



UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE  
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE VRYSTAAT  
YUNIVESITHI YA FREISTATA

**Panel discussion: Albert Wessels Auditorium, Bloemfontein Campus**

**18 May 2017, 14:00**

**Topic: Diversity, inclusivity and social justice and the renewed call for decolonisation**

**Prof Keet:** Just a few housekeeping announcements: if anybody is in need of sign language, we have a sign language interpreter here. Thank you very much, and you are also invited for coffee and tea afterwards. A series of events are already underway to welcome Prof Francis as our new VC at the University of the Free State and to this part of the country. Our university has a special place in the South African higher-education landscape, and of course, in the social lives of the country in general. We have many social experiments on the go, trying to live in post-1994 South Africa, but also trying to engage with our beloved and rapidly changing continent, Africa, and the globalising processes in the world. The world today is faced with profound challenges that are captured within the United Nations' 17 sustainable goals. These are the kinds of challenges that universities and others have to respond to. These challenges feature strongly in the social protests across the world, which has spiked since the financial meltdown in 2007/2008, and also articulate with the student protests since the turn of this decade. In our country in particular, we have a variety of discontent with the democratic project, and universities have a particular role to play in assisting us to engage with these. Between 1997 and 2014 – and these figures are staggering – more than 200 million social protests have been recorded globally. In the South African context, it is estimated that we have on average 1 600 social protests per annum. Researchers are arguing that these protests relate to the disillusionment of the citizen voter. It functions as an alternative to elections, there is a general mistrust in the democratic institutions, and above all, they are aimed at economic social injustices against capital and new liberalism. There is also a rise in protests globally, as I have mentioned, but in the past it linked up with these popular protests, and students are of course also angry with the new liberal capture of higher education. Nowadays, capturing and capture is a word that needs to be used sparingly in our African context. The consequences for fees and increasing inequality within the system are also critical of the ways in which Eurocentric white middle-class culture is unquestionably the norm in universities, hence the call for the decolonisation of the curriculum. They are also challenging institutional racism within our university, including HDIs and other parts of our system.

Apart from the conservatisation of our global politics – as in the case of Trumpism – our own domestic political scene looks messy and disturbing. What should universities do in the context of these challenges? How can it re-invent itself? To

engage with these questions, we have an impressive panel here. I have SK, our beloved SRC President, on my immediate right. I am going to introduce them, but I am not going to use the surnames, the names, and the titles, because we will waste time which we could have spent on our discussions. I will refer to Prof Francis, Prof Elelwani, Prof Melissa – also on my right – and thereafter we will have questions, answers, and responses after they have gone through their presentations. Each of the panel members will have 15 to 20 minutes and there can be contributions from the floor as well. I am going to do it in this particular order, and the panel can object if they have an issue with it. I am going to ask the SRC President to go first, then Prof Melissa will go second, Prof Elelwani third, and Prof Francis is going to use the organising concepts of this particular seminar colloquium to tie it into his vision for transformation at our own university. Let me start with the introductions, and I will be brief. Prof Francis, I am not sure if I should read this long thing of yours? SK was born and bred in a small town called Thala in the Eastern Cape in 1994. His name, which is very, very difficult to pronounce – Sikhululekile – means ‘free’ in the literal sense. He first found an association at the age of 13, which spoke to community and development. In 2013, he co-founded the Ubuntu schools project that donated school uniforms to Phomolong High School in Tembisa. He then founded an association here on campus called the Hand to Hand student association, which collects non-perishable food items, second-hand textbooks and raises funds against financial exclusion. He is a former RC: Rag of House Outeniqua, was elected as SRC: Dialogue and Associations, and led a series of dialogues after the Shimla Park incident last year. SK, we are grateful for the initiative you took to steer the university out of a very, very difficult time. We value your leadership in those kinds of spaces. He is a former ANCYL chairperson and now serves as the SRC President at the Bloemfontein Campus of the University of the Free State. Please give him a hand. I, of course, have to satisfy JC as well. JC wants me to mention that SK has aspirations to become a preacher.

Okay, now let me go to Prof Elelwani and Prof Melissa. Prof Elelwani is Associate Professor at the University of Cape Town. She worked as a clinician in rural South Africa and in the United States of America during the 1990s. She was Head of Occupational Therapy at UCT from 2010 to 2013. Following the fall of the Rhodes statue at UCT, she served for a year as Special Advisor on Transformation to the Vice-Chancellor. She continues to serve at institutional level as Chair of the Academic Freedom Committee and co-Chair of the Curriculum Change Working Group. Her scholarship on intergenerational play led to the conceptualisation of occupational consciousness, informed by liberation philosophy, and coloniality as an aspect of Western-led modernity. This has laid the groundwork for several doctoral studies adopting a decolonial approach to scholarship. Prof Romugondo has published several peer-reviewed articles and chapters in books. Her publications cover a broad range of topics, including theorisation in the context of discovery, spirituality in occupational therapy practice, and the political nature of human occupation. Welcome, Elelwani.

Prof Melissa holds the DST NRF South African National Chair in Critical Diversity Studies. She is the founding director of the Wits Centre for Diversity Studies. Her work engages with intersecting hegemonic social formations, but she is best known for her publications on whiteness and white identity in post-apartheid South Africa. Her book, *Whiteness just isn't what it used to be: white identity in a changing South*

*Africa* (2001), won the 2002 Outstanding Scholarship Award in International and Intercultural Communication from the National Communication Association in the United States. She has many other books, which I am not going to mention now, but her work has led her to developing a framework around critical diversity literacy which outlines key capacities for living consciously in a world increasingly characterised by heterogeneity and being different together. Melissa was featured as one of Routledge's Sociology Super Authors for 2013. Welcome, Melissa. Great having you back here again. Good friend of the University of the Free State, like they all are.

Prof Francis William Petersen was born in Oudtshoorn and grew up in Malmesbury in the Western Cape, where he also matriculated. He graduated from Stellenbosch University with a BEng in Chemical Engineering, an M in Metallurgical Engineering, and a PhD degree in Engineering, and completed a short course in Financial Skills for Executive Management. He brings to the position of Vice-Chancellor and Rector his extensive experience of management in both the industry and academic sectors. Before joining the University of the Free State in April this year, he was Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the University of Cape Town. Other positions include Dean: Engineering and the Built Environment at the same university; Executive Head: Strategy at Anglo American Platinum; Executive Vice-President: Research and Development at Mintek; and Head of the Department of Chemical Engineering at the Cape Technikon, which is now the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. Prof Petersen, is it okay if I stop there? Of course, Prof Petersen also has an impressive CV, but please welcome our new Rector to this particular discussion. SK, it is over to you my friend.

**SRC President:** Oh yes, oh yes. Can I propose that I stand?

**Prof Keet:** Yes of course.

**SRC President:** Well, we come from those high schools of Kopadi Padi Schmidt. I guess I am the only one who is not a professor, yet speaking live. I would like to greet the panel. Professor Petersen, I have met you in one of the colloquiums in the past. I have also met Professor Melissa Steyn and converged at some point. I have been equipping myself on this work. We organised a march and we said no to racism. Prof, you will recall this. We went around and mobilised the comrades. There were two racist incidents that happened at that time, and at the same time there were two assaults against women on campus. So, we organised a march to address the issue of racism, and we created a letter of directives. When we were creating this letter of directives, we even asked ourselves: is it gender friendly? We had it from the ground that there would be a counter-march because we were prioritising only the issue of race – because it upset me as a man. Then, me and the then SRC President, Lindokuhle Ntuli, we organised. As we were approaching the Main Building, there were females in front of us, saying: you are not going to deliver this memorandum, because whatever you are presenting, does not speak to us. Well, because of us being gatekeepers of patriarchy, we said that we are going to continue either way. This was privileged speaking. Symbolically, at that time we were the faces of patriarchy. What happened during that counter-march was not personal, but when you look at social justice, you only look at social justice in as far as it affects me. We even categorised social justice to say this is more important

because it speaks to my needs at the university. When we talk about social justice, I think we should not only focus on things that affect us, but on the greater good for our society. The idea is inclusivity, not to exclude. Even if you talk about the Language Policy, the idea is to include, and not to exclude.

But I want to talk about privilege, what privilege does. In the scenario I have given, I indicated what privilege does. It blinds you from reality. I grew up knowing that you have to work very hard to be successful as a black person. How many black people in our country work very hard, but are not yet successful? This means that there is something wrong in the system. If you have to prove racism, you will not be able to, because it is institutionalised. When the new government came into power in 1994, the idea was to create a new social order. In the process of creating a new social order, nothing was really done in terms of transforming the system. The system still exists and they promote those who are privileged. What happened was, if you look at residence placements, if you look at the policies of the universities, especially your previous Afrikaans universities like ours, if you look at all your universities, like Stellenbosch, if you look at UP, you will notice when you look at the University of the Free State, that our demographics have changed drastically in comparison to those universities, which mean that we should have been in front in terms of institutionalising a new social order – looking at the constitution of the country. Where we are right now, we are still struggling with hierarchy in residences. We are struggling to an extent that when you come in as a first-year, you are treated in a certain way. Again, we come back and we say we are advocates of human rights. Do you know that at some residences in our university, we still have certain stairs that are used by seniors and certain stairs are used by first-years? During a discussion we once had with JC in one of the residences, the question was: when we have these practices and traditions in our constitutional culture, we need to ask ourselves what it does to the equality of the first-year? I am using this as a case of reference. What does it do to human dignity and what does it do to freedom. We are coming to the university not to be subjected to a hierarchical system, but we are coming to university where we are able to question. I think the country, where we are right now, is in need of graduates who are critical thinkers, who are not positioned to think in a certain way. This is what is wrong in our country right now, and you will see how it ties into the aspect of privilege.

In my belief, there are three things one needs in order to run a country effectively. Your political will, freedom – that is your economic freedom – and your economic freedom will ensure that there is security. The setup of our economy allow perpetuation even in our spaces, because the setting for the economy is a problem in itself. That is why students are becoming angry, because this is what we are going to inherit. The question is, do we leave it or when you question it, will you be subjected to victimisation. We need to rethink where we are. I think we need to rethink what Rhodes Must Fall has done. We are comfortable, we are comfortable. This is what happens when you are finding yourself in a space where there is unprincipled unity. Unity is not something that we can fake; it is something that we can work towards. We say we dream of a rainbow nation, but this rainbow nation will not fall from the sky. It needs the commitment of each and every one of us to develop the community. You can do whatever you do, as long as you do not come into my space. I think this is where we are getting it wrong. To develop and build this country is not the responsibility of a few people; it is our responsibility – also the

transformation of our institution. We are still failing to answer one question: what does a transformed university look like? Ask me about the past twenty years in which we have been transforming, yet we cannot even define what it actually looks like. Is transformation only the work of members of the SRC or is transformation the work of everyone in a university? We have a problem of spaces being created, but in those spaces it is always the same people. The question then is, how do we reach out to ensure that everyone play their part? I believe that all of us who are here hold different positions, whether it is the resident head, the SRC, or the RC. What are you doing to advance inclusivity? What are you doing to ensure that there is diversity? What are you doing to ensure that we follow the ethos of our constitution? You will notice that the constitution is often defined as a sell-out document, because those principles or values are not just going to produce results themselves; it needs us to work towards the values that are embedded in the constitution. We need to have the culture of human rights even in our residences, and everywhere we find ourselves the culture of human rights should be embedded. The culture of human rights must even be embedded in the curriculum – it must reflect the culture of human rights. We have often noticed at university that when first-years come into either programme of your UFS 101, they are deprived of thinking independently. Student apathy exists because the voice is muted, but if that voice cannot be muted, why do we still have the statue of Pres Steyn standing at the centre of this institution, at the centre where all of us converge. Perhaps that should be the conversation. Why is it that when you start to ask certain questions, you become a bad person? In this institution, in this order which you call institutionalising a new social order, what happens is you look at the staff demographics, you look at the student demographics, and then again, the element of privilege is in play. Then you find that when the students are stepping up and saying that we are fighting against financial exclusion, they are deemed as being disruptive. We all dream of that day, Prof, a day when black and white will stand together against the injustices of our society. We dream of the day when everyone is able to lead and say, we must ensure that the staff equity in this institution is addressed. We live to see that day. We have academics who are leaders of society. When you go from here, we are supposed to go out and lead a broken nation. But how do you become unbroken in order to go and lead a broken nation? Let's take this opportunity to develop critical thinkers that will be able to respond to the issues of our society. Let's relook our institutional culture. How does the 71% of black students who pass the Steyn statute, relate to it? I think we need to understand the context in which we find ourselves and be able to respond. Thank you very much.

**Prof Keet:** SK, I think this is the first time that you did not overrun your allocated time. You don't want to say something in addition to this? So, JC, the Bible has been replaced by the constitution today. Prof Melissa, I think you have technical assistance there? I will just ask the panel members to shift to the sides so that we can also have a look at what is on the screen.

**Prof Melissa:** Is this on? Firstly, thank you very much for the invitation to be part of this event today. As André mentioned, I have a very warm affection for this university and have actually been involved with it over a long period of time. It is a university that for some reason I feel a particular commitment to, I am not quite sure why, perhaps because my mother was a Free Stater. I want to congratulate your Vice-Chancellor on his appointment and I wish him a very successful term of

leadership at the university. I also wish to thank your SRC President for that very inspiring first shot at our discussion today, so thank you very much. Our centre at Wits offers very good postgraduate programmes in critical diversity studies. I am not recruiting, I am just saying. So, for my presentation today, I decided to do what I think is sort of a bigger picture presentation. My reason for this is that part of the difficulty in negotiating transformation at our universities, is that we very often feel the turmoil, the difficulty, and confusion of these processes. If you don't quite understand, we feel that there is a lot of ambiguity around a lot of possibilities. I think that is part of the reason why it is really very difficult. In my experience, it sometimes helps if we just step back a bit and try to take more of a bigger picture angle on the whole issue, and perhaps gain a different perspective on what is happening.

So, I am going to speak about the diversity-literate university and the framing of the challenge of difference, and as I said, I am going to take quite a big scope in talking about that. In fact, I am going right back to the shift from medievalism to modernity in Western Europe. I am not really going to say much about it, but I think a big part of the story that we are dealing with today, starts here – the shift from that very comprehensively religious system that characterised Western medieval Europe; the changes in the political system, from the rule of the king and the lords and all of that stuff, to what we could regard as democracy; the change of the economic system towards mercantilism and capitalism; the shifts in the social system and the world system, which was shaped very much through the movement of Western Europeans across the globe; and then processes of conquest and invasion of many, well most parts of the world, until up to 90% of the world was eventually under European control.

So, this is the period of the modern colonial order that we are grappling with. We can think in different ways about what was established during that time. I love the concept of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, a feminist who works in religious studies and has termed what she calls 'kyriarchy', which is a system of overlordship. She invites us to understand that this shift into modernity, as a pyramid from the period we are talking about, was actually a very small group of people who gained an inordinate amount of power over the rest of the globe. These are obviously the men from Western Europe. What we have inherited, is this pyramid where we have a complex set of ways in which different power relations are interwoven, with the men who are descendants from Western Europe at the top of this pyramid system, and everybody else caught up in the networks of power within the pyramid jostling for as much advantage as they can get within that system. The decolonial theorists talk about coloniality as the system of power and knowledge that has been shaped through the period of modern colonialism. So, the point over here is that, through the system that has been developed, there are certain bedded-down ideological relations of domination that formed or have formed, and still forms the fabric of modernity.

If we want to, we can see the different components of domination – these are relations of domination and oppression that have been established through this period of several hundred years. It is characterised by an order that is West Eurocentric – not all of Europe gained this kind of domination. It is quite overtly and deliberately white supremacists. If anybody is interested in tracking some of that – a book that I can really recommend, is Charles Mills' book *The racial contract*, in which

he shows how the contract that was established in terms of how society should function, was never ever understood as a contract that included people who were not white. This is the cornerstone, the DNA of modernity, the idea of white supremacy and the fact that the world order was actually meant to work mostly, and actually probably exclusively, for people from West Europe.

It is obviously colonial. I don't have to say more about that. We have talked about it. But it is also, importantly, hetero patriarchal. Part of the system that we are talking about also involved, among others, the epistomology side of women's knowledge within Europe, also the burning of witches, the ways in which knowledge came to be dominated through certain understandings of what constitutes real truth and proper knowledge. The ways of knowing, which have been developed by women within Europe, was also completely destroyed. So, the domination of women is also very much part of the modern order. And then of course, linked in there within the hetero patriarchy, is the question of gender relations that have been established in terms of the historical construction of gender within this Western-dominated system. Very important also, the whole gender relationship understood as being a binary with men and only men and women, and that the physiological attributes of these two groups understood as being natural groups, determine sexuality, determine gender, and that is an order, it is an ideological construction. The Christian normativity of our world as we have inherited it, the dominance, the defeat of Islam by Christianity or not really to total defeat, but the conquest among other religions, the elimination as it were of other kinds of spiritualities and the understanding that Christianity is the modern religion, the advanced religion that it is more rational. I am going to make people cross. Can I? That it is more rational to believe in a virgin birth than to believe in your ancestors looking after you through your life, which in my experience is true. My parents are still with me. So, the ways in which religion was constructed, this is in some way a religion that is more advanced than other religions.

Capitalism, right at the heart of the whole colonial world order, is one of the big things that make the difference between the order that we have inherited and other forms of oppression. The fact that it was driven by a capitalist system gave it a different kind of texture in terms of the exploitativeness of the relationships. I have put enable over there just to remind us that the construction of disability is also a modern construction that actually started with the industrial revolution, when everybody who could not do a day's work for wage labour in a factory, was lumped together as disabled. Alright, so that is also modern construction, and of course part of the whole way in which the positioning of progress has been a particularly Western attribute. Only the West contained the germs of a perpetual progress that could lead the whole world, and everybody else needed to follow. Included in the whole understanding of domination that was right at the heart of this kind of world view, is also the domination of every other kind of living being; all of them are here for the utilitarian functions of serving human beings first and foremost.

You can obviously see these are wonderful topics to really get into, but I am just going to move on. How did that happen? Alright, so I am just really going to rush through this. You see, this stuff is too interesting. You can't possibly ask me to speak for quarter of an hour. But anyway, so all the hegemonic systems, the institutions and the knowledge systems, the political systems and most of all common sense, have all worked to naturalise the system, make us believe that it is

in fact normative and unproblematic. What we have been seeing particularly since the Second World War, or European war that is called the World War, was a loss of confidence and a loss of certainty in that order. This has been growing steadily. So, very importantly, we have the whole process of independence among previously colonised people, you have had the growth in the understanding of human rights, you have this UFS civil rights movement, the anti-apartheid movement is very much part of this. The growth of all these rights movements, like feminist movements, sexuality rights movements, ecological movements, and the ways in which the nation state itself has become troubled. So, the question then is where are we now? The decolonial theorists argue that we are experiencing a civilisational change – just as we had that huge change from the period of medievalism into modernity, we are experiencing something similar to that. It is not just an incremental change, but something really fundamental is shifting. What is happening is the re-imagining of all these social relations based on modernity's understanding of difference, which was all constructed from this normative position and used as a term of domination. So, what does it stack for the university? I think that we have to do a lot of rethinking, and right at the heart of it is to understand that we are part of a historical process. I think it is empowering for us to understand where we are as part of this bigger movement that is happening. It means that our actual relations, the relationships between black people, between white people, between men and women, all of these relationships actually need to be rethought and renegotiated as part of this change. Obviously, the way in which we do knowledge has to be rethought. We have to equip ourselves at all levels of the university, because even when we talk about things like institutional culture, we often talk about this in terms of values, etc. The experience of institutional culture is absolutely determined by the way in which power flows through our universities. We need to understand the ambiguity and our need to understand ourselves as positioned within these constructions, as well as the shifting these constructions are currently undergoing; and then also a new framing. How are we going to frame ourselves? I argue that something like multiculturalism, which we have talked about a lot, how we work with difference – these things have reached their sell-by-date, because they don't have to take into account the way in which social relations have been shaped within unequal power relations through hundreds of years. So, I argue, what we need is critical diversity literacy. I have tried to put just a couple of the criteria together which I have developed for this – in terms that I hope are understandable. I am just going through them, because I understand that I have run out of time, but if we are going to be literate, if we are going to be able to read these social relations, we need to understand how unequal power relations actually created the differences that make a difference. We have to understand that we are all, every one of us, positioned within intersecting and unequal power relations and these positions have shaped us in certain ways so that we understand ourselves through those social relations. Different values are attached to these different social positions and we talk a lot about whiteness, blackness, heteronomy. These are all part of social positions, and some of them create unearned advantage and others oppress us. When we talk about privilege, we need to understand that privilege in itself is not an explanation. Privilege needs to be explained and privilege is a product of relations of domination and oppression. So, we have to push our analysis back into understanding that. We have to understand that our emotions, even our sense of ethics, our whole understanding of what is true, what is real – all of these things have been shaped through social relations. We ourselves are part of reproducing or resisting or reframing this order that we are inheriting. The

constructions of race and coloniality and patriarchy are current and they are not just in the past. These constructions are pervasive, they are all around us. We see it in spatial relations, in organised arrangements, in the way material products flow within the society. And very importantly, we can develop our capacity and our vocabulary to deal with issues of difference in ways that reframes them out of relations of domination and oppression and more into how we can be different together.

**Prof Keet:** Prof Melissa, timewise, yes, yes of course. Prof Elelwani, you are not going to use the – you are going to stand over there? Okay lovely, thank you very much. Let me hand over to Prof Elelwani to make her contribution.

**Prof Elelwani:** Thank you for inviting me to be part of this. I feel very privileged being at a university that has benefited or is probably to benefit from an export from UCT. I won't try to poach from the UFS – I will find other ways to do that. I won't do it from the stage. The benefit of speaking after others have spoken is obviously that one only needs to punctuate, especially if there are no points of disagreement – that is really an advantage. I have a paper which I think I should read through in order to make sure that I don't run out of time, but I have planned for 20 minutes and I have timed myself. So, I don't think those 5 minutes left will be very convincing for me, Prof Keet.

I have titled the paper 'Decoloniality revealing absurdity in the academy'. I wish to suggest right from the start that any person can hold a view on matters of decoloniality or decolonisation and can advance an argument from their own vantage point. Academics, in particular, have a responsibility to share with society whatever interpretation they make of these concepts. This is from the social sciences, humanity science, health sciences, so whatever profession or discipline, the only caveat I would add to my suggestion that anyone can hold a view on these matters and sharing it, is that in doing so, it is necessary that they disclose what their vantage point is.

It is better that the speaker does this before it is demanded of them by the audience, or assumed, sometimes wrongfully so. Undisclosed vantage point becomes and continues to be the proverbial elephant in the room and also suggest that knowledge has no context – a lie which is becoming increasingly unattainable to sustain. For me personally, the need to engage with concepts of decolonisation and decoloniality are those before Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall, but became more concretised during the student-led protests. The need arose as I became more and more aware of the absurdity that can easily be advanced through academic work, and I am growing increasingly concerned that ignoring this absurdity will prove costly for both the academy and society in the long run. Let me demonstrate the kind of absurdity I am talking about from my vantage point – the vantage point of an occupational therapist who is an academic. My race, sexuality, gender, and socio-economic status do not come into play just yet. My illustration involves my profession, occupational therapy, and two disciplines – occupational medicine and occupational social work.

You would immediately have picked up that these three share some commonality through the names they have given themselves: occupation. For occupational therapy, occupation refers to everything human beings do, including work. For

occupational medicine and occupational social work, which are specialisations or disciplines within whole professions, occupation pertains only to work or populations in the workplace. Most of us who are in this room, effectively – and if it is students – most of you are preparing to be part of this population of the workplace. Of course the profession of occupational therapy and the disciplines of medicine and social work do important work. Occupational therapy uses assessment and treatment to develop, recover, and maintain human capacity for activities of daily living and work skills in people with physical, mental, or cognitive disorder. Occupational medicine is the branch of medicine which deals with maintenance of health in the workplace, including the prevention and treatment of diseases and injuries. Occupational social work is the practice specialisation which can assist employees, their families, and management with challenges that relate to social functioning and human relationships in the workplace.

I am sure you are beginning to wonder where these professions are if they sound like they can be so useful? Where are they when we need them? So, the first set of questions that serve to expose some absurdity pertains to these professions themselves. We need to ask whether these professions are ever working together; whether they understand what each of them do; whether the public knows about them; and also, what the real cause benefit ratio for society is for having all three professions or disciplines. Being familiar with all three of these fields, I can tell you now there is very little collaboration in practice across them. These professions don't even refer to each other's work in research publications. The reason for this is not surprising and simply relates to territoriality. Each of these fields is clamouring for a piece of the pie from industry and is getting very nervous whenever there is potential creep in on professional role and scope of practice. At times, the potential creep in on other professions in itself is also deeply problematic. So, for example, in some descriptions of occupational medicine it is proclaimed to be a discipline that can help promote productivity and social adjustment. Occupational therapists and social workers will probably argue that this is their sole terrain, unless of course doctors are talking about medicating us into productivity and social adjustment, which does happen, right? Think about all the possible prescriptions just to be functional.

The second set of questions pertains to what is assumed about human beings and their needs in these fields. One cannot help but ask exactly how human beings became so dependent on professions and disciplines in order to simply live or pursue a trade or passion. Clearly there is a disjunction between contextual factors and how professions and disciplines see these as part of the problem or solution for whatever issues they are prepared to address. So, here is where my raised and lived experience in different socio-economic contexts begins to matter. I could probably convince anyone with a middle-class background that they need professionals to help them with productivity and social adjustment at work. But this suggestion will ring absurd to many in rural areas, townships, and farms. These folks know that there is often nothing wrong with the individual and that, when given favourable circumstances, anyone can be productive. They recognise context as the issue within environments often becoming inhumane and increasingly lacking in their capacity to see human beings, and as a consequence requiring humans to adjust to them instead. When one begins to historicise professions or disciplines, there are often noble reasons rather than constructed notions of human need why they exist or were conceived in the first place.

There may also be serious baggage that a profession or discipline inherited when introduced from one part of the world to another, or problems introduced by bowing too far towards the interests of industry at the expense of human, animal, and plant life. I have found the notion of decoloniality extremely helpful as a framework to shift the gaze and expose the many absurdities that can be perpetuated through academic work. But, before I offer a particular understanding of decoloniality which I came across and which I have grown to understand, it is important to flag that terminology has serious limitations. Terminology can be easily co-opted, misused, or watered down. We have plenty of examples in South African where this has happened, for instance, transformation, radical economic transformation, and ubuntu. Notions of decoloniality and decolonisation are not immune to these problems. There is also an emotional response to these terms. In the first of his ten theses on coloniality and decoloniality, Niels Mulder writes that colonialism, decolonisation, and related concepts generate anxiety and fear. When these terms are mentioned and questions about their meaning are raised globally, they trigger typical bad faith responses that aim to relativise the value of the questions as well as to undermine the position of the colonised as a questioner.

Like SK, I have found in general that people can get very upset about what I sometimes see as very simple questions. It is really odd when academics in particular are easily disrupted by a question. To me this is counter-intuitive because universities ought to allow for questioning without any bounds. While some are simply disrupted by a question, others suddenly become unable to navigate even Google to find a simple definition. Yet others immediately look for simple recipes to decolonise this or that, which obviously does not work. A useful approach to these terms is to reflect on what they allow and on how we relate to them as individuals and collectives. Just reflecting honestly on this is a very good start. Questions like – what does this term allow me to see, what does it allow me to do, how does it relate to me, how does it relate to what I do, and how does it help me to think about my work and the bigger project, whatever that is? A definition I have personally found useful, is one advanced by Ramone Grosvogel, where he notes that decoloniality, while acknowledging colonisation to be a historical phenomenon that was countered by liberation struggles across many parts of the world, also emphasises coloniality as a notion that reveals a pervasive Western-led mode of civilisation and modernity that has continued beyond colonisation and has sustained racism as an ongoing organising principle that structures all of the multiple hierarchies of the world, and this is what Melissa is also talking about.

I have found the term decoloniality particularly useful when it exposes disciplinary decadence within the academy, within the Westernised universities that we have inherited in South African and in many parts of the world. Reflecting on disciplinary decadence, Gordon Lewis writes the following, and I quote: “This is the phenomenon of turning away from living thought, which engages reality and recognises its own limitations, to a deontologised or absolute conception of disciplinary life. That discipline becomes, in solipsistic fashion, the world. And in that world, the main concern is the proper administering of its rules, regulations, or as Fanon argued, self-devouring methods. Becoming ‘right’ is simply a matter of applying, as fetish, the method correctly.” The absurdity I spoke about at the beginning, is allowed and perpetuated through this disciplinary decadence, posing as academic or even

scholarly work. Decoloniality also allows for an honest take on racism, which is described as a form of structural dispossession and domination, such that within the zone of being hyper humanisation, it creates life even when it is mediocre, while within the zone of non-being there can only be premature death. In other words, where whiteness often mitigates oppression in the zone of being, blackness aggravates all forms of oppression in the zone of numbing. Juxtapose for instance the recent charge of hate speech levelled at the editor of the Huffington Post for publishing fake news suggesting that voting rights be revoked from white males, against the Bronkhorstspuit crash where young black lives perished through reasons that remind many of us about the inconsequential state of black life. These bodies – unrecognisable in death as they were unknown during life. White males on the other hand, through the Huffington Post, are protected even when the offence is fabricated. Their lives are that significant, even on mere paper. It is ironic that it is in this very context that all of humanity originates and where African languages serve as memory about what this humanity is really about. I am not talking about the watered-down version of ubuntu, but how it was defined by Cornell and Von Malle, citing Mudimbe, a Congolese philosopher. This author suggests ubuntu to be an ongoing ethic, an ongoing process through which we become human with the individual and the collective rather than being in competition, carrying the responsibility to humanise each other. It is in this way that the community may be judged, according to how those who are marginalised among them are supported in finding their true potential.

So, there are many myths about decolonisation that need to be dispelled. The first one, that it is in vogue – decolonisation is just fashionable. It is the new craze. It is not so. If decolonisation is understood as resistance, because – as colonisation started, the resistance also started – even if it meant stealing back the cattle that were sold for a song. Secondly, it is said that curriculum decolonisation is separate from research or practice, but the three are interrelated. Thirdly, that decolonisation can only happen through abstraction, as if it is only academics that should and can engage with this concept. If that were true, politicians would not be bothered. Fourthly, that decolonisation has an end point. It cannot be, because power has a way of reconfiguring itself in many different forms. Lastly, it is a myth that decolonisation means doing away with white people or everything that Europe or America has ever produced. The flipside to this myth is an admission that colonisation served white people, and more importantly, that this is fair and it is how the world should be. It is also to advance a lie about the origins of science and technology, when we know that the world mostly stole from other parts of the world through much pillaging and destruction. This myth also suggests wrongly that black spaces do not need decolonisation. So, decolonisation is rather aimed at doing away with these lies. Some of you might have seen on YouTube the interview between Malema and Judge Van der Westhuizen – which is part of the judicial commission interviews – with the judge, an educated man, trying to pretend that racism is a choice one makes and refusing to accept that apartheid was a racist system that helped sustain colonial structures, making it okay for white people to be taught to hate black people. These kinds of lies unfortunately produce academic mediocrity. Another professor on SAFM radio with Rowena Baird on the recent Freedom day public holiday – I am too nervous to refer to him by name – this professor tried to persuade listeners that freedom lies in what people do and that it is a mindset; that it is subjective. He also suggested that political freedom and

economic freedom are separate notions and in no way interlinked. Of course, he was called out on this absurdity by listeners. I never felt so embarrassed for anyone, not the least a professor.

So, what does decoloniality look like? What may it serve? It brings to question the voracity of the modern nation state which can be self-sufficient all by itself, such that America can be a powerhouse only because of what Americans do, and Zimbabwe is a failed state only because of one man. It interrogates the notion of the present as only progress. It reveals modernity as the problem, not people. It allows for an honest appraisal of racism. It allows for the questioning of the fragmentation of the knowledge project, helping us to address disciplinary decadence. It reveals the non-neutrality of the Westernised university and encourages disciplinary disobedience, exposing the hidden baggage rules and their actual intent to stop people from thinking. And to this end, Walter Mignolo notes that the basic assumption is that the know-how is always implicated by geo- and body-politics of knowledge. Although Western epistemology manage to conceal both and created the figure of the detached observer, a neutral seeker of truth and objectivity were at the same time controlled by the disciplinary rules and puts himself or herself in a privileged position to evaluate and dictate.

Institutions are thus created to accomplish two functions. Training of new epistemologically-obedient members and control of who enters and what knowledge-making is allowed, disavowed, devalued, or celebrated. I am going to end with a simple example. It is the story of a duck and the umbrella, taken out of Good Loves from good old Drum Magazine. So, a teacher hands out colouring pages with the picture of a duck holding an umbrella, and tells the kids to colour the duck yellow and the umbrella green. Little Jabu colours the duck bright red like those chairs. Jabu, the teacher says, how many times have you seen a red duck? I don't know, little Jabu replies, about as many times as I have seen a duck holding an umbrella. Thank you.

**Prof Keet:** Thank you very much, Professor Elelwani. For those of you who are presenting on stage, one of the nicest tricks that Prof Elelwani has taught us is never to look at the facilitator, and then you can use more than 20 minutes. Prof Francis, it is over to you.

**Prof Francis:** So, how much time do I have? Half an hour. Okay. Thank you. First, I would like to say thank you to my fellow panellists, SK, Melissa, and Elelwani. Just listening to what they have to say, really sort of focused my thinking about what I want to talk about. This is really what my vision for the University of the Free State is. The context of the diversity of social justice and of inclusivity is part of that. I would like to bring the decolonisation or decoloniality as Elelwani has textualised it, in at a later stage. I would like to see the University of the Free State as a place of belonging. It should be a place where every staff member – whether it is an academic, a support staff member, as well as every student on the Bloemfontein Campus, the South Campus, and the Qwaqwa Campus – should feel that this is a place where I belong; this is a place where I would like to make a contribution. This is the place where I feel I would like to study and this is the place where I would also develop my critical skills in terms of thinking, and ultimately make a contribution to a democratic and just society.

Now, this is an ideal position, but you need to put it to yourself as aspiration, otherwise you would never be able to reach even the levels or the tiers below that. The question that I have been asking myself is: how do you actually get to that ideal position. You can only do that from the vantage point of what a university is all about. I would ask myself the question, how would that ideal be satisfied, be reached by an institution that is not a university, by a science council, by an entity that sits in the centre of Bloemfontein or the centre of Cape Town or Johannesburg. You can only do it in terms of what a university should be doing as a university. If we go back to a university and say, well, the university is really focusing on the areas of teaching and learning, it is looking at the area of research and innovation, and it is looking at the area of community engagement or engaged scholarship.

You can also identify this as the knowledge project in itself, and this knowledge project is how you acquire knowledge, how you engage with that knowledge to ensure that you disseminate it in a way that is ultimately for the betterment of the society. That knowledge comes back to the issue of what Elelwani and Melissa, and to a certain extent SK, has also been talking about. The knowledge that we are imparting and also generating through our students, could be questioned as to where it came from. Who influences that knowledge? What is the angle we look at when we engage with that knowledge? The way that we engage with the knowledge is also a function of who engage with that, who is sitting with us in the lecture rooms? Who is sitting with us in the tutorial rooms? That question is also part of the knowledge project. The third aspect is how you disseminate that knowledge. You obviously own the knowledge and you would get a qualification if you are a student, but you would go out there with a certain set of values, informed by what you have learned here. If you are a staff member, you would use that knowledge, develop it even further and hopefully also make a contribution in either your research or innovation or product on process development, and you engage with the society at large on how that knowledge is being translated into society.

The context in which that knowledge are being structured, being packaged, being directed, is also very important. It is important from the perspective of where we are located as an institution, the region, the country, the continent, and surely that should make an impact. For me, this is a discussion that one should have around the complete knowledge project, and how to engage transformation and the value of diversity in terms of the different views that we bring into that discussion and that engagement. How do we include everyone that needs to be included in that engagement in order to produce a product – not only an individual but a graduate, not only a research paper, but also a more tangible value for the society. There are two other areas that are important in the context of the vision when we are talking about a university where everyone should belong, where everyone should feel they would like to be. The one is the physical component, the physical landscape. SK talked about the Steyn statue in front of the Main Building. Elelwani and others talk about the Rhodes statue that was removed during Rhodes Must Fall in 2015, and there are other symbols as well. I think it is important for us to look at that; it could be part of a colonial, decolonial project, but for me it is part of an environment you want to create for people to feel welcome and to feel that they can also associate with cultures or traditions where they come from. It could also be very superficial in a sense, if you heard what Elelwani has said about what decolonisation is all about. It

is not necessarily replacing one with the other. And if you don't approach it correctly, it can trigger the issue of fear, the myth that we want to replace the Western or other colonial symbols with symbols we believe are informed by the context and environment where we come from. That in itself is an area that one needs to look at, but when we have that discussion, it is not just replacing one with the other, but it should also be an intellectual discussion, a discussion where those concepts of statues and symbols need to be integrated in the understanding of why we either decide we are not going to have symbol A and replace it with symbol B, or that we are going to have symbol A and symbol B.

The third component, besides the physical landscape, is what I would label policy procedure processes. It is often those areas and those components that can break an institution. An institution may decide to go in one direction, but with policies and procedures that are outdated and not necessarily aligned with the new thinking, we could be going in a totally opposite direction. For me, it is those three areas, the total knowledge project that cuts across teaching and learning, research, innovation, and engaged scholarship, together with the areas of landscape, the physical landscape in terms of how we look at it as an inviting campus, and the issue of policies, procedures, and processes. This is the project that I have labelled and that we have labelled at a high level as the institution's integrated transformation planning and framework, which is still a framework. It is not a plan yet, it is a plan that we will consult, it is a plan that we would like to engage with, but I think the discussion that we are going to have subsequent to what I have just said, will also inform the things that we need to focus on. Hopefully that will start to map out some ideas that we should pursue in order to start making a difference in terms of the ideal of being an institution and campus, a university where students and staff feel they belong and where they would like to be. Once we have that, I think we can start to talk about institutional culture. Once we do that, we start to talk about excellence, and excellence in itself is also debated words. I don't think we are going to debate it this afternoon, but that in itself is a debate. What is our understanding of excellence? But nevertheless, academic excellence is something that we would also pursue.

In my vision, I would like to work very hard over the next five years to see how close we can get to that ideal. The better understanding we have of what the real challenges are, and real deep insight in terms of diversity, in terms of decolonisation, in terms of inclusivity, and in terms of transformation, would help us to tackle those things that all of us need to do, and all of us need to commit to. A final point I want to make, Chair, is what Elelwani has said, but I just want to take it a little bit further. She mentioned the word 'reflection' and that is actually what the academy is about. It is about reflection and it is about thinking. I said that once you have reflected, and once you have thought about those things, the question then is, what do I do with that? I have a more scientific word which I call 'innovation' and you will hear that word quite often; it is the moment of pause, and in that moment of pause you reflect. And once you reflect, you will make a decision on what I have assessed or what I have absorbed, no influencing of my thinking. And I will carry on. But you have paused, and you have reflected. Hopefully in that moment of pause, once you have reflected, you generate something that will not only push you forward, but will push the area in which you operate, and also where the institution is going. That is what I would like to do. This often gets you out of your comfort zone, and I think if I look at

reflection, this is how I see it. It is not a non-reaction, it is actually stimulated action and hopefully that action will be the right action in the right direction. Thank you.

**Prof Keet:** This is *nogal* very quick, so I can go back to my seat, because I thought I would use that place over there. Absolutely fantastic, thank you very much. Another hand for the four of them. I am going to set the rules for the discussion now, because I just want to remind us that the panel members are on the stage and not in the audience, so no key inputs from the audience, okay? Questions and discussions to follow, but the theme of the presentations resides in the key stock and trade of the university, and that is actually knowledge. I think that across the four presentations – SK asked us to envision what this transformed university should look like. He frames it around constitutional principles, and if he has his way, it will be a human rights-friendly university in different kinds of ways, but he also referred to the challenges of institutional racism within various kinds of spaces.

Melissa, in asking the question what is at stake for the university, puts forward a very crucial weakness of the academy, which is that we have very, very poor categories of self-understanding. We are actually sometimes so oblivious of our own practices; while we generate knowledge, we are keen to reflect on things outside of the academy, but not on knowledge about the academy. When it is about the academy, we have a variety of side-stepping mechanisms, like the responses to the Saleem report more than a decade ago, as well as other reports that are on the table. And of course, in that space, the rethinking ideas that she puts on the table around critical diversity literacy.

Elelwani puts forward the idea of decoloniality as an organising concept for renewal in terms of our thinking, renewing our traditions. In fact, in a sense, because the university works with knowledge, it should in any case be in a process of perpetual renewal, and so the absurdity that she refers to, is that we are not. That is the strange thing. We work with this thing that dictates renewal, but we are not a perpetually renewing profession, and students and academics can tell you loads of stories about archaic forms of engagement with knowledge, and teaching and learning practices. Maybe the way it tries to rescue the concept of ubuntu, is another way for a decolonial approach through one of the key concepts that we tend to use in post-1994 South Africa, but of course also via the disciplines that she refers to. There again, the disciplining of knowledge not only refers to the organisation of knowledge, but also to the processes of disciplining within it. The regulatory reforms that come to it make us formulate ourselves as the academy and students. Students and the academy are more or less predetermined and streamed by the disciplining of knowledge. So, if you don't have the kind of openness to your own disciplines that Melissa is talking about, you have predetermined subject formations already in your mind and the critical difference and diversity is not going to emerge via those kinds of processes. So, at the heart of the institutional culture the Rector refers to, is in fact the core mandate of the university which he also touches upon, and that is knowledge. Institutional culture is not something that is overlaid on top of the university, it is generated within the university. Actually, at the heart of its core mandates of teaching and learning, knowledge, research, and community engagement, the practicality and the pragmatic demands of running a university –

which is the responsibility of our new Vice-Chancellor – dictates that certain things need to be put on the table, because the university has to function as well. It has to function according to certain parameters that doesn't implode the system, but runs on the edge of flexibility that can provide for that kind of renewal. Now, all of you would agree that it is not an easy job being a vice-chancellor, and we also have to acknowledge from our side that, for Prof Petersen to come in here in the way that he does, has been heartening and energising in the way that he consults widely, the way in which he has taken on the variety of challenges on the table, the fact that he has been moving around the university community in different kinds of ways. So, in a sense there is now an open space being provided both in terms of analytical categories, decoloniality, critical diversity, and a transformed university. Of course, if Prof Francis has his way, transformation and innovation will run together and then we have an innovative university that is also transforming in a particular direction. This is the way in which I would like us to try this together, and the Rector already referred to the fact that the discussion will feed into the integrated transformation plan.

We have 25 minutes for discussions. Please, as you would know, if you want your question to come across, don't ask the question first and do your preface after the question. Okay, the introductions is not going to assist you, because I would like to give as many people as possible a chance to engage with our esteemed panel here. So once again, thank you, thanks a mil for what you have put on the table. Alright, so it is open for the floor. We will have Bongani, and Willy, and Mo over there – the first three – and of course the comrade over there as well. Do we have a roving mike? Yes, we do. The way that I have read it – sorry – Bongani, Willy, and Africa.

**Bongani:** Thank you Prof. I heard a lot of them speaking about, in essence, the failure or the lack or reluctance of academia itself to critically reflect on the issues that we go through as universities. However – it is a question and a statement at the same time – the board speaks about the concept of cultural capital particularly in relation to academics, because he says that academics tend to take it for granted that what they do every day, is part of an industry itself. So, do you guys not think that the reason why academics are not really willing or reluctant to deal with the challenges of the university, is because if ever I am going to open this space for someone to come with new ideas, it is part of an industry, it is going to change a legitimacy. Universities are commercialising these days, I am going to lose value and I will be taken out tomorrow.

**Prof Keet:** Thanks, Bongani.

**Willy:** Thank you, Chair. My question – I would like the panellists to answer coloniality being alluded to by Melissa and Elelwani. Coloniality of being I see manifested for instance in the striped jackets that some people at the university has a pension for, and I also see it in the way that there is little self-correction among students when one of their own narrowed down decolonisation to a black African nationalist revenge project. Question: how does coloniality of being affect fidelity to the cause of decolonisation as opposed to fidelity to leadership positions?

**Prof Keet:** Avail this mike for roving. It is Mo Africa over there and then I have these two, but you guys will be in the second round. **[klank raak sleg]**

**Mo Africa:** Thanks. SK has asked a question – what should a transformed university look like? Greetings to our sisters. I was reading this book yesterday and the author from the University of Cuba said, when you respond – the transformation should be – the university should paint itself black, not regarding the students, but also professors. So what this mean, after we have managed to get transformation, the university should paint itself black, even when you go to lectures. What is the use of us having those people who work there to evaluate us at exams when all of them are whites and old, whereas we have to graduate. We should make sure that we move to transform this university and also moving forward, thinking about inclusivity. As blacks, we have always included other people. For example, if we have a res that has been dominated by the whites and you say you are going to transform, they are going to put black students in, they will move to another res outside. They simply don't want to be included with us. Why are we wasting our time when we have to deal with important topics facing the blacks. Our sisters and mothers are being killed; we should have been talking about that. They trust us, but now we are talking about inclusivity, while as blacks we have played our part, whereas the other party doesn't want to come to our party. So we have to move forward to make sure that we have played our part, they didn't want to be included, we must move forward because we have important issues that we have to deal with. Another book defines decolonisation as always being a violent phenomenon. Comrades, you cannot run away from that. Decolonisation cannot come from classroom. For you not having the statue of CR Swart is the ....of decolonisation. We are talking about the statue of Steyn, it is because you are talking about him in a classroom, we know how to implement decolonisation. There is no way that we can try to be ....we know decolonisation won't come from this classroom. We know what we must do and we must do it, comrades.

**Prof Keet:** Thank you for that first set of questions.

**Ellelwani:** It is not easy to engage in disciplinary disobedience, especially if there is no critical mass within the academy, within the discipline or the profession where one finds themselves as an academic or a student. But it needs to be understood that academic space will not survive continued inequality out there, there is no way that we are going to get away with untransformed colonial moulds of the knowledge project. I think the student protests that we saw in 2015/2016 was just a prelude to what could come. So, I think that for any of us who see the urgency in moving for change happening because we see value in the notion of a university where we connect with those outside of academic spaces, and have these conversations in order to join the dots between what society sees as the reimagined university that serves and begin to do the work. I think we need it in order to survive. I don't see any other way of perpetuating the absurdity and thinking that we can survive. We are not different from the ruling party if we think that we can survive. Thank you.

**Melissa:** Yes, I would also like to comment on the cultural capital question. I think one of the myths that we perpetuate about higher education, in fact about education generally, is that – Vice-Chancellor, with due respect – that we are adventurous in bringing about change. I actually think education is a very conservative sector. I think it is very much engaged in reproduction of what already is and what has been,

and I think part of the reason is that parents don't want us to experiment with their children, so they – I mean parents – want children to be inculcated into what is understood, what is going to work, and what is going to give them a future in the way it is envisioned. So, the truth is, I think it is a conservative sector and also that academics are dealing with people who work to be regarded as experts. This is what you are doing; you are developing your whole career and your discipline to be regarded as the expert in this area, and then you have developed a turf you know. I think academics is a very difficult population to work with in terms of trying to do this kind of transformative work, particularly when it comes to things like knowledge production, because why would you want to deconstruct the basis on which you have actually built your power base, which is the turf of your knowledge that you have constructed. So, I think there are a lot of reasons why cultural capital within higher education is as difficult to shift as it is. I also just wanted to say something about inclusivity, and I think you are quite right to say that we need to question the language that we are using. Obviously it is an important concept and I think that the Vice-Chancellor is absolutely correct that it is about creating an environment in which we all feel we belong, in which we all feel that our contribution is recognised, and in which we all feel safe. I think that is a very important thing. We forget that a lot of people do not feel safe within dominant environments as they are now. But I think that there is a way – as a language around transformation, it perhaps sees us as readymade individuals; it doesn't take into account the fact of our constitution within power relations. So, the languaging enables the idea that there is something that is normative, that needs to be just opened up in a certain way to allow a number of representative others to come in and to be included, rather than the critical rethinking of the ways in which we understand ourselves in relation to each other, which is a much more challenging project that I think we have to do, and I think Andre is correct. I mean, we are supposed to be providing intellectual leadership. We should be the ones who are actually reaching into this new thing that we are talking about. It links again to the question that you ask, because I think that we have to really understand the project of decolonisation, the project of critical diversity, literacy development, this kind of recognition of ourselves fundamentally as a project of liberation, and I think that is where we need to be going. So it is not just about moving things around.

**Prof Francis:** Thank you. I also just wanted to comment on cultural capital. Maybe just a little bit different from my colleague next to me, Melissa, I do think that a university – and we often don't get it right – but a university is also a mini cosmos of society. If you just continue with that, you could perpetuate those structural injustices, prejudices in society in a university. If the university itself does not challenge that, the question is who will. I think to get that project right is probably more difficult than it is. Well, I think we shouldn't move that responsibility away from the role of the university. Therefore, we would like to have students and staff who are critical thinkers, who are in fact challenging these things for us to see whether we could map out suggestions and ways forward which could be a different order and a new order in society. So, I just wanted to make that comment. The comment, the question that I would not be able to answer, is about the coloniality of being. I thought that maybe Elelwani could answer that, but the one that I want to comment on, is about the representation of what you would see in the class in terms of who teaches me, and I think this is one of those challenges that we have in higher education, not only at the University of the Free State, it is a challenge that cuts

across higher education in South Africa. We have, in fact, not produced enough professors, associate professors, professors of colour, black professors. And therefore, the initiative that we should think about is, how do you effectively ensure that your institution starts to contribute from within to create that next generation of professoriate that is transformed. And it is not only of colour, it is also in terms of gender and one can easily say well, let us go to other institutions and try to get those professors from UCT or from Wits or from Pretoria or Stellenbosch. But effectively, you just create a gap in their institution. So fundamentally, one has to look how we can work from within higher education. The Department of Higher Education are producing specific programmes to be able to fund those types of initiatives, but I do think it is too slow, I do think it is too little money, and we also need to have some massive input from other sources. I believe if we start to inform society that this is a challenge, that other role players in society other than universities, other than government, should also come to the table in order to address that. That is the only meaningful contribution that we could make in that space.

**SRC President:** I think to come to Africa's question on fake statement; I think yes, I agree with you. There is a justified anger, but if you read the paragraph on the oppressed, there is a part that says that the oppressed must not now want to assume the position of the oppressor. I agree with you, there is a justified anger to say that we have been stretching a hand and then you have not come on board. You know, sometimes when you are watching, even in all of this that is actually going on, even in Shimla Park, you even begin to ask yourself – maybe some people are not ready to let go of the apartheid system – but the idea is not to exclude, but to include. I think I also spoke about that unprincipled unity, where normally when things happen, we use things as a form of media exercise. We need to get to the crux of the problem, because they normally are cosmetic in their approach and that is what is also creating that anger. And when that anger comes, to say we have been trying, but this is what is happening. So ideally, I think we should get everyone on board on the transformation agenda. I think I also indicated when I spoke, that you even have resident heads, we have primes of residences; what is happening in that space, because I think that is where it starts. I am not going into a more academic discussion, but I just want to comment as well. When you go into a department, you will notice that everyone in the department is white from HOD going up, and I think it is a problem in higher education. I read in one of the papers on higher education how they want to develop a new generation of scholars. I am not sure whether it is because there are no incentives to also develop black academics, because I think that to expect people who have presided over the system for years, to be the ones to lead a decolonisation process – one of my modules deals with lobola, and I am taught by someone who is white and sometimes I have to explain what lobola actually is. This is actually what happens. I think if we can also look at it from that angle, but I think that since the academia is so white, there is some form of discomfort, there is some form of not wanting to let go, so I wanted to comment on that.

**Prof Keet:** Before I am going to give to Elelwani, who is going to tackle the issue of coloniality of being – we are running out of time – but one of the points that I wanted to raise, is not to equate the ideas of the transformation project simply to equity numbers. That is also a very, very dangerous move, because there is a lot of scholarly work on the conservatisation of the black professoriate as well. So, I think

the question that Mo raised – and it is of course very difficult to have an epistemological divide of skin colour – it is a difficult project to think through in the first instance, but the idea of a transformative university that is inclusive in terms of progressive voices and also other voices, is something that we need to debate in much greater depth, because you don't want to create a mirror image of the thing that you are fighting against. So, I am going to ask JC to make a note of Mo's question around the issue of equity, the very good example that SK also now mentioned, and maybe have a debate around equity, transformation and epistemological renewal, because it requires so much more time than one can put on the table at the present moment. So let's do that as a second movement.

**Elouane:** So the question that was asked about the fidelity to positions that is often seen among student formations, and how that link to coloniality of being and managers; so, it is not just students who are implicated here, it is also managers. It is important to make that point, and I think the coloniality of being needs to be understood in line with the posture we have inherited within Westernised universities. I think, therefore I am – as if thought happens and then there is a being, and that morphing into I conquer; therefore, I am and conquering was advanced by those of a particular gender and a particular complexion against everything else. And how exactly that strobe is taken up within the movements, but also black bodies, when they ascend the power they need to conquer. And to conquer bodies that are different from one's own, and given that it happens so often, it suggests the work that must be done by those who believe themselves to have been oppressed and continue to be oppressed. The education and the work of praxis that is required if there is a clear understanding of what the bigger project is; the bigger project which really is not about the academy which exists for itself, but the bigger project that is about our society – society that gets rid of inequality. If there is an understanding that this is the bigger project and it needs to succeed, then we ought to be very clear about the work that we need to do in whatever space. So, the example in student movements has been around intersectionality, and how certain forms of black masculinity really struggled with being called out, right? And it has been very sad and it is demoralising to see students actually sabotage their own work by not listening to voices within the movement. If you are not going to listen to what I call intersectional viruses within the movement, that actually shifts and get you to self-correct, to auto-correct, then you are just opening yourself up to intersectional snipers. They will take you out from outside, so it is in your best interest to allow those voices coming from bodies that are so easily subjugated, to get you to reflect.

**Prof Keet:** Thank you, Elelwani. I have a problem. I have confirmed to contributors here, but I know that Melissa has to catch a flight now. VC, I was wondering, with your permission, whether we could see this as the first of a series of engagements on deep discussions around transformation that I am sure the institute would be happy to manage, and having you engaging with a variety of questions on a continuous basis with other interlocutors as well. Will that be ok?

**Prof Francis:** I think that will be fantastic. I know Melissa has to catch a flight back again. What time do you need to go? Now? Say five minutes. Five minutes. I wonder whether we shouldn't take another two or three questions, and then I would suggest that – what you propose is something that one should continue to do.

**Prof Keet:** Okay, sharp. Thank you very much then. So, I have one – oh gosh – sorry guys, I have to stick to my original designations. There is one, and there is the other, and now there is a third one, but okay begin, begin.

**Speaker:** Thank you very much. My question is directed specifically to Prof Petersen, particularly with the vision that he has for the university. I think the vision that you have must be measured against the resistance, because the reality is that there are people who don't want to see the inclusive environment in this institution. From a historical point of view, we know that there are people who do not want to see the freedom, such as the disruption of Codesa and all sorts of things, just to indicate that there are people who do not want inclusivity. There are rectors in other institutions who failed to realise the vision they had for the institution they were leading. So, what are the alternatives if the planned vision fails? Thank you.

**Speaker 2:** Dumelang. So, my question is based on the lack of perpetual definition of the institution in relation to the advancing social change in society. Now, there are some questions. One is that maybe we view freedom as a contained or rather a Eurocentric abstract concept, because it doesn't speak to economic value, legal rights, political category, cultural place, and a self-determined lack of experience. Now, coming to reconstruction – reconstruction in itself is a process; it is a two-party process of the denomination and the denominated. It is an input and output process where input is simply living and the process is now where domination lies. This is exactly where we generate knowledge. This is the knowledge-production centre, which could be the institutions and other relevant factors that influence individuals within society. Now, I have a problem with where the power lies, because it is informed by domination itself and this domination, these institutions are exactly where dominations replicate and further advance themselves. So now, me as an individual would not belong when I am a professor in this institution per se, because I'd not want to be someone who perpetuate this perpetuation within my community itself. So, it becomes rather difficult, in me viewing the institution, I view it quite differently. Professor Elelwani, I want your comment on Judge Sexton's view that the world should end as we know it. It is not as difficult as it sounds, but I just need your view on that.

**Prof Keet:** I also have to switch in terms of gender and other diversities. I am going to give Des, and then you, your hand were up, wasn't it? Colleagues, there were only males in the previous round and this one as well, okay. So, there you are. So, there are three more questions, and then you.

**Speaker 3 lady:** My question is directed at Prof Elelwani. She mentioned in one of her myths that curriculum decolonisation is integrated with research, and I have to say that I am not yet at that level of going out and conducting research. However, I have been in spaces where researchers go out and conduct research. And I think and I truly believe that there is a discrepancy either in transparency and audibility in terms of the receiving end, or with communication between the two parties. The giving, which is the researchers, and the sample that has been selected for the research. I do not think there will be an outcry that there is no decolonisation when there is no discrepancy. Either there is no audibility or transparency in either of the two ends. Thank you.

**Speaker 4 lady:** Prof, I also wanted to ask about your myths of decolonisation; you said that racism is a choice and that is a myth. So, I wanted to ask that and also make a comment to mainly the VC, but to all the panellists, about the idea of the university as an inclusive place, when in some sense it is completely by definition that the university is exclusive. Hundreds of people apply to come into this place every year. Students, also staff members who apply for jobs, are not successful. This is true of every university, so the question of inclusivity, what is the limit of talking about inclusivity when the university itself, out of necessity or political reasons, or limits to resources or whatever, excludes people all the time.

**Speaker 5 lady:** Yes, to what you are saying about inclusivity, but I also want to talk about the personal politics. Coming from the University of the Free State and having been a student here for so long, not that long, but I just think it is very important if you talk about inclusivity, you also mention personal politics. Whenever a student is differently abled, queer, openly very problematic, and believes in the importance of disrupting normativity, it becomes a problem. I have seen how we have constantly put our bodies on the line, like Prof Elelwani has already indicated about the Fees Must Fall, and we have seen how Fees Must Fall continues to outcast certain or demonise certain bodies because the politics do not intertwine. For example, I am openly a black trans woman who is very unapologetic about her trans status and her poverty, coming from a rural community, but I have never been in a space where the University of the Free State has affirmed me. The space is very, very exclusive. Exclusion of certain women, particularly if you are black; but then it becomes another problem on another narrative when you are a black trans woman within the space. So, the question is, Prof Elelwani, why do you think it is important to make people like this, normal people, become accountable. I believe it is extremely important to make such people uncomfortable, because it is these people like – as you can see – I am seated on the other side, and it is these people who get to decide my life, how I navigate space, how I navigate the UFS and then again, how I navigate this campus as a whole. The question is – why do you think it is important to make these people extremely uncomfortable, because I truly believe it is important to make them uncomfortable?

**Prof Keet:** Okay, thank you for that round. I am going to ask the panel to respond. Prof Elelwani, SK, and then the Vice-Chancellor, and please make your closing remarks in the responses.

**Prof Elelwani:** I will try to be short.

**Prof Keet:** Make the closing remarks as well. Your own closing remarks.

**Prof Elelwani:** Sure, the interlink or the interrelationship between curriculum, research, and practice, and what you have witnessed where research was done, in a way that there was no transparency – is what I am picking up from what you have said – where the give and take between the researcher and those who are researched, there is no clarity about who is gaining here. Is that what I am? Okay, so what I was trying to advance is that people in the academy often want to leave research untouched. When they talk about transformation, it is about everything else, but in my experience that is where real power is. Because in research you are given the power to interpret, you are given power to interpret people's lived realities as

data, and if you look around in South Africa and if you look at our relationship with the global North, there is an imbalance between who the researchers are and who the researched are. Coming from Cape Town, it isn't often that I hear of researchers going to Constantia to collect data. They are going to Khayelitsha and we have to ask ourselves what the function is? Sometimes, research that is advanced over decades is dependent on that inequality; research that can be done not to solve the problem, but only to announce it. So, it is a question that many communities ask – when will we stop being data? It is not only in South Africa, it is indigenous populations; first nation people have that as an ongoing issue, to a point where some communities mobilise. The Maoris are known for that; where they say, no more. They put effort and time in to generate their own researchers and decolonised methodology for research, then the journey is more mutual and the gains are mutual. I wouldn't be surprised if someone gutsy would go to Constantia and say, I want to know which households has a portrait of Mandela and where it sits in the home. If people say yes, you can come in, but we will charge for your time. Right, it is an exchange. Some of you would know about the very problematic incident from UCT when a photographer took photographic archive material from UCT to Yale, because it was understood that the material was no longer safe. The back story is that there is going to be financial gain for the use of that data, and if you think about who is on those photographs, and whether they gave permission, it is a big one. I think decolonising research will be the hardest, because there is just too much thereto. There was a question about racism and what I said, and that it can't be a choice. Making it a choice leaves it to something that happens between individuals, as if they can be racists without racism – it makes no sense. So, for the UFS – if the Vice-Chancellor decided, well, I want to get rid of anyone who might have those tendencies, and they did some personality tests, I can assure you that it is possible that no racist will be found. But people of colour might still experience the institution as racist, maybe not so much at the UFS, but at UCT it is certainly the case where again and again there are stories that remind us of exactly how racist an organisation, an institution, UCT continues to be. And it is healthy to acknowledge it, because then you can begin to change the systemic issues. So, when Prof Francis was talking about proceeds and policy, sometimes this is where it lies; where you sometimes have rules that are so stringent that nobody can actually ever get away with anything. But the rules are used differently, depending on who is sitting across the table. Then the next question – making people uncomfortable. Sometimes this is the work that needs to be done, because there is this lie that we perpetuate about safe spaces in the academy, as if they are possible. If you are going to talk about social justice issues, be prepared. Those spaces are not going to be safe. There is no way that you can speak about inequality in nice ways. It doesn't make sense. One can only be ethical where, in raising these issues, you don't push people into – especially if you are the lecturer, and you are engaging students on this very difficult issue – that you don't push them into spaces where they feel like the only way is to commit suicide. That is not helpful. Uncomfortable conversations are critical when we want real change. So, for peer/queer bodies, it is not going to be possible to engage people who perhaps don't even believe that you should exist, because of some spiritual readings they have been raised on to believe that people who are different in that way are not human beings or don't deserve to exist. How else do you challenge that, except by making people confront the lie?

**SK:** I think I will more or less just do my closing remarks. But I just want to comment that it is also possible to feed into the system in a sense that you will understand – I have been talking about the plight of women, but the minute you become patriarchal you are also feeding into a patriarchal system, so that means you are perpetuating the system. If you look at most of our spaces, I like what you are saying about the spaces being uncomfortable. You will know that most of our spaces are largely militant. It is us men leading the discussions; it is us men giving the direction. I think if you now look at what happened to Fees Must Fall, it was a good way of causing discomfort, because a conversation emerged from the Fees Must Fall movement. So, I think it is important to have discomfort in those spaces, because at that point of discomfort we are able to see change. Given our historic context, I don't think we can look at diversity, embracing diversity without looking at inclusivity. Because at some point, you must be able to converge and at some point – I always laugh at this – I was actually accused of having therapy sessions because I believe so much in dialogue. I believe that, depending on whether you are having a dialogue and if you want a result in the end, you must clearly define when you are entering into a conversation and what you want to achieve, because we feed from one another. So, I again say that I appreciate the fact that we have platforms like these where we are able to have this discussion and sort of find each other and sort of find the centre. I don't think that the conversation – there should be a safe space though – I don't think safe spaces exist to a large extent in the university. I think we should have spaces of robust engagements, sometimes when you leave you must be angry, and the minute you are angry you are able to say, you know what, it triggered me. We have different definitions of equality, because your definition of equality might be different from my definition of equality. My definition of transformation might be different from another definition of transformation. And that comes back to your position in society, because it is your position in society that makes you. In fact, it is your position and the manner in which you are socialised that enables you to comprehend what is going on in society.

**Prof Fancis:** Okay SK, I just want to comment briefly on the safe space. I think this has come out of the discussion, and then I am going to respond to two questions and maybe just make a closing remark. I think, the way that I would define a safe space, is a space where one is creating an environment where we respect the views of others. It is going to be uncomfortable, but everybody is allowed to say what they want to say in that space without being personally attacked. And that is how I look at safe spaces. It is not necessarily to say that there is going to be comfort and that there is not going to be discomfort. Discomfort is going to happen, but it is going to happen against the context of respecting other views. The two questions that I will respond to, is the question – it was directed specifically to me – in relation to the vision, saying that there is lots of vice-chancellors that have visions and plans, and how do we know that this one is not going to fail? And in fact, I received a similar question when I visited the SRC, their full council, where they also asked me this question. I said to them that the vision for me is in fact articulated in a plan that would be fully consulted. It will be a plan where hopefully everybody will have an opportunity to provide input. It will be a plan where everybody could say, these and these things are things that are not aligned to what we would like to see in the plan. Hopefully, once we have gone through that consultation – and we will allow enough time for that to happen – we will generate a plan that most of the people, students and staff at this university, knows about, has given input into, and could effectively

say – well, I could actually live with that plan. So, when we ultimately implement that plan and the plan fails – although I am accountable, I would like you to feel that you also failed, because you are part and parcel of that plan. It is not going to be a plan that will be pushed down from the top. You say, well this is going to be a plan that you have to implement. It is going to be a bottom-up plan, and hopefully that will sort of bring the two together. You could say that this is a cop-out answer, but that is my response to that question. The other question was about inclusivity and how a university can be inclusive, because universities generally are exclusive; because if you look at the cross section of society, how small a percentage of school leavers actually end up at university. If you look at it from that context, I would agree that we could be seen as exclusive. What I have been focusing on is, once those that enter the university are in the university, I would like them to feel inclusive. We would not be able to get everybody access to the university, and therefore we should have different institutions in your post-school system to be able to absorb students that have the need – and I think the need should be there – to further their careers. What I can do, is once students and staff are here, to create that inclusivity in this environment. So, finally Chair, I am actually quite impressed with the questions that came up. I do think that this should be the starting point of a series of discussions around this. This is complex, and I don't know of one institution that got it right, but we are learning from one another. We have specific contexts, but we also have local contexts that we have to keep in mind. I am quite optimistic that we are going to use the ITP, the Integrated Transformation Plan, as a basis to define the way we look at social justice, human rights, and diversity in the full context of the knowledge project – Elelwani, not only the teaching and learning part, but also the other parts. I think we have a community which we will try to make as exclusive as possible or inclusive as possible. You can't force people, but I think if you create platforms where we can discuss and allow people to air their views on why they might think differently, but also try to see how we could persuade them that this is the direction we would like to take as an institution and we would like them to think along the same line. Some of it is going to be hard, some is going to take longer, but I am optimistic that we would be able to get there. Thank you.

**Prof Keet:** A handful there, Vice-Chancellor. You can sense when there is like a good ending, you know. You don't have to wait for the facilitator to indicate it. I have a few comments to make. Thanks to Lacea and her team, JC and the team, the institute and its staff members and students, Prof Elelwani, absolutely fantastic having you and Prof Melissa, thanks for honouring us. A hand for our visitors, please! And then, of course, our SRC President, SK, our Vice-Chancellor, Prof Francis, and for me, please? Thank you very much for coming and for engaging. A big hand to yourselves! So, this brings the panel discussion to a close. I am very grateful for your engagement and as we have agreed, this would be the beginning of a series of discussions that will be put together on these very difficult matters. Enjoy the rest of the day, colleagues and friends.