

MEDIA ADVISORY

**UNISA DECOLONIALITY SUMMER SCHOOL
(15 – 26 JANUARY 2018)**

ATTENTION: EDITORS, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL REPORTERS

DATE: 15 / JANUARY / 2018

“DECOLONIZING KNOWLEDGE, POWER AND BEING”

Today mark the beginning of the 5th Annual UNISA Decoloniality Summers School, with the purpose to confront challenges and reject the status quo. And further to create a space for scholars to engage with issues of epistemological violence within the academic sphere and to confront the perpetual coloniality of knowledge, power and being.

The event is taking place as follow:

Date : 15 – 26 January 2017

Venue: Kgorong Function Hall, Unisa Main Campus

Time : 09H00 – 16H00

This year the Unisa Decoloniality project aims at allowing an opportunity for the interrogation of what it means to be human from the subject that speaks, and engage in uncomfortable conversations about what it would mean if we were to see each other as human beings and not falling into different categories of humanity.

Various topical issues including modernity, eurocentrism and coloniality, epistemic racism, sexism, zone of being and of non-being, decolonizing the universities, etc will be discussed by both local and international decolonial thinkers and theorist, including the following:

- **Professor Lewis R Gordon** from the University of Connecticut, USA
- **Prof Oyeronke Oyewumi** from Stonybrook University, USA
- **Prof Siphamandla Zondi** from the University of Pretoria
- **Prof Pumla Gqola** from the University of the Witwatersrand
- **Prof Rozena Maart** from the University of Kwazulu-Nata
- **Prof Tendayi Sithole** from the University of South Africa.



“To us decolonisation is not an arrival, but a historical ongoing and dynamic process which needs to engage imperialism and persistent colonial tendencies at their multiple levels. We therefore call for the acknowledgement of people’s agency, cultural perspectives such as identity, language, history and ethics from their own vantage point. We also call for the space of breath” said Professor Puleng Segalo, Head of Research and Graduate Studies, Unisa College of Human Sciences.

Members of the media are invited to attend the event.

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For RSVP and Interview request, please contact Tommy Huma (Senior Media Officer), on 072 218 6197 / 012 429 3981

ISSUED BY UNISA MEDIA AFFAIRS DIRECTORATE

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CONCEPT DOCUMENT

THE DECOLONIALITY SUMMER SCHOOL

Long before #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall student protest movements, Unisa's College of Human Sciences, saw the importance of decolonising the spaces South Africans, and Africans find themselves in. Out of this the Summer School on Decoloniality with a focus on Power, Knowledge and Identity was born.

What became clear though through these movements is that there is an urgent need for revisiting higher education in South Africa. Statues and fees were merely the symptoms of a deeper dissatisfaction with the status quo of higher education in South Africa, which was largely toeing colonial lines.

While the need to decolonise education has been an ongoing conversation at Unisa for many years, it officially started in 2011 when the Africa Decolonial Research Network (ADERN) was established in the College of Human Sciences (CHS). The network consisted of scholars who grew tired of the lack of change and academic spaces being stuck in a colonial mindset and thinking. ADERN organised (and continues to organise) readings groups, seminars and a visit to Barcelona where they attended a Summer School on Decoloniality. While ADERN has since moved out of the College, the network of decoloniality scholars within grew, and in 2014, the CHS was ready to host its first Summer School on Decoloniality, positioning itself as a pioneer of decoloniality scholarship in South Africa.

Opened by former South African president and current Unisa chancellor, Thabo Mbeki, the first summer school focused on issues of power, knowledge and identity linked to decoloniality. Mbeki emphasised that there is a great need for progressive African scholarship to ensure the kind of progressive change required on the continent. He highlighted that challenges facing the continent are violence and instability, poverty and underdevelopment, nation building, as well as national unity and social cohesion, among others. While these are not new challenges, he said the approaches conceptualised to address them have either failed or yielded very few results. Progressive scholarship is therefore required; African leaders will fail to remake this continent without it, he said.

This first summer school paved the way for future schools filled with rich thought and dialogue. In 2015, daughter of decolonial thinker and writer Frantz Fanon and president of the Frantz Fanon Foundation, Professor Mireille Fanon-Mendes France delivered the keynote address, which was nothing short of provocative. She reflected on the traits of colonialism that still haunt France to date and on how discrimination and racial profiling are systematic in a "civilized" France".



The success of the summer school continued in 2016 and 2017 with international decolonial scholars such Dr Enrique Dussel (Professor at the Universidad Autonoma de Mexico), Professor Ramon Grosfoguel (University of California, Berkeley), Professor Nelson Maldonado-Torres (Rutgers University), and Professor CK Raju (Centre for Studies in Civilisations) as well as local scholars, Professor Sabelo Gatsheni-Ndlovu (Head: AMRI), Professor Pumla Gqola (University of Witwatersrand), Professor Tendayi Sithole (Unisa), and Professor Siphamandla Zondi (University of Pretoria).

Professor Puleng Segalo, Head of Research and Graduate Studies in the College of Human Sciences who has also been involved with summer school since its inception, says the aim of the Summer School is to create a space for scholars to engage on the topic of decoloniality and with issues of epistemological violence within the academic sphere; a form of violence which ultimately bleeds into the broader society. Furthermore, the intention is to confront the perpetual coloniality of knowledge, power, and being.

“To decolonise is to confront, challenge and reject the status quo. This came about as many academics, students, and activists felt suffocated within the various spaces they occupy and wanted to ‘speak back’. Decoloniality is about acknowledging that knowledge is produced from a body which then implies that we think, feel and act from a particular position. Knowledge is socially and historically situated and with this, one can see how the idea of universalism becomes problematic.

“Decolonisation is about where we locate ourselves. Many students felt that they could not locate themselves in the courses they are being taught and as a result felt the need to call for the decolonisation of curriculum within institutions of higher learning. The academic space has been one of the many platforms that remind us of the legacy of apartheid and colonialism.”

Professor Segalo said since hosting the first summer school in 2014, the Unisa decolonial project has started to progressively shift the center from privileging Euro-centric/Western forms of knowledge to centering and allowing space for pluriversality where multiple forms of knowing and understanding the world are offered space.

“As a result, the College has introduced an honours module on decoloniality; this module is not limited to any specific discipline as the idea was to break away from disciplinary boundaries. Furthermore, we have introduced discussion sessions on Mainstream Media, a platform that takes the conversation outside the confines of the academic space. The number of postgraduate students using a decolonial lens as a theoretical framework has also increased as a result of many staff members having attended the summer school and other related decolonial seminars and gaining a theoretical grounding that assists them to guide students through their research journeys,” said Professor Segalo.



Other outputs, she continued, included books published on decoloniality, special decoloniality journal issues, as well as having a voice in the news space. “The university, like other institutions of higher learning in South Africa, is currently going through a transformation process, and amongst others this entails having to go through re-curriculation processes where modules are reworked and this has created an opportunity of ensuring that a decolonised lens is used when new study materials are developed.

“Finally, a number of Unisa academics are increasingly invited by other institutions as speakers and contributors in their transformation processes. The College has also established *The Archive Project*, which aims at ensuring that local artists’ work is given space in the library. This is aimed at making audible the voices of local artists that have for a long time not deemed as ‘academic’.”

Looking ahead to the 2018 Summer School, Professor Segalo said that the College has ensured that the majority of the speakers are South African. The aim is to reflect back on the impact of colonialism on what we now call “developing countries”. Furthermore, the school will engage with what it means to decolonise. “This shift was a conscious effort to allow space for engaging with our local experiences, and to offer a platform to our scholars who have been engaging with decolonial work. Additionally, we intend to have panel sessions with non-profit organisations who are doing decolonial work on the ground.”

The lectures and discussions will be delivered and facilitated by leading decolonial thinkers and theorists such as:

- Professor Lewis R Gordon from the University of Connecticut, USA
- Prof Oyeronke Oyewumi from Stonybrook University, USA
- Prof Siphamandla Zondi from the University of Pretoria
- Prof Pumla Gqola from the University of the Witwatersrand
- Prof Rozena Maart from the University of Kwazulu-Natal
- Prof Tendayi Sithole from the University of South Africa

Professor Segalo emphasised that decolonisation is not an arrival, but a historical ongoing process, which engages imperialism and persistent colonial tendencies at multiple levels. “Here at the College of Human Sciences at Unisa, we have long called for the acknowledgement of people’s agency, identity, language, history, and ethics, from their own vantage points. We will continue to call for the space to breathe.”

Additional Information:

A first of its kind at a South African university, the two-week long summer school which is attended by delegates from across the world, deals with the following pertinent issues among many others:

- Modernity, Eurocentrism and coloniality



- Epistemic racism/patriarchy/sexism
- Zone of being/zone of non-being
- Knowledge and power
- Coloniality of being and subjectivity
- Development, nationalism and decolonization
- African archive and library
- African intellectual traditions
- Africa and the modern world
- Decolonising the university

At the end of the Summer School the delegates are able to reflect seriously and critically on the following important questions:

- How was the modern world constituted?
- Who is producing knowledge?
- What institutions and disciplines legitimise it?
- What is knowledge for and who benefits from it?
- How is our social existence colonised?
- How do we think about decolonizing being?
- What power hierarchies constitute the cartography of power of the global political- economy we live in and how do we go about decolonizing the world

