

The Decolonial Alternatives Project Space

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A burial ground for black men, women, and children who were taken into slavery on the Rustenburg slave plantation during the early colonial period will be developed into a unique heritage site at the University of Cape Town (UCT). The first phase of the heritage site project is due to open on National Emancipation Day, 01 December 2016, with an academic and community panel discussion, and a spiritual ceremony in remembrance of the deceased buried there.

The site, which lies on what is now a small lawn adjacent to the School of Economics on the Middle Campus, will house a new open-air public classroom, a social space, as well as a permanent exhibition and an on-going display of critical research from across the University.

The month of August has quietly marked the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation's International Emancipation Day, which commemorates the formal abolition and enduring legacies of slavery in the imperial British world. In parallel our campus has had scholarly and activist engagements through the 'Remember Marikana Week'. These commemorations, historical and contemporary, create deeper reflection upon inequality and institutional violence in our society, on questions of memory and citizenship, as well as the leadership role of a university towards the project of transformation.

It is in this context that I communicate to you the development of the memorial space, a significant heritage site that highlights a history of the University that has traditionally been excluded from its narrative.

There are four key values and long-term goals of the project:

- To expand our knowledge of slavery, about which our contemporary world still has much to learn.
- To transform the material, cultural, developmental and symbolic landscape of the University to show the contribution of black communities to its achievements.
- To contribute to curriculum transformation, including new forms and methods of teaching and learning, new ways of engagement, and new areas of knowledge.
- To establish a critical heritage platform for recognition of other neglected heritage sites and practices and to generate dialogue around such issues.

These values can be realised and sustained through the collaborative and collective effort of academics and student groups, community organisations, and religious and social justice groups.

Mr Sadiq Toffa, a PhD student at UCT's School of Architecture, won the design competition for this project and is the curator of the memorial.

Lastly, it is important to emphasise the scholarly integrity and curatorial independence of the project, and the fact that this will be the first public memorial to slavery and colonialism at UCT. It is the ultimate goal that the project builds social trust through a shared project within the campus community.

Sincerely

Professor Anwar Mall
Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor