

**Upenyu Majee**  
**IRIS Summer Fieldwork Award report (2016)**

The research project

My research highlights and examines the increasing pressures faced by South African university administrators to simultaneously respond to international, regional and national demands that often conflict over the missions and daily functioning of public universities. According to Dolby (2010) and Maassen & Cloete (2006), the country is caught between and conflicted about, on one hand, a global reform agenda that promotes efficiency, effectiveness, and competition, and on the other, a national reform agenda that emphasizes locally-driven post-apartheid concerns such as redress, democratization, reconstruction and equity. The national and the global are not the only pressure points, however. Regionally, endemic economic challenges, political instability and limited higher education opportunities in neighboring countries have made South Africa the coveted study and work destination in Africa. This has meant that at the same time that the South African higher education sector has to cater to local demands for redress and equity and development cooperation pressures regionally, it also has to integrate within the competitive, globalized knowledge economy.

Summer 2016 fieldwork

Up until October 2015, the research project had constituted an institutional ethnography at one of the country's historically White, research-intensive public universities. The fieldwork was, however, cut short by #FeesMustFall student protests that started at my research site in mid-October and eventually spread across all public universities in the country. While the protests presented a priceless data collection opportunity around *transformation* discourses and policies as they relate to university funding for historically disadvantaged black South African students, they virtually shut down the university for weeks and made it impossible for me to complete key follow-up interviews with focal participants and to collect crucial institutional documents that I had painstakingly negotiated for while there. Two key factors necessitated a Summer 2016 return to field: 1) initial data analysis had exposed significant gaps which made it imperative to go back and engage those who championed and participated in the #FeesMustFall movement, institutional leaders and state bureaucrats on their responses, and other stakeholders on meaning and policy implications of the strike outcomes 2) to the extent that a focus on one university had

**Upenyu Majee**  
**IRIS Summer Fieldwork Award report (2016)**

provided for depth, I had increasingly become aware that my research lacked the breadth that would increase the project's relevance and usefulness across the South African higher education sector.

The IRIS Summer Fieldwork Award assisted with travel and living expenses for an additional five weeks in South Africa this summer (2016) during which time I was able to conduct 5 follow-up interviews that had been disrupted last October/November, and 10 additional first-time interviews, and collect a myriad of critical institutional documents and audiovisual materials pertinent to the research. Although time limitations did not allow for me to secure the full range of interviews I had anticipated for (e.g. with the incoming Dean of Students, and some student leaders) I feel confident that I now do have a representative enough sample to proceed with data analysis and write up the dissertation.

The timing of the additional fieldwork happened to coincide with two conferences at which I was able to present papers on preliminary findings from the research: the *2016 International Decoloniality Conference* held at The University of South Africa, Pretoria, and the *Global Conference on Higher Education Internationalization in South Africa* held at Kruger National Park. Each of the conferences brought together higher education leaders, professionals and practitioners working in the field of decoloniality and higher education internationalization. Both conferences provided a unique opportunity to present my work, network and engage in robust exchanges of ideas around South African efforts to expand, equalize and internationalize higher education opportunities in the post-apartheid era. In lieu of these interactions, I was able to broaden the scope of research project by collecting additional data from 6 additional South African universities. Doing so has added the hitherto missing breadth, thus giving the dissertation project a much needed comparative component.

Among the additional study participants who I was able to interview is a high profile Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) official as well as one of the founding directors of a student political formation that is not affiliated to any of the national political parties and galvanizes international students. The DHET official highlighted for me the state-level contestations regarding global, regional and national demands brought to bear on the country's universities. On the one hand, the DHET understands the value of internationalization and would want to see a smoother flow of students and

**Upenyu Majee**  
**IRIS Summer Fieldwork Award report (2016)**

academics across the South African border. On the other hand, the Department of Home Affairs (DHA), which regulates the movement of people in and out of the country, constitutes an obstacle to non-South Africans seeking education, work and residence opportunities within the country. At the institutional level, the student formation unaffiliated with any national political parties makes claims to values of inclusivity, multi-nationalism and cosmopolitanism that often are at odds with racial identity politics and the nationalistic orientation that animate and characterize the student political formations aligned to national political parties. The DHET/DHA and student political party tensions underscore and exemplify the dilemmas and contradictions at the core of my dissertation project: the post-1994 transition from the elitist and exclusionary legacy of apartheid to a mass-based tertiary education system (Ramphele, 1999), the emergence of post-apartheid South Africa as a regional economic hub and the most popular study destination in Africa, and the dominance of the new orthodoxy of the knowledge economy (Naidoo, 2011) which places high value on elite, world-class and research-intensive universities.

The IRIS Summer Fieldwork Award made it possible for me to collect the additional data without which the story my dissertation attempts to tell would not have been complete. For that, I am extremely grateful.