

Outcomes of the Precolonial Catalytic Conference, 15-17 March, 2017, NMMU

1. Reconceptualising the 'Precolonial':

Language: African history and African systems themselves should allow us to speak in a different language on the 'precolonial', such as the clan systems. We must understand the African imagination. What are the folktales of the San? We must come to terms with this in order to understand African History.

How do we structure periodization in southern Africa? Classical Age, Africa between 1100s and 1300s. Late Independent Period, 1600 – 1700. There are regional differences; we must be able to tell these histories regionally. Similarity does not imply uniformity. Privileging of Christian calendar and Islamic frameworks to be avoided. Can't have a linear history only; look at African History in thematic ways with chronology to some degree, linked with thematic breaks.

Repositioning history before 'remembered history'; i.e. 'the myth of historical era' (tales, legends). This rethinking is foundational and should be a point of departure for historical thinking and for forming 'historical consciousness' (not conceptually linked to 'colonial'). For example, in studying Greek History, you have to deal with Greek concepts such as *demos* etc. Similarly, one can't study African History properly, if you do not study the foundations in African Mythology. One must understand the African imagination and we must feel comfortable to teach **the myth of historical era**. In order to study African History properly, one has to grapple with African concepts, the linguistic idiomatic elements of ancient African culture etc.

Interdisciplinary Methodology: *Izithakazelo* allows us to move between disciplines such as Archaeology (the material) and others. **The ritual archive allows us to excavate concepts.** The problem of naming: *Izithakazelo* helps us to move away from colonial imposition of division between different modes of living. For example, the hunter gatherer moves through different modes of living. If we should **write a southern African textbook**, to deal with language and focus on southern African region, we should bring such concepts in deliberately.

2. Methodologies:

(*Masters NMMU Sociology student Andiswa Nzenze reported on this workshop.)

Interdisciplinary and inclusive methods: These must be ground breaking, new, and different from existing methodologies with regard to precolonial studies. There is an incorrect assumption of 'complete knowledge' of 'who speaks first', especially in Archaeology. Our approach should be interdisciplinary and we should work with education and health sciences.

Voices of descendants should be included on the 'pre-colonial' and the 'pre-colonial talk'. (Intellectual property and knowledge is currently privatised.) Use '**decolonial**' language as we are currently taking the language of the 'colonial' into the 'precolonial', e.g. *uMakhulu* as a source of indigenous knowledge. We could develop a **multilingual keywords guide** and the next conference could be on *ukuHlambulula* – 'Cleansing' in Xhosa.

Avoiding the development of binaries Draw on Paulo Freire's 'The Pedagogy of the Oppressed' in navigating anger in doing the 'pre-colonial', because the lenses that research has been presented in has been problematic and angering. Anger can be deployed as a creative catalyst; 'rage' should be used in sustainable methodologies (research has shown that interventions on the pre-colonial in education can be risky if they are not long-term, as they can provoke rage). Anger can either be paralysing or healing.

Secrets, confidentiality and ethics: Is apparent 'protection' of the people being researched justifiable? How do we stop ourselves from using exploiting methods? Secrecy can also be abused in terms of crediting sources and keeping information also on injustices. Research to be done on 'researched' people's terms. Put critical positions on these topics.

Equal authorship with research participants. The rightful sources of knowledge should get the credit they deserve.

Review funding models for sustainable work on the 'pre-colonial'. Research objectives can be distorted and compromised because of funding requirements.

3. Strategic Networks:

Research Committees Networks to do check and balances on 'community research'. What we are teaching right now, is not what is needed by society in general. What is it that society wants us to teach about? The Land Question and the institution of so-called traditional leadership as connected to the 'precolonial' as a question to research. Question of language in research; how does it benefit the people? Ethics of research on sacred sites and joint research: How do we use history to affirm who we are (lack of social cohesion). History of educational structures (education not only in public structures, but in peer groups, family etc.). Intangible heritage (music, dance etc.)

Organic intellectuals Networks to get funding

Public History Networks: Protection and preservation of the traces of the past (farmers are bulldozing ancient remains on their farms); dysfunctional heritage institutions.

WAY FORWARD AGREEMENTS IN THE PLENARY

Working Groups to be established to report at the 2019 Conference on where we are.

1. **EDUCATION:** Educational Materials development within a decolonising framework. Southern African project. Mozambique and South Africa as a start. Connected to Teacher Education, in a participatory way. Teachers must be trained to use education materials effectively. (Training of future teachers at NMMU show that the teachers are very underprepared. Need to organise a 'Future Teachers Conference'. We have to engage teacher education faculties; they are producing the stuff that create the 'fallism' at university.) Cultivation of the future especially regarding the 'catalytic'. Process of incubation with Honours students. Dr June Bam and Dr Nomathamsanqa Tisani to discuss way forward with forming an emerging Working Group on Student Development. Agreed Leader: Dr June Bam (Research Officer at CAS & coordinator of the 2014, 2015 and 2017 'precolonial' conferences)
2. **PUBLIC HISTORY & HERITAGE PRESERVATION MANAGEMENT:** Sites are being bulldozed and vandalised. There is no one to report it to. There are tangible issues to tackle, such as getting human remains back. Memorials are not conserved and become functional for politicians only. Agreed Leaders: Dr Denver Webb (NMMU) & Professor Mcebisi Ndletyana (UJ)
3. **ETHICS:** Policies and legal frameworks on secrecy etc. Visibilising our connections to Chapter 9 institutions of the Constitution. Question of ethics and who speaks for whom. Public participation across institutions, e.g. Public Health. Agreed Leader: Kershan Panchau, Afro-Asia Catalytic Music Project (UCT).
4. **ORGANIC INTELLECTUALS AND UNIVERSITIES:** Khoisan people as 'foundational people' should be included in the debates. We should conceive of residencies and fellowships; community fellows to be attached to our research institutions. They don't necessarily have to write; only need to engage in teaching and interactions. How can we partner with the organic intellectuals? There are people working on family and clan histories.

There are many out there, like indigenous knowledge practitioners. How do we bring the knowledge that is out there into the university, and how do we take the university back to the community? At the moment NIHSS is not funding this aspect. Agreed
Leader: Professor Lungisile Ntsebeza, UCT, will lead this group with Professor Nomalanga Mkhize, NMMU.

Towards the 2019 'ukuHlambulula' Conference

Practical work on the 'precolonial' will be done by delegates between March 2017 and March 2019. Papers for the conference to be based on *real work done, not ideas*. Funds to be raised for these groups to get together for workshops in 2017 and 2018. The NIHSS has indicated availability of funds for such research collaboration purposes.

Publication Of Proceedings Of This Conference

Papers to be revised, and to be sent to June Bam at CAS and Allan Zinn at NMMU for consideration for inclusion in an edited peer reviewed publication, aimed for June 2018. Manuscript to be put together by end of June 2017. Peer Reviewed as first choice as this scholarship should be taken seriously globally.