



BOOK LAUNCH

“The University of South Africa Memories: Transformation and Africanisation Volume 1”

Vice Chancellor/Principal, Prof. Makhanya

Address

26 March 2015

Programme Director and Executive Director Corporate Communication
& Marketing, Mr. Mohamed Shaikh

The Author of the book we are launching today, Dr. Muff Anderson

Executive Director: Academic Transformation Projects, Dr. Johann

Brinders

Members of Unisa's executive and extended management

Unisa academic and non-academic staff

Students

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

I am elated to join with you in the launching of this book that reflects the important history and heritage of this great university. I am equally delighted to witness tangible fruits of the Unisa History and Memory Project particularly when considering the partnership with great institutions such as the Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory. Let me congratulate and thank Dr. Muff Anderson for the work done, burning the

midnight oil, to produce this brilliant and masterful piece of work. Let me also take time to thank all those who collaborated and participated in producing this reflective work which is both a social history as well as an interpretive analytical academic work.

The launch of the book **The University of South Africa: Memories, Transformation and Africanisation Volume 1** is an important timely and timeless contribution to our reflections on the history, heritage, legacy and the journey of Unisa through different moments in its history. The timing of this book launch is also instructive as it comes only two years after we celebrated 140 years of this institution and a year after we just marked the tenth anniversary of Unisa's merger into a

Comprehensive University. It also comes at the time when the university has just adopted its Vision 2030 framework to chart the way forward for the next fifteen years.

On a national level there are several milestones and anniversaries that mark moments in the evolution of our democratic society and the struggle against apartheid. It was 60 years ago that the historic document, the Freedom Charter, was adopted in Kliptown. It is 25 years ago that the global icon and towering statesmen, Nelson Mandela, was released from 27 years of incarceration and the liberation organizations such as the ANC, the PAC and the SACP were unbanned. Next month we shall also be marking the end of the 20 years of our democracy. On a global scale we are reminded of the historical

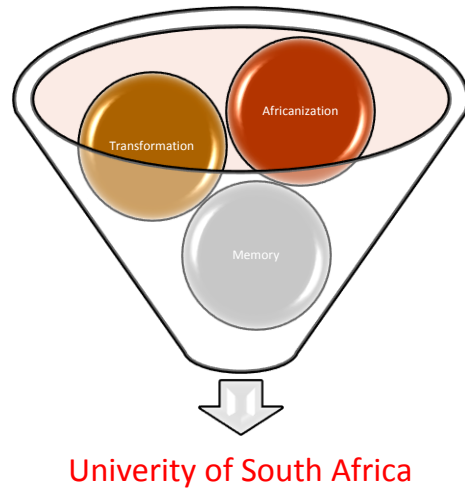
fact that it is exactly 70 years since the end of the bloodiest and the most destructive war, the Second World War. All these historical moments and anniversaries provide us as academics and scholars with a reflective mirror to review moments that have defined the evolution of our social, political, economic and academic history. Universities, in their academic enterprise, are used to analyzing phenomena in the society but they are often reluctant to reflect on their own histories but this book is, therefore, in this respect, a significant contribution in that knowledge gap.

The University Transformation Report by Professor Makgoba, the Report on Discrimination at the Universities by Professor Soudien, the recent and current incidents at the Northwest

University, Rhodes University and the University of Cape Town are all indications that the Transformation Agenda of the Higher Education Sector is neither dormant or something of the past. Many of us never expected it to be a short passing phase as it is complex and need conscious concerted effort to yield genuine intended results. Whilst the change of the demography of student enrolment and management diversity seems to have been the most visible aspect of transformation of the Higher Education Landscape in South Africa, the issue of institutional culture and the very essence of the content of our curriculum has proven to be the most stubborn legacy of our colonial and apartheid past. I am acutely aware of the fact that Unisa's unique position of being the largest university in South Africa, in Africa and in the Southern Africa, and one of mega-universities in the world, carries heavy burdens of past, current

and future history and responsibility. This reflective piece of academic work assists in unearthing Unisa's history and its contribution in the evolution of our society, with rich nuggets and insights of personal reflections of those who went through or had encounters with the institution, from the dark days of apartheid to the more recent history of its efforts to transform and give practical expression of this through some bold efforts to Africanise.

In this book, if one were to invoke the visual imagery, the scene or setting is UNISA and the key operative concepts are the trilogy which is made up of Memories being unearthed, Transformation and Africanisation that is driving the current strategy agenda of the university.



Milan Kundera, in his book, **“The Book of Laughter and Forgetting”** makes a powerful observation that apprehends the notion and utility of memory when he asserts that “The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.” In yet another setting, Bell Hooks in her book, **“Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black,”** proclaims that “Our Struggle is also a struggle of memory against forgetfulness.”

A collection of recollections and reflections of former Unisa students, who were also in prisons, does not only give them voice to give

expression to their experiences but serves to preserve our memory as a nation on the role that Unisa played as the only resort when all other doors of learning were shut down. At this moment Unisa became a window for prisoners to the world of ideas, with all its imperfections, given the historical moment it operated within. Memory becomes a weapon against those in future who may be tempted to repeat mistakes of the past. An average South African can hardly associate Unisa of the past with such transfiguring experiences that would shape the future course of our history through the struggle icons' encounters. These reflections also reveal an interesting and twisted complex history of South Africa's oldest university whose original intention was within the colonial and apartheid grand design but through an intersection of historical facts evolved within the belly of an apartheid system to give some significant relief to the very victims of apartheid even those who were incarcerated or banished. It is the interpretation of this paradox and complexity of an institutional history that future volumes on this subject ought to reflect on. How do institutions outgrow their original

design? Is it the structure or agency or an admixture of both that produce these changes in the historical paths of institutions?

Another defining theme of this book is transformation with particular attention given to Africanisation as the essence of this transformation project. As alluded to earlier, transformation in the higher education sector in South Africa was an imperative response to, or more adequately, an antidote to the colonial and apartheid legacy as well as some dominant global imperial currents that sought to nullify Africa's past and its contribution to human civilization. Transformation was meant to reverse the painful cognitive and epistemological injustice that had reduced Africans into a footnote or a watermark of fading insignificance in their own land. The new wave of Africanisation is meant to place Africa and Africans at the center of their own condition and experiences as well as destiny by giving them intellectual space and

voice to engage in a meaningful dialogue with other mainstream paradigms in search for social justice and genuine development.

It became fashionable, if not a cliché, for many South African universities to proclaim themselves as being African Universities. For some this was for marketing purposes - whereas some were merely exercises to deflect or wood-wink those who were demanding change. Some were content to establish an African Studies Centre in the margins of their institution in order to quench the nagging thirst for Africanisation without polluting their mainstream programmes. Such claims never translated into sustained genuine efforts to transform the content of the curriculum, of research and programmes as well as institutional culture.

Unisa, under the leadership of Prof. Barney Pitso Rikhotso and a cohort of leaders, embarked on a bold experiment of transformation along the

lines of Africanisation, a project that continued with vigour under my leadership since 2011. This book also gives us some perspectives of what this journey was and how it was conceptualized.

Without any fear of contradictions, I can stand here and boldly state that Unisa today has the greatest concentration of Africa-focused programmes and institutes, and has enjoyed deeper penetration and engagement in the continental development programmes. The launch of the Thabo Mbeki Presidential Library and the signing of the MOU between Unisa and the African Union Commission as well as the Council reaffirmation to Unisa's strategic intent as "The African University Shaping Futures in the Service of Humanity," have not only given impetus to the transformation and Africanisation project but ensure that Unisa's trajectory along this path is guaranteed for the long term. It is my intention to ensure that the work generated from the Africa-focused programmes is mainstreamed and infused into our core curriculum. But to do this will neither be easy nor flow in a linear path

without challenges. But I have come to learn and accept that change does not come easy without struggle. I have also come to know that freedom is not free, with it, it carries a lot of responsibilities.

The challenge of the current cohort of leadership and scholars in our universities is to write the unfolding chapters of transformation and Africanisation to make real the promises of our emancipation. In the battle of ideas scholars who are agents of this transformation must stand and deliver, they must raise their hands to be counted in a real sense of engagement and knowledge production. We ought to carry the torch that our intellectual icons such as Archie Mafeje, Es'kia Mphahlele, Ngugi wa Thiongo, Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Maya Angelou, Franz Fanon, Cheik Ante Diop, Ali Mazrui and many others did.

Our current transformation projects have to inform and respond to current realities such as the Africa rising narrative, AU Agenda 2063,

the National Development Plan and our own university Vision 2063. As Fanon proclaimed in his book, **The Wretched of the Earth**, “Each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfill or betray it.”

What then is our current mission of advancing the transformation agenda? Do we have what it takes to fulfill it? If not us, who will do it? If not here where else will it be done? If not now, when will it be done? Again I am happy to launch the book on Unisa’s past memories and transformation and Africanisation journey with a full understanding that there are still many rivers to cross and many more chapters to write on this important subject. Today we have come to mark the laying of the foundation stone for future writings and reflections on the history, heritage and the journey of this great institution.

I thank you.