

Prof Sithole shines spotlight on Black consciousness and solidarity during VC's webinar

NALEDI HLEFANE

THE Office of the University of Zululand (UNIZULU) Vice-Chancellor, Professor Xoliswa Mtose, recently held a stimulating webinar/public lecture which touched on matters of black consciousness, black solidarity and the rampant anti-black racism in South Africa.

The lecture was titled "The Texture of Biko's Being: On Mabogo P More's philosophical defence of the Native Club". It was presented by esteemed guest Professor Tendayi Sithole, an academic at the University of South Africa's Department of Political Sciences. An author of four books, Prof Sithole is also Senior Research Associate at the Institute for Pan-African Thought and Conversation at the University of Johannesburg.

Professor Sithole declared the talk a complaint against the liberal consensus, a group comprising white liberals and their black attachés, who shun black South Africans' lived experiences of anti-black racism, continuously attempt to muzzle black voices, and counter black solidarity.

The demise of the Native Club, formed by black intellectuals to advocate for a robust sense of black consciousness, was a prime example of the latter. The club was formed and disbanded in 2006 following backlash from the liberal consensus, Prof Sithole noted.

The speaker, who bemoans the still-birth of the club, frankly suggested: "By the very fact of their oppression as a collective, blacks therefore needed to gather as a collective to confront what dehumanises them as a collective. They needed to share their collective lived experience that became the basis of their political ontological formation - hence the name 'the Native Club' came."

To augment and emphasise his points, the speaker looked to the intellectual thoughts of late anti-apartheid activist Stephen Bantu Biko and Mabogo Percy More, advocates of black consciousness and black solidarity.

He agreed with More's view that the uniting of blacks in the Native Club was a direct pathway to black solidarity, which not only was a necessity but also



From left: Professor Siphoo Seepe, facilitator of the public lecture; Professor Xoliswa Mtose, UNIZULU Vice-Chancellor; and Professor Tendayi Sithole, guest speaker. Photo: James Thwala

a justifiable mode of politics in challenging the liberal consensus that was calling for the end of the club.

The sentiment of black people needing to unite is one that echoed throughout the apartheid era. Biko, according to Prof Sithole, had been a great supporter of this through the black consciousness movement. His stance was even more pronounced when he once observed: "We are collectively segregated against - what can be more logical than for us to respond as a group?"

The speaker further noted how unfortunate it was that the critics of the Native Club had rushed to interdict it without first auditing the pervasive anti-blackness in the country. Instead, the formation was misconstrued as reverse racism

and a threat to national reconciliation.

"More is correct to argue that the discourse of individual liberalism denies the reality of lived experiences of groups. Everything is reduced to the white liberal as the individual and there is no way that this can materialise into the collective being, more fundamentally that of the black," Prof Sithole said.

Dr Aghogho Akpome from UNIZULU's English Department responded to the presentation by focusing on some of its aspects. Struck by Prof Sithole's critique of the "new" South Africa, the respondent agreed that because the current political dispensation carries many of the same features as those of the old system, there is a need to question the extent to which it is new.

Dr Akpome noted that "scholars who focus on temporality have made us aware of how especially dominant Eurocentric forms of historicisation" tend to label what is present as "past" as a way of misrepresenting ugly realities. "It is still there, but we've put it in a box and called it past so that you cannot refer to them as things that are still current". He argued that this could be understood from the speaker's repeated references to features of anti-black racism that continue to describe life in South Africa, and indeed, the world today.

He also noted how hypocritical it was of anti-black liberals to oppose black collective political and social action when they themselves operate as collectives.

Sustainable information for education and development

PRECIOUS SHAMASE

THE most dynamic minds in the Department of Information Studies recently convened at Imvubu Lodge in Richards Bay for the 23rd Annual Information Studies conference - a three-day event characterised by compelling presentations and intellectual deliberations.

The conference served as a dynamic platform for scholars, researchers, practitioners and students to assemble and engage in a vibrant dialogue on the critical role of information in fostering sustainable education and development.

The conference aimed to facilitate the exchange of ideas, insights and best practices that can drive positive change in societies.

Themed "Sustainable Information for Education and Development", the conference was attended by representatives of nine universities from five countries. There were three keynotes, three guest speakers, 28 main papers and 14 student papers.

Professor Kevin Naidoo, the Acting Deputy Dean: Research, Innovation and Internationalisation in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, officially opened the gathering and welcomed all the attendees.

The Head of Department of Information Studies (IS), Professor Velile Jiyane, said that the department was hopeful that the conference would be a source of inspiration, collaboration and enlightenment for all participants.

"We expect that by the end of our deliberations, we will gain fresh perspectives on the theme of sustainable information for education and devel-

opment. This year's conference is a testament to the enduring commitment of the information studies community to advance our understanding of information science, technology, and their profound impact on education and development," she said.

Nokuthula Musa, Executive Director: Core Programmes in the National Library of South Africa (NLSA) was one of the keynote speakers. She shared insights into the role of South African libraries in sustainable community development; looking at the South African development context including the triple challenge of development, namely inequality, poverty and unemployment.

She further touched on the energy crisis, counting it as one of the issues affecting community development. The presentation also covered the South African government's development approach, the role of SA libraries, and examples of work done by the public libraries across South Africa. Musa also highlighted the challenges that limit the actualisation of sustainable development goals (SDGs) by libraries, and the lack of reporting.

"I recommend that libraries must integrate SDGs in their planning and share their SDG stories to advocate for the role of libraries in sustainable community development," said Musa.

The attendees said that they were leaving the conference equipped with insights, inspiration and potent connections to propel their expertise to a higher level.

Nkosingiphile Zungu, an IS academic, thanked everyone for attending and participating in the discussions.



Photo: James Thwala

Decolonising the curriculum in the context of African thought



Photo: Xolani Ncube

PRECIOUS SHAMASE

THE Department of Anthropology and Development Studies under the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (FHSS) recently hosted a two-day international conference at its KwaDlangezwa Campus.

In her welcome address, Acting Head of Department, Dr Joyce Mdiniso thanked everyone for joining. "This conference provides a platform to critically discuss the impact of colonial legacies on the education systems and explore new approaches to education that are inclusive, equitable and empowering. The conference gathered some of the brightest minds in the field; experts who have dedicated their lives to researching, teaching, and advocating for a decolonised curriculum," she said.

Professor Kevin Naidoo, FHSS Acting Deputy Dean: Research, Innovation and Internationalisation, gave his opening remarks on behalf of the faculty dean,

saying that the conference was an important step in the right direction. "This conference intends to re-examine the ways that African knowledge systems have been disregarded in our approaches to education, and to ignite critical discussions about how we may recover our intellectual legacy.

"The conference will look at the numerous ways that decolonising the curriculum might result in a more inclusive and varied educational environment that incorporates viewpoints that have long been missing. We are eager to hear from our eminent speakers so that we may benefit from their knowledge and expertise in this area.

"For too long, colonial legacies have influenced the curriculum in many nations - perpetuating injustices and misleading narratives about the achievements of African intellectuals and thinkers. Because of these legacies, our educational institutions are no longer relevant

and are unable to meet modern problems. This prevents many students from understanding their own countries and cultures or competing in the global arena."

The first keynote address was by Dr Nompumelelo Radebe, senior lecturer and Chair in the Department of Anthropology at the University of South Africa. Hers was a detailed and enlightening presentation. "There are two things that the theme is claiming. There is a need to decolonise the curriculum and there is an African thought. The latter has more bearing because this claim demystifies the myth of emptiness that justifies imperialism and colonialism in Africa. By extension, this myth also meant Africa had no knowledge and no thought. Building on this theme, I have entitled my talk towards an African Anthropology, 'Thinking from the crime scene'."

The respondents to Dr Radebe's presentation termed it informative and insightful.

Prof Goerge Shava from the National University of Science and Technology in Zimbabwe was the keynote speaker for the second session. He shared his detailed presentation, which was titled "Recalibrating higher education to address historical injustice: a transition towards achieving sustainable development for 2030 goals and beyond - the Africa that we want."

"A shift towards education for sustainable development (ESD) is required for higher education to be in alignment with the global sustainability agenda for 2030. There is a growing international recognition of ESD as an integral element of quality education and a key enabler for sustainable development goals as an integral part of quality education," said Prof Shava.

The conference sparked the interest of a diverse range of attendees including researchers, students, and enthusiasts of education.

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