

**CITATION FOR ISSA SHIVJI****Honorary Graduand, Rhodes University, 18 April 2009.**

By Professor Paul Maylam

He has been described as one of Africa's "most radical and original thinkers", and as "a courageous and inspiring scholar" with "a commitment to emancipatory politics at all times". Issa Shivji has for long been the quintessential scholar-cum-activist, leading a distinguished career as both a brilliant academic and as a forthright public intellectual speaking out on a range of key contemporary issues.

Issa Shivji's academic career, spanning almost four decades, has been firmly based at the University of Dar es Salaam. Starting out in 1970 as a tutorial assistant, rising to a full professorship in the law faculty by 1986, a position he held for twenty more years until his apparent retirement in 2006. I say "apparent", because a year ago he was appointed to the post of Professor in Pan-African Studies at the university – a chair created to promote interdisciplinary research into socio-economic and cultural issues in Africa, and to stimulate rigorous intellectual debate. Issa Shivji clearly the ideal person to fill this chair, having spent his whole career engaged in debate and interdisciplinary intellectual pursuits.

A lawyer by training Professor Shivji is equally at home in the field of political economy, regularly producing sharp critical tracts on such topics as globalisation, neo-liberalism, poverty, inequality and a host of other themes. This capacity to bring together law and political economy was well demonstrated in his major book, *Law, State and the Working Class in Tanzania: c.1920-1964*, published in 1986 – a book that has become an African studies classic. Three years later came another groundbreaking book, *The Concept of Human Rights in Africa* – a critique of prevailing human rights ideologies, and an attempt to reconceptualise human rights from the perspective of African workers.

These are just two of eighteen books published by Professor Shivji – to which one must add 35 journal articles, and 33 chapters in books – some of the works translated into foreign languages, including Arabic. A formidable publication record – but this has just been the academic output, produced mainly for fellow academics and students. Issa Shivji is also a public intellectual writing on critical issues for a wider audience. Here again the output has been immense – between 1990 and 2005 alone about 150 articles, appearing in three different newspapers, covering contemporary events and trends in Tanzania and beyond. In a bold, incisive style of journalism he has ranged across a broad set of themes – but always at the forefront of his concerns have been the failures of Tanzania's ruling elite and the plight of the country's working people.

Combining scholarship and activism has been integral to Issa Shivji's career. As a student at the Dar es Salaam campus he became caught up in the radical fervour of the late 1960s. Students started their own journal, *The Spark*, with Issa contributing to the first issue – an article that called for law to be taught in its social, economic and historical context – an approach that would actually be adopted by the law faculty, and one which Issa has practised throughout his career.

For many people the end of their university years also marks the end of their activism. Not so with Issa Shivji. As a practising lawyer and academic he has taken up legal cases, acting pro bono on behalf of the poor, the vulnerable, and the disadvantaged; has taught literacy classes and assisted self-help, home-building schemes; has often rendered service as a consultant – for, among others, Oxfam, the UN Development Programme, the Trade Union Congress of Tanzania, as well as local government reform programmes.

Then further roles – in the 1980s serving as Director of the International Third World Legal Studies Association; chairing a presidential commission of inquiry into land matters in Tanzania in the early 1990s; President of the Media Council of Tanzania since 2006; for long playing a key role in CODESRIA – the Council for the Development of Social Science Research In Africa.

Such has been the development of his worldwide reputation that there have been demands on his services across the globe – visiting professorships in India, Hong Kong, Mexico, the UK, Senegal, Lesotho, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

Issa Shivji has been no academic careerist. Admirable are the principled positions he has taken on many issues: consistently speaking out on behalf of exploited Tanzanians; railing against corporate greed and the global culture of consumerism; condemning African regimes that violate human rights; bemoaning the corporatisation of universities and the accompanying suppression of critical thought; always passionate about making the world a better place, politically, socially and culturally. Humble in character, egalitarian in spirit, committed to intellectual honesty, Issa has been described as “a source of inspiration and an extraordinary example of struggle to build up African universities not only with high standards, but with scholars committed to the development of the continent”.

Today Rhodes University is proud to honour a distinguished academic, a prolific writer, a teacher and practitioner of law with an ardent commitment to social justice, an internationally renowned public intellectual driven by a passion for freedom and an intense concern for the common good.

Mr Chancellor, I have the honour to request you to confer on Issa G. Shivji the degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*.