persecution (Amnesty International, 2021). Over the years, Zimbabwean universities have become sites of persecution thus leaving little room for protection of scholars and student activists (Makunike, 2015; Kapit, 2023). Linked to the country's human rights violations is an enduring socio-political crisis that has seen millions of citizens leaving the country to neighbouring countries.

Initiatives such as temporary relocations, scholarships, fellowships and/or placements in universities with some HRD support program, are some of the mechanisms employed to protect HRDs. However, those only cater for a few. Many HRDs also independently leave the country, through study visas or asylum visas and end up studying and/or working in regional and international universities. It is, however, unclear whether the regional universities they move to support their resilience and reinvention. The role of regional universities as sites of protection for those HRDs remains unexplored.

Using Zimbabwe as a case study, researchers at the Africa Hub are currently examining the role of African universities in protecting Human Rights Defenders amidst the persecution they face for their work in countries with closed or shrinking democratic spaces. This is part of the wider research conducted by the UNESCO Chair on Human Rights and Expansion of Political Space, held by Professor Paul Gready at the Centre for Applied Human Rights at the University of York.

This research seeks to examine universities' role as sites of protection and providing support for the resilience and reinvention of the activist diaspora in Southern Africa and defines resiliency as the ability of HRDs to recover from challenges (social, psychological etc) and continue their work. It also reflect on HRDs reinvention in refences to: (i) activists strengthening their skills, changing their approaches, renewing their commitment to their activism and (ii) activists leaving activisms to do other kinds of work.

Some researchers see universities as having the potential to be sites of protection for activists and contribute to the expansion of political and democratic space. However, the existing protective programs, often led by European and American universities, also only cater for a few HRDs. Many HRDs also independently leave their countries, through study, and asylum visas and some end up studying and or working in regional and international universities. The role of universities as sites of protection remains largely unexplored.

Using a case study approach, our research therefore seeks to examine universities' role as sites of protection and providing support for the resilience (strength to continue their work) and reinvention (different skills and approaches to continue work) of the activist diaspora in Africa. Our research traces the journeys of selected HRDs and host universities. We seek to unravel ways in which HRDs experiences and perspectives are reflected in the host universities' values and the types of protection provided. This research will feed into the Hub's work. Preliminary observations of Zimbabwean HRDs in South African universities show that some continue to be involved in activism in their country and/or the host university or country, while others discontinue their activism and pursue other interests. The findings will be shared in various formats to inform debates about the roles of universities in protecting human rights.

- MMELI DUBE, PRINCIPAL RESEARCHER

Africa Hub Programmes for 2024

In 2024, the Universities as Sites of Protection: Africa Human Rights Hub intends to facilitate4 programs aimed at enhancing the protective role of the university. The Hub intends to work on two broad areas. They Include:

1. Protection and capacity building for HRDs and;
2. Research and knowledge exchange to inform effective interventions.

Regarding the first area, the Hub, working with the UNESCO Chair, intends to continue to develop thinking and practice on the relationship between universities and protection. It will specifically focus on capacity building for HRDs and emerging academics working in this field in the African continent. Core activities will include an HRDs Fellowship Programme for HRDs and activists at risk. This will be a university-based program that embeds HRDs in the academic community both for their safety and engagement in collaborative research, training and networking opportunities. Involving HRDs in research and teaching will also potentially enrich the learning process for university students and help HRDs reflect on their work trajectory.

We also intend to run capacity-building and networking programs such as the Summer School for scholars, students, and activists at risk, selected from across Africa. These will include multiple conceptual themes including a focus on leadership development and reflections on psycho-social support for HRDs. In line with our pedagogical approach, we will also apply innovative storytelling and design thinking methods of learning and teaching. Such programs will enable the Hub to identify opportunities for collaborative and applied research with HRDs and universities across the African continent and beyond.

The Hub's second programmatic area will focus on generating and disseminating knowledge with fellow academics and activists regarding political developments and shrinking space for activism in the African continent. The information will help HRDs to think strategically about their work, map the possible risks involved and plan for the kinds of support they will need.

The Africa Hub also intends to host symposiums to facilitate an exchange of ideas, networking and collaboration between academia and HRDs. This idea takes a leaf from the successes of the 2023 symposium where key discussions were held concerning the role of the university in protecting human rights. This is an emerging field, thus new research presented and debated in such a space will deepen the thinking around universities and human rights protection. Academic papers, artistic performances, talks, debates and other modes of idea sharing will be employed to ensure that multiple voices find space to be heard. This platform will involve and strengthen a network of African universities working to advance Human Rights protection.

Much of the above will form part of a reiterative process of learning from HRDs, HRD support groups and fellow universities working to support HRDs. We thus look forward to growth and a critical reflection on how the Africa Hub can begin to position itself as a site of protection in collaboration with others.
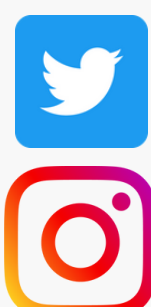
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