Academic freedom for some is academic freedom for none

A response to Nithaya Chetty

By Fred Hendricks

Nithaya Chetty, the Dean of Science at Wits University, writing in his personal capacity, contributed a discussion piece to the *South African Journal of Science* provocatively entitled "Should our universities respond to geo-political conflicts around the world?" Referring specifically to "the Israeli–Palestinian conflict," he called for higher education institutions to be neutral in global conflictual situations. FRED HENDRICKS' response considers the implications 'neutrality' would have for the realisation of academic freedom, especially in the context of ongoing racialised inequality in the university sector in South Africa.

Tänka fritt är stort men tänka rätt är större:
Thinking freely is great, but thinking right is greater
Thomas Thorild, 1794, University of Uppsala, Sweden.

Introduction

In March 2025, Nithaya Chetty, the Dean of Science at Wits University, wrote a commentary piece in the *South African Journal of Science* asking "*Should our universities respond to geo-political conflicts around the world*?"(Chetty, 2025).[1] Referring specifically to the ongoing genocidal massacres in Palestine and in the context of widespread university outrage at the atrocities (including at the University of Witwatersrand), he called for higher education institutions not to issue statements and to be neutral in conflictual situations. Writing in his personal capacity, Chetty positions himself as the voice of reason amidst the contending viewpoints at universities and he provides a justification for university neutrality by saying, "Some individuals are so invested in the political outcome of this conflict that they cannot see the folly of their ways" (Chetty, 2025, p. 2).

This response offers a critique of Chetty's position as part of the dominant discourse on academic freedom in South Africa which is located very firmly within a legalistic framework of constitutionalism and rights with virtually no reference at all to the abiding reality of extreme inequality in the higher education landscape and further afield. It is a decontextualised discourse and therefore singularly inappropriate in providing a compelling case for academic freedom. In a deeply divided environment, the virtues of academic freedom can only effectively be extolled if they take account of this context.

Agreement with Chetty

I agree with Chetty when he says,

> *Showing but a cursory interest in the conflicts in Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo now is a feeble attempt to retrofit our concerns there, when there has previously been no genuine interest at many of our universities. This comes across as being insensitive and insincere, and very much an afterthought* (Chetty, 2025, p. 2).

There is a real need for us as African scholars to ensure that the ongoing violence and killing of innocent civilians across the continent, especially in Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), are placed more firmly on our research agendas so that we may readily expose the atrocities towards an engaged scholarship in cooperation with broader society and beyond the confines of the university. However, the

fact that we have failed in this respect does not prevent us from taking a stand on the question of genocide in Palestine. The two are not mutually exclusive. At the same time, it's not as if nothing has been done in these two conflict-ridden countries. As far as Sudan is concerned, I would refer any reader to the works of Kwesi Prah, who has spent many years trying to decipher the shifting nature of the genocide and educating us about the complexities in ethnic cleansing and civil war.[2]

As far as the DRC is concerned the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (Codesria) has been at the forefront of promoting academic freedom across the continent. A standout report of theirs was written by Mahmood Mamdani in 1997 already (Mamdani, 1997), but their involvement with scholars in the DRC, like most other African countries, is ongoing.

Disagreements with Chetty

Chetty's justifications for being against universities responding to global geopolitical conflicts revolve around: (i) the reputation of the university, (ii) "sets us up for failure as a university," (iii) exacerbating existing differences of opinion which might lead to "unnecessary tensions,", (iv) "imposing a hegemonic view from the top," and (v) protecting "equally valid views" (Chetty, 2025, p. 2).

He articulates the principles of his position in the following:

> *The principles that I refer to speak more to what we value as our university, and invariably these principles impinge on the policies and procedures that we set for ourselves, and ultimately the decisions that we make as a collective … And as universities are principally a place of ideas, principles largely speak to the intellectual culture of the place.* (Chetty, 2025, p. 1).

The principle Chetty espouses is the free-flow of ideas, where differences of opinion can be aired without any hindrance. For Chetty the value of open discussion at a university trumps the normative position against genocide and the violation of human rights. In his world, those complicit in genocide have "equally valid views" to those of the victims of genocide as well as those who stand in solidarity with them. Putting it bluntly, universities ought to give a platform to those in support of the ongoing genocide. For him, this humanitarian crisis is "essentially a political matter" which creates "unnecessary tensions" at the university. Consequently, he argues:

> *…for the university to officially choose sides when there are clearly different political viewpoints across the university is problematic and sets*

> *us up for failure as a university. We should strive to be inclusive of differing political viewpoints on this matter at our universities.*
>
> *However, it would be remiss of me to impose these views on the university, through a vote, for example, when I fully know that there are differing, and probably equally valid, views on this. Making decisions on this goes way beyond the remit of the university. (*Chetty, 2025, p. 2*)*

There are many problems with these formulations. Firstly, his arguments against voting on issues require closer scrutiny. After all, it is precisely when there are differing views that a matter is brought to a vote. The majority view then prevails. Chetty's statement undermines the very basis of democratic practice at a university and society at large. If indeed the vote is premised on fair democratic principles it cannot be considered an imposition at all. Basically, he says we should not vote because there are differing views. This is a paralysing anti-democratic position. In fact, it is an indefensible position in the face of the overwhelming evidence of genocide. These two statements demonstrate just how his insistence on neutrality leads to institutional inertia:

> *If we comment on one major human rights issue, then we should make every effort to comment on essentially every other major human rights catastrophe, which is hopelessly untenable to do.* (Chetty, 2025, p. 2)

And,

> *We should be wary of taking sides in what is a known long-standing and controversial political conflict that will clearly exacerbate divisions at our universities, no matter our own personal political convictions.* (Chetty, 2025, p. 2)

In Chetty's world of neutrality our institutions will not provide leadership in the great moral questions of our time. They will not assist in deciphering the complex priorities we face in the context of rapidly changing technology. Instead, they'll be disengaged from the struggles, challenges and problems of wider society. They are to be ivory towers, isolated in their privilege. As he says, "We should always think about how we can do good for our universities, for now and for the future" (Chetty, 2025, p. 2) without much concern for anything else.

We have to state quite unequivocally that what is currently unfolding in Palestine is not a war involving contending armies, it is essentially a genocidal massacre of unarmed civilians. The leading global authorities in the field of genocide have passed resolutions which provide us with sufficient evidence to declare that the Israeli authorities are guilty of the crime of genocide in Palestine. These are their findings:

Gaza in ruins.
Photo by Shutterstock.

Following a compelling justificatory statement, the International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS), a 500-member body of academics founded in 1994, passed a resolution on the 31st August 2025 declaring that Israel's policies and actions in Gaza meet the legal

definition of genocide as set out in the 1948 United Nations Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (IAGS, 2025).

And on the basis of a joint investigation, the University Network for Human Rights, the International Human Rights Clinic at Boston University School of Law, the International Human Rights Clinic at Cornell Law School, the Centre for Human Rights at the University of Pretoria, and the Lowenstein Human Rights Project at Yale Law School together concluded that:

> *Israel's actions in and regarding Gaza since October 7, 2023, violate the Genocide Convention. Specifically, Israel has committed genocidal acts of killing, causing serious harm to, and inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about the physical destruction of Palestinians in Gaza, a protected group that forms a substantial part of the Palestinian people.* (IAGS, 2025)

And, finally the United Nations' Commission of Inquiry concludes on reasonable grounds that the Israeli authorities and Israeli security forces have committed and are continuing to commit the following *actus reus* of genocide against the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, namely (i) killing members of the group; (ii) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (iii) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; and (iv) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group.[3]

It is rare that global institutional authorities and academics are so completely in agreement. In these circumstances, an appeal to freedom of speech pitting supporters of genocide against those who stand in solidarity with its victims appears entirely inappropriate and indeed could be considered morally repugnant. It also exposes any possibility that these views might be "equally valid" as Chetty suggests, unless of course he believes that the right to hold views in favour of genocide ought to be protected in the interests of striving "to be inclusive of differing political viewpoints on this matter at our universities".

The central point of Chetty's position is captured in the following paragraph:

> *Universities releasing an official statement on the Israeli-Palestinian matter is not an academic freedom matter. Even though academic freedom is a right accorded to academics, a special group of individuals in society, with important rights, responsibilities and obligations, it is practised on an individual basis. We practice academic freedom as independent critical public voices. It goes against the principles of academic freedom for the university to impose a hegemonic view from the top on an essentially*

> *political matter when we have differing views on this amongst staff and students.* (Chetty, 2025, p. 2)

This individualised notion of academic freedom is so utterly detached from the reality of the genocide in Palestine that it cannot conceive of the fact that the academic freedoms of scholars in Gaza have been systematically violated by the physical destruction of their universities. When Nelson Mandela said, "But we know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians; without the resolution of conflicts in East Timor, the Sudan and other parts of the world" (Office of the President, 1997), he could equally well have been speaking about our academic freedom in relation to that of the Palestinians. Indeed, academic freedom for some is academic freedom for none.[4]

Chetty's concern about the imposition of a hegemonic view from the top also deserves some comment. Firstly, he misconstrues the genocide in Gaza as "essentially a political matter", when in fact, this is one of the most significant humanitarian crises of our time and the widespread outrage it provokes is entirely understandable. The question that we need to ask here is − whose academic freedom might be violated by a university adopting a resolution against genocide? Also, should a university allow space for the articulation of the views of those who are in support of genocide? Needless to say, this would place the university in an invidious position of moral incoherence. In my view, far from "setting the university up for failure" as Chetty argues, a university that adopts a resolution condemning genocide and violence necessarily occupies the moral high ground both nationally and globally. It tells the world that the university, as an institution, stands for justice and does not tolerate oppression.

Beyond the questionable moral standpoint of this piece, there are also some other problems, for example, (i) the circularity in a statement such as, "One of the enduring principles by which all good universities are governed is that they are governed in a principled way"; (ii) surely, Chetty's assertion that he is concerned with the "best interests of our South African universities" as if there is a singular interest across such a deeply divided landscape is contested; (iii) in a deeply contradictory manner Chetty also mentions "competitor universities".

Universities respond to genocide in Gaza

Despite Chetty's misgivings, to date nine South African universities have issued statements on Gaza. They are listed below, in chronological order, and with short extracts from their statements:

• University of the Free State university (October 2023),
"The tragedy unfolding in the Middle East reminds us again of the urgent need for a peaceful resolution of the conflict that has been raging in the region for many decades" (Loader, 2023).

• University of Johannesburg (November 2023),
"The University of Johannesburg (UJ) adheres to the principles and values that underpin our democracy. We express deep concern on the conflict between Palestine and Israel. The University supports the upholding and preservation of human rights, and the need for an immediate ceasefire and cessation of armed conflict" (University of Johannesburg, 2025).

More than a decade earlier, UJ's senate voted to sever links with Ben-Gurion University, becoming the first university in the world to implement an academic boycott against an Israeli academic institution.

• University of Fort Hare university (December 2023),
"[We therefore…] commit not to pursue any institutional links with Israeli institutions as these have played a key role in supporting settler colonial oppression and apartheid and have been complicit in grave violations of human rights … including developing weaponry, military doctrines and legal justification for the indiscriminate mass targeting of Palestinians" (University of Fort Hare, 2023)

Sakhele Buhlungu, the University of Fort Hare Vice Chancellor, has implored universities in SA to play a more assertive role in coordinating national academic solidarity in support of Palestinian scholars and Fort Hare is also at the forefront of efforts to rebuild universities in Gaza (Roodt, 2025).

• Nelson Mandela University (December 2023),
"[Senate resolved to] support a comprehensive and consistent boycott of Israeli academic institutions and academics who may be proved to be complicit in supporting Israel in oppressing the Palestinian people, as called for by progressive Palestinian and Israeli academics" (Nelson Mandela University, 2023).

• University of the Western Cape (June 2024),
"UWC will fully disengage from Israeli academic institutions, in line with The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) guidelines. Strengthening Academic Ties: Initiatives to enhance connections with Palestinian scholars and students and support the rebuilding of higher education in Gaza" (University of the Western Cape, 2024).

• University of Venda (June 2024),
"The University of Venda will suspend with immediate effect its scientific, technical and mobility cooperation with Israeli universities and institutions until there is calm in Palestine in Gaza and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank" (University of Venda, 2024).

• University of Cape Town (June 2024),
With regard to research collaborations with members of the Israeli Defence Force and the wider Israeli military establishment, "no UCT academic may enter into relations, or continue relations, with any research group and/or network whose author affiliations are with the Israeli Defence Force, and/or the broader Israeli military establishment" (University of Cape Town, 2024).

• University of Witwatersrand (July 2024),
"We recognise and recommit to opposing the multiple conflicts and crises of violence that have resulted in dire humanitarian crises, particularly on the African continent, including Sudan, the Sahel, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, amongst others. Expressions of solidarity in these contexts must also be embedded in a larger commitment to advancing our common humanity on many fronts across the globe" (University of the Witwatersrand, 2024).

• Rhodes University (September 2025),
"Rhodes University condemns the ongoing atrocities of the Israeli government against the people of Gaza. The relentless bombardment, the destruction of homes, schools, universities and other tertiary institutions, hospitals, and vital infrastructure, and the deliberate deprivation of food, water, electricity and medical aid are unconscionable crimes against humanity" (Rhodes University, 2025).

It is quite clear that there is no uniformity in the statements. The main dividing line is between those universities that have condemned the

violence and called for a ceasefire and those that have gone further and imposed a prohibition on academic contact with universities in Israel.

Stellenbosch University presents an interesting case. Here, a resolution was put before the senate, but it failed to muster a majority vote. Instead, the resolution was placed on the university website with an explanation that it had not been passed by senate.

Similarly, the University of KwaZulu-Natal has not issued a statement on Gaza but it has, in practice, designed and implemented a number of projects and academic activities in relation to the genocide.[5]

Academic freedom in South Africa

Chetty's arguments follow a long line dominant in the South African discourse on academic freedom which fails to take account of the ongoing context of racialised inequality in the university sector as well as the society at large.

All rights, including the right to academic freedom, do not occur in a vacuum. There is always a particular context which determines the parameters for the realisation of rights and here I'd like to show how conditions of inequality structure the possibilities for academic freedom in South Africa. I argue that the current discourse here is a retrogression from the notion articulated in the Kampala Declaration on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility passed in November 1990.[6]

In my view, the Declaration has stood the test of time. It extolls the virtues of intellectual not merely academic freedom. This is a very important distinction with huge implications for the production and dissemination of knowledge. Basically, it explicitly covers intellectuals outside of a university or academic environment and in so doing it seeks to break down the extant barriers between town and gown. In this regard it embraces a notion of engaged scholarship irrespective of the location of scholars/intellectuals.

While there may have been some earlier notions of academic freedom in South Africa, expressed in inchoate ways, it was really the context of an apartheid state's nefarious intervention in the affairs of universities that the TB Davie mantra emerged. It stated that academic freedom may be defined as, "…freedom from external interference in (a) *who* shall teach, (b) *what* we teach, (c) *how* we teach and (d) *whom* we teach".

Academic freedom is today enshrined in the Bill of Rights of the South African Constitution under the rubric of freedom of speech (Republic of SA, 1996). It is also upheld in the Higher Education Act

(No.101 of 1997), the preamble of which states, "…it is desirable for higher education institutions to enjoy freedom and autonomy in their relationship with the state within the context of public accountability and the national need for advanced skills and scientific knowledge" (Republic of SA, 1997). These are laudable declaratory statements, but how do they relate to the South African higher education environment that mirrors our broader societal inequalities where the interests of different universities are so utterly at variance with each other?

Celebrating academic freedom under these circumstances is akin to applauding the rights of the landless to buy a wine farm or the homeless to buy a mansion. So, we do need to ask whether the conditions at historically black universities are such that the right of academic freedom is itself unrealisable in the same way as the political and socio-economic rights of poor people are hollowed out by the reality of their poverty. The Constitution is supposedly inclusive, yet its pretensions to universality effectively disregard the concrete conditions of inequality in higher education.

While academic freedom is constitutionally protected, the inequalities of the university system and the mobilisation around the protection of particular interests have combined to produce a whole range of different positions on what academic freedom should mean in a democratic South Africa. If academic freedom means that universities should be left untouched by the democratic policies of the new government and that the state should not intervene in the university sector at all, it implies that the untenable status quo should remain. On the other hand, allowing state interference in the running of academic affairs is also not desirable, because it will be extremely difficult to dislodge the state once it has become ensconced at universities.

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Ostensibly in response to mounting threats to institutional autonomy and academic freedom in post-apartheid South Africa, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) in 2005 commissioned an extensive investigation into the concepts of academic freedom and institutional autonomy and their relevance in the country. The ensuing CHE report,

entitled, "*Academic Freedom, Institutional Autonomy and Public Accountability in South African Higher Education,*" was published in 2008 (CHE, 2008). This is clearly the most wide-ranging examination of the concepts of academic freedom and institutional autonomy in South Africa to date and it serves as a very good barometer for the nature of the discourse.

The report is characterised by a sterile reliance on the South African Constitution as a cornerstone for understanding notions of academic freedom. It uses the language of rights, duties, and obligations in a disembodied manner devoid of any substantive examination of how these might be realised in practice. It contains vague references to transformation without any specific discussion on what this entails in relation to the differentiation of the higher education sector and how some universities are in far more favourable positions than others. In fact, it uncritically accepts this differentiation outside of a framework for understanding just how closely it is linked to a history of apartheid in education. In so doing, it accepts the racially unequal dividends of apartheid without any sense of how these might be overcome.

Consequently, it does not provide an agenda for change but instead produces a programme for the reproduction of the disparities. The report portrays a hollow universalism around the notions of academic freedom and institutional autonomy while displaying a damning amnesia of educational struggles in the country and in the light of the ongoing student and university struggles, its findings should be considered passe.

The CHE's report is also at pains to try to move beyond the TB Davie formulation but it does so only haltingly and without any coherence. While repeatedly asserting a necessity to go beyond TB Davie, it actually ends up merely re-iterating the Davie mantra. The incoherence of the report lies on many fronts but it is nowhere clearer than its glib reference to the various "African declarations on academic freedom" about which the report states, "The Task Team finds all of these ideas applicable for South African higher education" (CHE, 2008, p. 43). It is this kind of contrived indifference to the rest of the continent that bedevils South African scholarship. There is no thorough engagement with the many issues confronting academic freedom on the continent. Instead, this glib affirmation suggests a lazy disinterest, a gesture without any substance at all.

If there is one continental document on academic freedom that cannot be ignored, it is the Kampala Declaration adopted more than 30

years ago. Article 22 of the Declaration states, "The intellectual community has the responsibility to struggle for and participate in the struggle of the popular forces for their rights and emancipation".[7]

This is a very different approach to the social responsibility of academics and the intellectual community more broadly, than the legalistic and individualised embeddedness of the CHE report and its reliance on the state. The Kampala Declaration unambiguously calls for an engaged intelligentsia, one that locates itself within social struggles. It does not hide behind constitutional rights. Instead, it expects actual agency by intellectuals in the struggles of the wider community.

In concert with this view, University of Fort Hare Vice-Chancellor Buhlungu had this to say at his Academic Freedom lecture at the University of Cape Town in August 2023:

> *We should move away from this homogenised [idea] that there's one definition of academic freedom for everybody. No, it means different things. It's shaped by our different histories. We [University of Fort Hare] come from a particular history that has kind of killed the soul, the fibre of our institution since 1959 and the roots of the violence and the killings and what you see on TV today, it originates from there … So, let's be mindful and open up this notion of academic freedom and autonomy because they're different.*(Davids, 2023)

Buhlungu goes on to claim:

> *Autonomy has been eroded so much that these syndicates are so confident [and] so brazen that they now kill. They don't just send memorandums, [cause] unrests or protest, they now kill. And that's where we are now. Where we are, we are now battling the syndicates in [a] very real sense … in the past two years, two UFH staff members, Petrus Roets and Mboneli Vesele, have been murdered. Do these gruesome acts threaten freedom of expression and academic freedom?* (Davids, 2023)[8]

Ultimately, the question Buhlungu is asking is − how does one extoll the virtues of academic freedom in a context where staff members at universities are being killed? It doesn't mean that Buhlungu is against academic freedom, just that it needs to take account of the history of segregation in higher education and in the society as a whole.

My main contention is that academic freedom cannot root itself as a concept of currency and relevance outside of the context of extreme differentiation between universities, without reference to the preceding educational struggles, and without any awareness of continental and indeed global struggles around academic freedom.

Educational struggles were an intrinsic part of the accomplishment of democracy in South Africa. The student-led uprisings of 1976 and the subsequent ongoing resistance of the 1980s were characterised by mass participation of ordinary people, students, academics, and workers, who were directly involved in various struggles. There appeared to be no limit to their day-to-day ingenuity in engaging the state as educational struggles were animated by the promise of a better, more equitable future. This ingenuity translated into a generalised optimism, even euphoria, when apartheid gave way to democracy in 1994. However the expected changes have not happened, despite a mountain of educational policy paperwork by the post-apartheid government. The inequalities have proven to be far more durable than initially anticipated. In response, the optimism has waned and the euphoria has dissipated. A dry set of legal documents has taken the place of the vibrancy of struggle and mass participation has been substituted by state direction.

A decade ago however, the foundations of the tertiary sector in South Africa were profoundly shaken by student resistance, some violent, in placing their interests on the agenda for the future of the country. It goes without saying that these student movements have been sporadic, issue-based, and largely without coherence, but they have served to call into question the very many enduring inequalities and injustices of a democratic South Africa.

Conclusion

South Africa is today one of the most unequal countries in the world and the division between rich and poor still largely follows racialised lines despite the democratic changes in the country since 1994. These inequalities are embedded in all aspects of South African society and universities are no exception, with the historically black campuses remaining at the bottom of the pile on a whole host of indicators, despite the gestures of institutional redress since 1994.

University mergers were intended to transform the landscape of institutional inequality, but they have done nothing of the sort. In fact they have entrenched the inequalities. The privileges at historically white universities remains largely untouched by these moves. Lumping weak universities and technikons together has done little to transform the institutional landscape of the country in line with the new democratic order. Former Minister of Higher Education and Training Dr Blade Nzimande's statement in 2010 remains relevant today:

> *The legacy of apartheid is still clearly discernible in higher education as it is in many aspects of South African life. The relative deprivation of the formerly black, rural institutions still exists − they constantly teeter on the brink of bankruptcy, much of their infrastructure is inadequate, teaching and study facilities are poor, libraries and laboratories are badly stocked, accommodation for many of their students is over-crowded and the quality appalling, and the staff qualifications do not begin to compare with those at the better-off universities*.[9]

There are, of course, many complex reasons for the enduring inequality in the university system, but it is clear that the higher education landscape has been profoundly shaped by the enduring legacies of apartheid. If it is accepted that the inequalities are the result of a history of racism in higher education then it follows that there should be definitive corrective action to address this legacy of neglect and disadvantage. If we uncritically accept the inequalities as given and outside of this historical context, it amounts to a legitimation of a racist past.

It is inevitable that higher education institutions will be differentiated. However, when that differentiation is caused by the racism of apartheid, then the system requires direct action in the form of institutional redress. How this should happen to permit the historically black universities to recover a sense of academic credibility should be a matter of urgent national attention. This is a *sine qua non* for substantive academic freedom in South Africa.

The inscription at the start of this response comes from above the entrance to the Grand Auditorium in Uppsala University's Main Building in Sweden. It goes to the heart of the debate about academic freedom in the process of knowledge-making and the meaning of inquiry at a university. It begs the question − who decides on what is right?

In many ways this question has been answered almost irrevocably in the contemporary United States of America, with many universities meekly capitulating in the face of state intervention in their affairs and where what is right, for example in how antisemitism ought to be defined, is captured by the state and enforced by major budgetary cuts to the apparently offending universities, such as Columbia. The message is crystal clear − if you do not deal decisively with pro-Palestinian protests, we will withhold your grants.

The crass manner in which the powerful have monopolised what is right has called into question the very basis of a university. After decades of the Global North preaching to us in the South about academic

freedom, they have now all but given up that right, with very little fight, very little opposition and virtually no real belief in the true meaning of a university (Gabbatt, 2025; Bhuiyan, 2025). To be fair, Harvard University has opposed Trump's attempts at state control through litigation, but internally, at the university itself, there has been a crackdown on Palestine scholarship − some scholars have been demoted and some programmes cancelled but the clearest violation of academic freedom at Harvard in recent years is the withdrawal of an entire issue of the *Harvard Education Review* dedicated to education in Palestine. The issue was in an advanced stage of review and contracts had already been signed by the contributing authors, only for the editors to be informed that the issue would not be published (Speri, 2025).

I'd like to return to Chetty's provocation, by finally referring to Desmond Tutu's extremely insightful statement of moral compass: "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality."

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ENDNOTES

[1] Please also see the Leader article and other discussion commentaries on this issue in the *South African Journal of Science* Volume 121 Number 3/4 of 2025. https://sajs.co.za/issue/view/1264. SAJS is the official journal of the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) – Ed New Agenda.

[2] See especially, *Sudan in Crisis: The Dialectics of a Failing State, Ethnic Cleansing, Slow-Motion Genocide and Civil War.* Cape Town: Africa Century Editions Press (2024).

[3] See legal analysis of the conduct of Israel in Gaza pursuant to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Conference room paper of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel. Human Rights Council. A/HRC/60/CRP.3. https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session60/advance-version/a-hrc-60-crp-3.pdf

[4] The title is inspired by Jonas Gwangwa's song "Freedom for Some is Freedom for None".

[5] For more information see https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=University+of+kwa+zulu+natala+gaza+genocide&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8

[6] See The Kampala Declaration on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility, published in *Codesria Bulletin 1, 1991.* https://academicfreedom.codesria.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Doc-3a_The-Kampala-Declaration-1990.pdf

[7] https://academicfreedom.codesria.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Doc-3a_The-Kampala-Declaration-1990.pdf

[8] Roets was in charge of transport at the University and Vesele was Buhlungu's body guard. Clearly a sight for nefarious accumulation, the previous incumbent of the transport portfolio, Victor Peter, was also murdered.

[9] Keynote address by former Minister of Higher Education and Training Dr Blade Nzimande to the Stakeholder Summit on Higher Education Transformation, 22 April 2010.

BIOGRAPHY

Professor Emeritus Fred Hendricks is the former Dean of Humanities at Rhodes University. He is currently an Executive Member of the African Humanities Association and a Roving Mentor for the National Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS). He is also Editor of the African Humanities Book Series.