

# ***The Critical Tradition at Rhodes University: Retrospect and Prospect***

Fred Hendricks  
*Dean of Humanities*  
*Managing Editor, African Sociological Review*  
*Rhodes University*

Peter Vale  
*Nelson Mandela Chair of Political Studies*  
*Rhodes University*

## **Introduction**

Steven Bantu Biko came to Rhodes University in 1967 as a University of Natal (Black Section) delegate at a NUSAS (National Union for South African Students) congress held in Grahamstown. He discovered that apartheid was alive and well at Rhodes. In observing a segregationist ruling, the university had prohibited accommodation for blacks on campus. Biko, together with other student delegates from Wentworth (Natal), put forward a motion to adjourn the conference and simultaneously invited his fellow white delegates to join him at a non-racial venue in the nearby townships of Grahamstown. The motion was defeated. It was a critical moment in the history of student and black struggles in South Africa. There were two major consequences of this decision by the white-dominated student body. Firstly, it exposed the very severe limits or even irrelevance of liberalism in the face of the racist repression of apartheid; and secondly, it set in motion a trajectory of independent black-led struggles which were vital to the eventual demise of apartheid in 1994. Biko left NUSAS and two years later launched the South African Students' Organisation (SASO) at the University of the North (Turfloop). SASO was one of the key organisations in the Black Consciousness movement which spread across the country leading directly to the Soweto uprising and the national revolt of the late 1970s and 1980s.

Ten years after the NUSAS congress at Rhodes University, Biko was arrested and detained in Grahamstown. Ten days later he was dead. Grahamstown and Rhodes University are central to the unfolding understanding of the linkages between universities and apartheid. This special issue of the *African Sociological Review* is devoted to one of the untold stories of South Africa's dark past – the role of its universities. It is based on the papers delivered at the Critical Tradition Colloquium held at Rhodes University in August 2004 to celebrate its centenary year. The Rhodes Centenary opened up space for many considerations of the institution's life and its times. Most of this

was celebratory but the corner of the Centenary reported in these pages, looks back to the university's experience during the apartheid years and beyond. Although not a sombre occasion, the gathering of Rhodes alumni as well as former and present staff and students was contemplative and focused on the difficulties faced by those who were opposed to apartheid and who, importantly, took a stand on the issue.

The Colloquium was devoted to the Critical Tradition at Rhodes University which we defined very broadly to encompass diverse voices in a conversation about the past, present and future of the university. Our objective in organising the Colloquium was threefold: Firstly, we hoped to provide a platform for critical engagement on the history of Rhodes University, how it was experienced by critical scholars and students, how they were shaped by this history and how that history continues to inform current choices and policies.

Secondly, we wanted to celebrate a broad tradition which seeks to uncover hidden assumptions and is prepared to question various claims to authority. Rhodes has produced a rich repository of critical thinkers and we were concerned with ensuring that the contribution of this tradition to the university should be acknowledged as an integral part of the many reasons that the university had to celebrate.

Our third objective concerned the future. We were keen to provide the intellectual space for a critical discussion to feed into the way forward for Rhodes University in order to contribute to its varied and unfolding identity. We were convinced that bringing together so many critical voices would lead to an important debate about the future journey of the university. In as much as the university shaped many of its alumni, they, in turn, have had an enduring influence on the university. The Colloquium provided the intellectual space designed to harness that influence.

### **Universities and Politics: Apartheid and Beyond**

Some hidden places have still to give up their accounts of what happened during and before apartheid. The ongoing fracas over apartheid's military archives is such an instance; some places, we can be sure, will never reveal their pasts except, perhaps, in the novels that remain to be written. One place where stories have still to be told and which will not wait for the novels are South Africa's universities. Recalling the past is often difficult, but not unusual, within the academy. After the Berlin Wall collapsed, for instance, a slow, but steady, flow of stories on the complicity of academe in the development of the Cold War and the perfection of both its ideology and weapons that sustained it began to flow from America's universities. This confirmed the increasingly important conceptual recognition that there is a link between organised forms of knowledge and political power.

How are we to know what happened in (and to) South Africa's universities under apartheid? How are South Africa's universities currently positioned in

the telling their tales? What is likely to happen to South Africa's universities as they tell these stories? How do these stories find their way into currents and practices in South Africa's universities today? And will they help to shape the future? Finding the answers to these questions will understandably not be easy.

A modest beginning was made at Rhodes University, in August 2004. A two-day colloquium, structured around the themes of student and staff experiences at Rhodes, and in Grahamstown, over six decades – from the 1950's to the present – opened a window on the institution's past. But it also allowed the university to reflect on what happened, and when, and why, and what lies ahead.

The Colloquium considered some of the seminal events and episodes in the university's past and helped to reveal how the actions of both students and staff changed the university and the society. It also opened a window on how they, in turn, were influenced, in varying contexts, by the university and the apartheid system within which Rhodes and other South African universities operated.

The purpose was not to open up old wounds. Certainly many who attended Rhodes (and other South African universities) over the apartheid years were wounded – but the idea rather was to look honestly at university and society during apartheid and beyond. The intention was not to point fingers at the institution or at individuals who may, or may not, have driven an agenda that was pro-apartheid, or for colonialism, or supportive of both minority rule and white privilege. While collusion with apartheid was certainly revealed in many of the papers at the Colloquium, what we need to understand is the manner in which South Africa's dark moments predisposed students and staff to various forms of action, political and other.

Higher education plays an inordinately important role in the experience and so in the lives of both individuals and communities. Yet this is not properly understood in South Africa. Many Rhodes graduates, broadly defined as critical, were crucially shaped by what happened at the university. The Colloquium offered an opportunity to explore how exactly were they shaped, what agency emerged as a result of their being at Rhodes, and how were they constrained by the many limitations of apartheid. How did different students and staff respond to these constraints and in what kinds ways did they contribute to change at the university and beyond?

As we have said, our interest in organising the gathering concerned the future, too. What do these critical thinkers make of their own, the university's, and indeed the country's future? Indeed, what does it mean to be critical – in the past and today? Can officialdom – university or other – genuinely embrace critique and survive? Does critique always have to be external to the inner workings of an institution in dark times? Does this help it survive? And what does 'critical' mean for individuals in the new South Africa? An astonishing feature of the new South Africa is how critical activists and individuals have become compliant, even complicit, citizens. Can we understand why this is so?

And does a university, like Rhodes, have a professional responsibility to train critical minds? Can critique help us resolve South Africa's many contradictions, now and in the future? And what does this mean for a university in a democracy?

There are many questions, to be sure. But asking questions is in the best tradition of serious scholarship, especially the critical kind. And answering these questions will provide some insight into the effect that apartheid had on the institutional life of the country. In an age when the easy answer is all too easily preferred to the long haul offered by reading, thinking and writing, two days and two nights in Grahamstown are certainly not enough, but they may well be an important beginning for Rhodes and for other South African universities.

Colonialism, and other forms of racial discrimination upon which the apartheid doctrine came to be built, plainly influenced the life of Rhodes University notwithstanding that St Andrew's College, out of which the university was born, 'was founded to train priests drawn from local communities, both black and white'.<sup>1</sup> Of course, apartheid's ending did not erase economic inequality and social injustice and, importantly for an educational institution, the academic preparedness of students for university. Rhodes University, like every other South African institution, experiences this legacy every single day. The heritage of race-based inequality presents South Africa's universities with, arguably, their biggest challenge: each of them is touched by its overarching embrace.

The experiences reflected in these pages were not confined to Rhodes University. Every university in South Africa was deeply influenced by apartheid. But perhaps we can claim that Rhodes was the first university in South Africa to face up to its past. Confronting the past, as all South Africans have come to know, is not easy. The country's universities did not use the canopy offered by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to talk to and of their pasts. Indeed, the flourishing of Broad Transformation Forums (BTF) at almost every South African university in the final years of minority rule might be seen as a way of escaping the formalities of the truth-for-amnesty pact that underpinned the country's political settlement. This unwillingness, even inability, to face up to the apartheid past was also reflected in individual academic disciplines: no account was given, for example, of the complicity of Strategic and Security Studies in South Africa's destabilisation of the southern African region. There are countless other examples. So the issue of how to make known the past and, as importantly, how to position this past with regard to the complexity of academic and intellectual life and institutional history, has been largely unexplored. It is almost as if there has been a total amnesia about these crucial periods in our history. This Colloquium was intended to jar the memories of the past by those who had experienced, in many different ways, the repression of apartheid, in order to expose and to understand.

## Rhodes University: Imperial past, African future

In opting for a Colloquium, our hope was to draw individual experiences closer to understandings of dissonant voices in academic institutions during times of repression and great political turmoil. In this endeavour, the format chosen by the organisers was largely successful. Participants were frank and forthright in their criticism of the university, their immediate peers, their teachers and the administration. It was of course not possible to reach back a full century, but some of those in attendance were associated with Rhodes University for almost fifty years. Where intimacy and memory failed, accounts of more distant times at Rhodes relied on the archives and other historical accounts. From these we learnt that, from very beginning, and notwithstanding the highest and most noble ideals of those who founded the institution, the university was caught in a web woven by the politics of those and successive, times. At this core, was the perennial South African issue – race discrimination. The lonely stand by G.F. Dingemans – one of the university’s four founding professors – in his efforts to admit an Indian student to Rhodes in 1933, reported by Paul Maylam in his paper, is an example of how the meta-narrative of both politics and society determined policies and procedures within Rhodes University. A number of times in his piece, Maylam returns to Rhodes University’s unhappy entanglement with the issue of race.

Paul Maylam offers an historical gaze. He mentions three episodes in the university’s past which reveal a pattern of ready compliance with the racist dictates of apartheid. Firstly, Rhodes awarded State President C.R. Swart, a noted segregationist, an honorary doctorate. Secondly, the university denied Steve Biko a place to stay overnight – which we have already mentioned – and thirdly there was the so-called Basil Moore affair. For Maylam, these episodes characterise a relationship of collusion with, rather than opposition to, apartheid.

From Maylam’s historical gaze, we turned to a fresh eye, an African eye, and a decidedly post-apartheid gaze. Jimi Adésina, Nigerian-born, Rhodes Professor of Sociology, offers a clear and accessible account of the challenges that face Rhodes, and other South Africa universities, in their quest to affirm ‘their African identities’. Issues of symbol and substance are drawn together and the complexity of the search for a new identity – free of the European-gaze – that Rhodes University faces in its second century. While Rhodes University’s vision and mission statement mentions very clearly that it ‘proudly affirms’ its African identity, there has been very little debate about what that actually means in practice. This is a pressing problem especially in the context of a university, which according to Maylam, was established to bolster the British Imperial connection. Adesina’s contribution goes a long way towards opening up the debate about the meaning of an African identity.

## Academic Freedom

Strictly speaking, the two papers that follow Maylam's history and Adesina's vision stand outside of a collection that is preoccupied with the Rhodes experience. A word of explanation is therefore in order. For many years Rhodes University has organised an Annual Academic Freedom Lecture. Named after a former professor of Philosophy, the Annual D.C.S. Oosthuizen Lecture has reaffirmed the university's commitment to the principles of Academic Freedom which were entirely corroded as much by racist legislation and practice as by university complicity in apartheid. Because of the Centenary year, the format of the Oosthuizen Lecture was changed somewhat. Instead of a single lecture, a panel of philosophers was invited to a symposium to look at the topic of academic freedom and the place of a university in society through the prism offered by Daantjie Oosthuizen's life and his legacy. This took place on the eve of the Critical Tradition Colloquium.

The papers from that symposium included here are by André du Toit, Emeritus Professor of Politics from the University of Cape Town (UCT) and an important scholar in the teaching of that discipline in South Africa, and Dr Andrew Nash, a graduate of Stellenbosch and UCT. Like du Toit, Nash is an inspiring figure in South African intellectual circles even though, at present, he works as a publisher for Monthly Review Press in New York City.

In du Toit's critical account of the history of the search for Academic Freedom in South Africa, Rhodes University stands outside the tradition of South Africa's Liberal universities. This point is confirmed by Paul Maylam's reading of the institution's history. Professor du Toit's intention, however, is not to look backwards. Instead he considers contemporary threats to academic freedom in South Africa including the instrumentalist pressures on higher education, the issues of commerce-based research, and the relationship between university and state. While du Toit is interested in the liberal impetus offered to Rhodes University by Daantjie Oosthuizen's life, Nash offers an account of Oosthuizen's intellectual journey and provides a close reading of his writing. These, as Nash shows, had a major impact on Oosthuizen's political choices and, ultimately, on the fashion in which he was viewed within Rhodes University. Within this collection on the Critical Tradition at Rhodes University, then, is a story within a story.

## Varieties of Critical Traditions

This opens the space to say something about the organisation of the material and the choices we, as Editors, faced. The workshop was organised on thematic lines: 'Reflections on History at and of Rhodes University'; 'Rhodes under Apartheid' (two sessions); 'Shaping Identities at Rhodes and Beyond'; 'Student Dissent at Rhodes under Apartheid'; 'Rhodes University Today', and 'Predicting and Constructing the Future of Rhodes University'. In addition, the

Vice-Chancellor, Dr David Woods, delivered a keynote address at a dinner on Saturday 20 August, 2004.

As we approached the publication of the material, it made sense for us to draw a line, not thematically, but between the experience of students and of staff of the university during the apartheid years. Now, of course, this (like most divides) is arbitrary: Jacklyn Cock, Louise Vincent and Sam Naidu whose contributions are included here under the category of Staff, were students at Rhodes, in three chronological periods: Professor Cock in the late-1960s, Dr Vincent in the late-1980s and Ms Naidu in the mid-1990s. Professor Trevor Bell, called a member of staff here, enrolled at Rhodes as a student in 1952. And James Christie, included here as a student, taught in the Sociology Department in the early- and mid-1970s, as did Kirk Helliker a full decade later. It also seems necessary to add that T. Dunbar Moodie and Eddie Webster, who both who studied Sociology at Rhodes, have both become figures of considerable import in Sociological circles both in South Africa and abroad, as has Devan Pillay who is an Associate Professor at Wits.

Terence Beard, who was appointed to the Department of Philosophy and Politics in 1959, has offered a critical and personal account of his years at Rhodes. Like Maylam's, his paper refers us to three significant moments in the history of the university and in its relations with the apartheid state. The first is the 1962 decision by the university Senate and Council to award an Honorary Doctorate to the then State President, C.R. Swart. This was to be a cause celebre, at Rhodes, in Grahamstown and within the country. Indeed, the issue was wider than South Africa. The University's Chancellor, Basil Schonland, whose father, Selmar, had been a leading figure in the formation of the university, resigned. Secondly, Beard easily moves between the personal and the political. He speaks about the victimisation that he, then a member of the Liberal Party, and his colleagues felt at the hands of the Rhodes Administration. This account certainly suggests how academic disciplines were prejudiced by the political positions taken by formal and informal hierarchies within Rhodes. Finally, Beard raises question which are also touched upon by André du Toit: the deepening corporatisation of higher education and the resulting utilitarian pressures on tertiary education.

The economist Trevor Bell picks up this latter point in a discussion of his own discipline. Moving back and forth across five decades Bell brought to the conversation some perennial problems, especially the endemic issue of poverty – Bell calls it 'the harsh realities of daily life' – in the Eastern Cape which, at Rhodes, was the dual focus of investigation by economists and anthropologists. This work found a strong institutional form in the foundation, in 1954, fifty years after the founding of the university, of the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) But Bell, like many other experienced scholars is worried that the critical project – in South Africa and elsewhere – has been jettisoned in favour of contract and policy work. Academic salaries are to blame for

this development, certainly, but the cost in terms of the academic enterprise in general is high.

Jacklyn Cock's essay opens by invoking an iconic moment in apartheid: the detention without trial of Steve Biko in Grahamstown on 18 August 1977 with which we opened this Introduction. Drawing from her wider oeuvre, Cock is concerned with locating Rhodes University within South Africa in the brutal years of apartheid modernity, 1977 to 1981. She provides a self-critical reflection of her own engagement in the struggles around two crucial repressive processes of the time in Grahamstown and its surroundings; the forced removals and detentions.

The idea of Terror (and Terrorism) has returned to political and social discourse in the early-21<sup>st</sup> Century. Professor Cock points towards forms of state terror under apartheid, especially deaths in detention and the forced removal of people. Examples of both occurred near Grahamstown. While these are itemised by Jacklyn Cock, her political interest lies in mapping the response by the university and its wider community and critically reflecting on the inappropriateness of her own response. She cites the contribution of what the writer Noel Mostert called 'the Frontier's small group of beleaguered radicals'. She names both the Glenmore Action Group and the Surplus People's Project. And while recognising that Rhodes was not a 'homogenous political community', Professor Cock does name an impressive list of names making the point that 'there was... [at Rhodes]. important scholarship, protest and support... but much was not done'.

In the 1970s, under the inspirational leadership of a leading figure, Guy Butler, Rhodes University established itself as the premier national institution in the study of English. A term much in vogue nowadays is entrepreneurship: however one looks at Butler, this he was. Poet, Biographer, intellectual and institution builder – he inspired the creation of the 1820 Settler's Monument, conceived (with others) the Grahamstown Festival and initiated the teaching of Journalism at Rhodes University. An unanswered question remains whether Butler was a member of Rhodes famous 'Old Guard' or a thorn in the side of a project which aimed to define and ensure the survival of the English-speaking minority in South Africa.

Sam Naidu's journey at Rhodes University begins with 'the White Liberalism' of Guy Butler and ends in postcolonial studies. En route, she invokes the memory of the Marxist critic and long-time member of the Rhodes Staff, Nick Visser, who, had he not passed away, would certainly have been at this Critical Tradition Colloquium. The once acclaimed 'English in Africa' course which was initiated by Butler, she reports, is defunct, 'mainly due to a lack of student interest and staffing constraints'. She calls for change, for relevance at Rhodes and in its academic offerings in this field – 'we cannot stave off direct engagement' – and at the same time nostalgically, almost relishes 'the air of peacefulness, serenity and orderliness' on the Rhodes campus.

Another student who became a lecturer is Louise Vincent, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Political and International Studies. This piece reports from the post-apartheid chalk-face at Rhodes University – it tells ‘stories about race and identity among the present generation of Rhodes students’. Her interest is in the constructed nature of race and racial discourse and in reports of the continuing suspicion, ten years into the post-apartheid period, across the racial divides. Many believe that this kind of reportage and analysis has no place in a South Africa but Dr Vincent is unrepentant, ‘(e)ven if the dog of racism is indeed asleep at Rhodes – and I doubt it is – we should be prepared to give it a vigorous shake in order respectfully to continue to engage with learn from and understand more fully our past and its continuing implications for the present’.

The contribution by Vincent’s departmental colleague, Thabisi Hoeane, is also interested in race. He is, however, less concerned about his own position at Rhodes and, indeed, his position as an intellectual with the issue of colour than he is with professionalism, making a contribution, and changing Rhodes University ‘from a previously exclusively white dominated institution to a truly representative South African institution’.

If the foregoing seven essays offer a perspective on the ‘Critical Tradition’ at Rhodes University from the 1950s to the 2000s, then those we have chosen to call ‘students’ match them over the five decades but are more representative in terms of both race and gender. T. Dunbar Moodie came to Rhodes in 1958 and was persuaded by another legendary Rhodes professor, James Irving, to read Sociology. The decision, as Moodie writes, ‘changed the way I saw the world’. Can there be any finer achievement in a university career and any stronger claim to the status ‘university’ than this? If the Sociology classics – Durkheim, Weber and George Mead – were the staple diet of Sociology in Irving’s time, Moodie’s first exposure to Marx was in the Rhodes Library where he read *The Communist Manifesto*. He charts his journey from a Christian to a Marxist via many discussions about social determinism, politics, religion and society.

Another Rhodes influence on Moodie was the work of the Anthropologist, Philip Mayer, whose work was also noted, with great appreciation, by Trevor Bell. Daantjie Oosthuizen, who we met earlier in this introductory essay, was also an important formative figure. Outside of the classroom, Moodie was influenced by a variety of sources but one deserves more than a passing mention. This was the strong influence at Rhodes, during the late-1950s and deep into the 1960s, of the theology students – colloquially called ‘The Toks’. Surely, their story is another biographical project which is crying out to be written from Rhodes University.

If Moodie was profoundly influenced by James Irving, so were James Christie and Eddie Webster whose essays follow. Christie opens with his first day at Rhodes: a dining room meeting with two acclaimed Rhodes alumni, Charles van Onselen and Tim Couzens – both of them, like Christie, in their very first hours on the campus. The three have remained friends, James Christie

happily reports, 'forty three years later'. In a university of 1,600 students, conversations and exchanges were intense, and interdisciplinary too: a truly 24-hour university before the term became popularised by the managerial fad that has enveloped higher education. When Christie returned to Rhodes to teach after unhappy experiences at the LSE and the University of Durban Westville – then located in Salisbury Island, Durban – he discovered a new cohort as eager to learn as was his own. But in all this ferment, and across two generations, both students and staff were 'unsure of the limits of resistance and unsure of its consequences'.

Eddie Webster was in the same intake as Christie. He locates his paper in historical sociology, his upbringing within the confines of English-speaking South Africa, but with recent experience of Europe and an awakening interest in decolonisation. Studying history with a third Rhodes legend, Winnie Maxwell, Webster crossed a metaphorical intellectual road to study, later, at Balliol College, Oxford, where he engaged with Sociology and Socialism. His account includes strong, near evocative, accounts of the university residence system and the life and times of student politics. Webster was elected to the SRC in 1963 serving as its President, a post that brought him in conflict, as he reports, with his prowess on the rugby field.

Throughout his account Webster respectfully recalls the names of his peers, including that of another Webster, David, who came to Rhodes University from the then Northern Rhodesia. Dr David Webster, of course, would graduate from Rhodes and London, and would become one of the country's leading anthropologists. He would also certainly have been at this Colloquium had he not been assassinated by the apartheid regime, paying for his intellectual and political interests with his life.

The decision by the Rhodes authorities to collude with the state security powers, reported in Barry Streek's essay, could be seen against the international mood of the times: the Cold War years of the late-1960s, and early-1970s. More likely, however, was the fixity of a small town parochialism and simple fear. If some students and some staff were activist, or critically-inclined, we must accept Barry Streek's account that the 'Rhodes University authorities were far from progressive'.

Kathleen Satchwell, now a High Court Judge, but in her day, like Webster and Streek, President of the Rhodes SRC, provides a meticulous account of the Rhodes Student of her day from 1969 to 1978. She points out that most students came to Rhodes from affluent white families; most had been influenced by Christian National Education; most knew little of the 'despised language of Afrikaans'; almost every one was Christian; and most knew little of a world beyond white Southern Africa. Most were, in short, beneficiaries of the apartheid system. Although located in Africa, Rhodes University students knew little of Africa. Her Hall, Hobson, was 'a white enclave in the country of the Mfengu and the Thembu'. In this context, social explosions of 'volcanic

proportions' were 'entirely parochial and without broader political content'. However, Judge Satchwell's own journey towards an understanding that 'the political is personal' – to use the feminist phrase – was rooted within her 'typical South African experience – confused, conflicted, and critical'.

Zubeida Jaffer came to Rhodes (as a post-graduate student) under the so-called 'Ministerial Dispensation'. She found a university which conferred on her a second class status. In 1978, she and other black students were forced into separate residences as the university administration, without consulting the students, complied with government fiat. Although offered the wardenship of a separate residence for non-white women, Jaffer chose, rather, to move into shabby digs on the outskirts of Grahamstown. In her account of these events, Jaffer is highly critical of Rhodes University's official account of this history in the Centenary publication.<sup>2</sup> Using this criticism as a point of entry, Jaffer expresses doubt on the claims of transformation at Rhodes from her position on the Rhodes University Council. And she returns to a theme that necessarily runs through all these presentations: Grahamstown as a microcosm of South Africa. What can Rhodes University do to 'assure the people of this town that this is their university'? Although much work has been done in this direction in recent years, this remains a crucial challenge for the university.

Devan Pillay calls his experience of Rhodes 'life changing'. 'It was a time when my Marxism developed, when I engaged in national political activity, aboveground and underground, and when I was arrested, and later convicted of ANC activities'. Of all these contributors, Professor Pillay talks of the importance of sport – not the rugby so enjoyed by Eddie Webster, but soccer – and the boycott of university sport by black students. This prohibition freed black students, however, to cross Grahamstown's infamous Kowie Ditch and to build links with the Township. Although the university was embedded in a strand of liberalism, Pillay suggests that more critical teachers in Journalism, Sociology, Political Studies and History opened space for radical thinking. Quite why the apartheid government allowed this intellectual space to remain open remains, for him, a puzzle. If Rhodes is to continue with a critical tradition, as Devan Pillay hopes, it must 'always articulate the interests of those without power – particularly the poor and the marginalised – in the pursuit of social harmony and justice'.

If a Rhodes Sociologist James Irving 'changed the way' Dunbar Moodie saw the world, another Sociology professor, Eddie Higgins, 'lit a fire' in Kirk Helliker. It burnt, Helliker insists, not because of Rhodes University but despite of it. '[T]he space for critical thinking was not built into the structure of Rhodes as a social entity', he argues. Rather than reaching deep into sociological theory to explain how the university produced generations of critical thinkers, himself included, Helliker turns to a theory of Great Women – in particular Marianne Roux and Jacklyn Cock – both of whom in the face of great intimidation, 'sought quite consciously and with great conviction to open up and shape a

space for critical reflection at Rhodes'. Helliker, a Canadian citizen, was unceremoniously deported by the South African regime in the mid-1980s. They simply refused to renew his residence permit.

Wrenched from his heart, Shepi Mati has produced a paper of great depths, literary and other. His own roots lie deep within the soil of the Eastern Cape, and it, rather than Rhodes, is his alma mater. He is a 'graduate of his people, who are known to generations of Rhodes scholars as only Alfred, Maria, Jane and John, names that are not theirs, but imposed upon them for the convenience of whites who refused to and fail to pronounce our names'. Mati's telling of the Rhodes story in this fashion brings to this collection a compelling sense that there are still too many silences, especially at the quotidian level where university meets workers and the black community that lie beyond the ring of privilege that surrounds Rhodes. Shep Mati includes in his paper, two of his poems. This one, perhaps, captures the sense of despair felt by many black students during apartheid:

Graham's Town Ghost town!  
 I thought I'd left you  
 But you haven't left my heart  
 Those wild jols  
 The noise of your student evenings  
 Those tormented beggars  
 The Church bells on solitary Sunday evenings  
 The spies we drank with in the pub  
 Hidden among the saints  
 Such loneliness  
 Such sadness

Dr Ashwin Desai's paper returns to some of the themes that run through other papers: the place of the Sociology Department, the sports boycott and the segregated residences of the late-1970s and early-1980s. He provides a roller-coaster ride involving politics, sex, sport, violence, alcohol and friendship. His personal journey of sociological debate is almost indistinguishable from his political awakening and the many twists and turns in both local and national struggles. His story is told from the wisdom of an insider who never shied away from controversy; indeed, he thrived on it.

It would certainly be surprising, given the reach and the sweep of apartheid, that Rhodes University would have escaped its insidious reach. Each of these papers and, surely, many thousand stories beyond them, tell of opportunities lost, of moments when Rhodes – its governors, its administrators, its professors, its teachers – should have made different decisions about students, about courses, about the community which surrounds the university. But within the institution's walls, critical candles were lit in the minds of staff and of students.

How are we to see the impact of the Critical Tradition on the stories told between these covers? How has it affected Rhodes University? Dunbar Moodie's thoughtful essay ends with an interesting idea on the power of traditions, especially critical ones. 'Traditions encapsulate us, he writes, 'binding us to closeness with one another, marching in lock step. Critical traditions, however, are by definition more open. We carry them with us as sheet anchors, providing ballast but not direction, keep us into the wind but not precisely defining our course... the critical tradition I learnt at Rhodes, modified over the years, continues with me, for better or for worse. We wore certain racial and gender blinkers, but precisely because it was a *critical* tradition, it enabled us to grow'.

### Notes

1. See 'Let School Leaders Deliver', *Financial Mail*, Johannesburg, July 15, 2005, p. 16.
2. Richard Buckland and Thelma Neville, *A Story of Rhodes. Rhodes University 1904 to 2004*, Johannesburg, Macmillan, 2004.