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UKZN Academics part of Time of the Writer discussion panels

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Professor Sihawu Ngubane, Professor Nobuhle Hlongwa and Dr Gugu Mazibuko at the 19th Time of the Writer Festival.

Three [College of Humanities](#) academics – [Professor Nobuhle Hlongwa](#) (College Dean Teaching & Learning), Dr Gugu Mazibuko (isiZulu studies) and [Professor Sihawu Ngubane](#) (Head of African Studies) - formed part of the recent 19th Time of the Writer discussion panels.

Under the festival theme *Decolonising the Book*, which provides a platform for conversation and debate on this issue, had leading voices from literature in the areas

of writing, editing, publishing, translation, marketing, bookselling and promotion (including events) who deliberated on issues of transformation and growth in literature in South Africa.

The academics spoke under the *Conversations that Matter* event which is a daytime programme of roundtable discussions led by experts across the various fields of literature. This segment provided a space for people to share and

contribute towards vital topics.

Within a panel of Thabiso Mahlape, Kholeka Mabeta, Duduzile Mabaso, Mandla Matyumza and Siphiwo Mahala, Professor Ngubane spoke to *The Book and Gatekeepers* where he, together with the panellists, deliberated on whether the South African literary landscape has shifted to accommodate previously poorly documented and valued contributions and which attitudes are delaying decolonising access. This conversation culls from the experiences of both publishers and distributors.

Ngubane said, 'Multilingual publishing in South Africa is a new concept in the new democratic dispensation. Historically only two official languages enjoyed monopoly in the publishing industry where as indigenous languages focussed on educational books. Most publishing companies are now desperate to publish new authors whose work they can publish and sell.'

He noted that publishers are therefore viewed by many as gatekeepers and the censors. 'By not publishing more books in the indigenous languages they are censoring black voices. But the problem is deeper than that,' declared Ngubane. The discussion further focussed on accessibility of such books to the general public, who will read for personal consumption and not educational purposes.

'The book in South Africa is still struggling due to numerous factors such as the economy, poverty and appropriate infrastructure closer to the people that is acting as a gatekeeper. Publishers are not charitable institutions. They will only publish the books that they think they can sell. If they take too many risks and promote unknown authors and then can't sell the books, they will go out of business. We need to revisit government policies that will create a conducive environment for indigenous language literary work to flourish,' he said.

Another panel on *The Book and Language* saw Professor Hlongwa and Dr Mazibuko, together with panellists Eric Ngcobo, Dr Mpho Monareng and Dr Pamela Maseko, lead an important discussion on the preservation and promotion of marginalised languages.

Prof Hlongwa said, 'There are various empowering policy and legislative provisions that seek to empower indigenous African languages and their speakers that have been formulated. However, indigenous African languages are still side-lined when compared to English and Afrikaans.'

'This is due to the fact that the act self-love, act of healing has not happened in the minds of many African people in South Africa. This has disastrous implications to the achievement of transformation, social justice and cohesion, access and the success of indigenous African language speaking students in South African Higher education.'

She noted that while authors publish books written in African languages, these books are not read. Many publishing houses are not interested in publishing academic or non-fiction books because of sales.

Prof Hlongwa recommended that as we live in the digital age we need to promote e-books in that way bridging the digital divide and at the same time promoting and preserving African language through ICT.

The panel, through an interrogation of the notion of linguistic hierarchies in print media, literature and academic institutions, concluded that it requires contributions from academics and cultural producers whose careers are dedicated to the preservation and promotion of marginalized languages.

The Nightly evening panels also featured a summative discussion on the day's deliberations.

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