

UNISA SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES CONFERENCE, UNISA MAIN CAMPUS, MUCKLENEUK, 2-3 SEPTEMBER 2015

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It was an absolute pleasure and a privilege to have attended and presented at the first School of Social Sciences Conference at Unisa. The event themed *Alternative visions of society: negotiating the future impact of the social sciences* was an exhilarating two-day affair graced with the likes of Professors Steven Friedman and Leila Patel as keynote speakers. With hi-tech and world class infrastructure provided at Kgorong building, the atmosphere was tranquil and at its best ensuring the smooth running of the conference and that the delegates receive their money's worth. Catering was also top-notch as per usual. Reflecting back after spending extensive hours of architectural hard work as part of the conference administrative team, I was delighted to finally experience the unfolding of conference right before my eyes. I was there! I was there when conference delegates were welcomed by Professor Rosemary Moeketsi, the Executive Dean of the College of Human Sciences who also graciously opened the ceremony. I was there when Professor Steven Friedman delivered his keynote address. Through his expressive character, he gave a moving and an informative lecture on the political history of South Africa by focussing on the socioeconomic, cultural and political path dependencies of Mzansi. Immediately

following the keynote address, coffee and tea was served and this kicked-off the four parallel sessions that took place on the day.

The conference had been of particular salience to me in more ways than one. For instance, it brought with it unprecedented terrains of challenges in the way that I had to simultaneously juggle between the three roles I had been tasked with. These included symposium coordinator, conference administrator and presenter all at the same time! Although such novel deeds may initially appear daunting; nevertheless, invaluable knowledge and experience are usually acquired from them and this was no different. And, as per the norm for the past three years; when the proceedings kicked off, the Inside-out Outside-in symposium attracted the most audience with plus minus thirty odd delegates. I then lost count somewhere towards the end of the session because I also had to give a presentation by which time the Function Hall had almost been filled to capacity. Well, as symposium coordinator, I did not do much and thanks to Dr Mojapelo-Batka who chaired the session wonderfully and did a sterling job in keeping the discussions alive. The dialogue was pulsating, with a very intriguing and engaging Q and A session following each presentation. It was at this point that I became aware of the magnitude of this conference. I mean, some of the delegates attending the conference were from the SADAC region. That on its own should speak volumes of the marketing that went into putting together the conference. The only down side was that even though I eagerly wanted to attend the presentations on socially marginalised groups, yet due work commitments I could not be in two places at once. As such, the opportunity to physically acquaint myself with delegates upon whom we share the same the interests went begging. Not so much of a train smash you might think. Well, I guess this would depend on the lenses one is wearing because, among the many purposes served by attending conferences one of them is to serve the very purpose of acquaintanceship. Losing that opportunity meant that I would have to do it via cyberspace.

Day two of the conference which concluded the proceedings went about in the same spirit as day one. Generally, from what I have observed throughout the years of attending conferences is that final days are not very well attended and this is usually ascribed to exhaustion. However, the school of social sciences conference was a cut above the rest. By maintaining high numbers through-out the two days, this conference was able to set itself apart from the ones I have attended. Could it be the presence of keynote speakers like Professor Leila Patel who had an effect in retaining the numbers? I still need to figure this out, but suffice to say that the overall conference lived up to its expectations and I am honoured to have taken part in putting it together.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE



MBONGISENI MDAKANE has background training in education but is currently pursuing a Master's Degree in Research Consultation. His interests are deeply rooted in Psychology of imprisonment as well as Social and Community Psychology.