

NELSON MANDELA  
UNIVERSITY



Colloquium  
***Dalibhunga: This Time? That Mandela?***  
6 – 8 March 2019  
Bird Street Campus



# Vision

To be a dynamic African university, recognised for its leadership in generating cutting-edge knowledge for a sustainable future.

# Our Mission

To offer a diverse range of life-changing educational experiences for a better world.

# Our Values



Diversity

Excellence

Ubuntu

Social justice  
and equality

Integrity

Environmental  
stewardship

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# Introduction

The *Dalibhunga: This Time? That Mandela?* colloquium was hosted at Nelson Mandela University in collaboration between the university, the Nelson Mandela Foundation (NMF) and the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC). This colloquium was aligned with the Mandela Centenary Celebrations, as well as the historic name-change of the university in 2017. A range of *Mandela* scholars were invited to provide critical animations on the *social figure of Mandela*.

The colloquium was a significant step in a process of conceptual thinking around what it might mean for a university to be named after Nelson Mandela on the one hand; and how such thinking can find expression in the university's relationships with its publics, communities and society on the other. This process put forward the idea of *Mandela* in italics, as a social figure, that dense location of scholarly work where history and subjectivity make social life,<sup>1</sup> and suggested that this figure always be encountered in the plural. The colloquium was also meant to explore the possibilities of a *Critical Mandela Studies* programme and to formulate the thematic groundwork for the idea of a *Transdisciplinary Institute for Mandela Studies* (TIMS).

For links to the videos of all the colloquium sessions, please visit: <https://crishet.mandela.ac.za/Events/March-2019/Dalibhunga-This-time-That-Mandela-Colloquium>



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<sup>1</sup> This is the name Mr Mandela was given at the age of 16 once he had undergone initiation, the traditional Xhosa rite of passage into manhood. It means "creator or founder of the council" or "convenor of the dialogue". See Nelson Mandela Foundation. <https://www.nelsonmandela.org/content/page/names>.

# Colloquium Programme

## **6 March 2019**

Session 1 – Opening Event (18h00–20h00)

## **7 March 2019**

Introduction/Welcome (9h00–9h30) – The ‘idea’ behind it all

Session 2 – *Mandela@MustFall* (09h30–12h15)

Session 3 – On ‘Making’ *Mandela* (13h30–15h30)

Session 4 – Second Avenue Exhibition [*Provoke/Ukuchukumisa/Daag-Uit*] (Viewing starts 17h00; Main event 18h30–20h30) – Arts, Heritage and Culture

## **8 March 2019**

Session 5 – The Archive (09h00–11h00)

Panel: What now? (11h30–12h15)

Closing remarks (12h15–12h30)

Session 6 – Bird Street Exhibition/Lunch (12h30 onwards)  
Department of Visual Arts



# Colloquium Concept Note

## Dalibhunga: This Time? That Mandela?

What *Mandela* for what time? The question presents an aporia, an impasse. Who is the *Mandela* we import from history and 'what' is the *Mandela* approaching us from the future? And, what kind of imageries and imaginaries of *Mandela*? For whom? For what purpose? There are many *Mandelas*, and more to come, since legacy is not a "static inheritance, but a disruptive re-visitation of the past".<sup>2</sup> We may consider the propensity of history to centre the 'big man', that is, to explain *Mandela*, and we can mobilise the discourse of the saviour in the *Mandela* historiography to elucidate his influence. Further, calling on our politico-cultural and socio-economic analytical resources, there, sometimes, is a sense that we have figured *Mandela*; there is a sense that we have figured him out. We express this in the myriad of biographical, non-biographical writings and thoughtful/less social media representations. Nevertheless, there is the niggling, awkward acknowledgment that we all carry in the present: *Mandela* defies figuring. The italicised *Mandela* here signifies the shift from the person to the *social figure*: a figure of justice.

Perhaps, knowing *Mandela* as an 'impossibility' may be a more strategic way forward for us currently. That is, we must grapple with the idea of *Mandela* as a definitive figure of justice in order to move the very idea of justice further than *Mandela*. Amidst a sea of biographical work *on* Mandela, and the infinitude of commemorative acts *about* and *for* Mandela (place names, institutions, etc.), critique accompanies veneration for him. Not because of *Mandela*, but often for the reason that a global and national mediated *Mandela* came to be the icon of 'the struggle' and thus carries the representational burden of the perceived failure of the reconciliation project in the absence of a non-racial and inclusive narrative of progress since 1994.

To grapple with the idea of *Mandela* is an injunction to persist in trying to do so as an ethical imperative; it is to open up the infinite possibilities of justice. This is, amongst others, primarily an engaged-scholarly task with practical import. That is, the labour of praxis calls upon us to disclose the interpretive schemes and associated social practices that we can distil from *Mandela* to cultivate humanity in the interests of socio-economic equality: productive work on this is already available<sup>3</sup> but we are yet to come together as a community of scholars and practitioners, as

the name 'Dalibhunga' intimates, to excavate *Mandela*. Such excavation of *Mandela* will inevitably encounter *Mandela* in the plural, across time and space: *This time? That Mandela?*

To this end, Nelson Mandela University, together with the Human Sciences Research Council and the Nelson Mandela Foundation, are hosting a colloquium from 6-8 March 2019. The colloquium is organised around the following themes: rights, democracy and justice; cultural memory and the politics of the present; inheritance, legacy and commemoration; and representation, signification and iconism. These themes will permeate the discussions and scholarly contestations of the colloquium which is planned around four sessions and two exhibitions (see attached programme).

The framing objective of the colloquium is an exploration of the social figure of *Mandela* as the dense location of scholarly work where history and subjectivity make social life,<sup>4</sup> in the present; and its implications for formulating a *Critical Mandela Studies* Programme with real, pragmatic import to engage with the grand challenges of our time.

Starting at 18h00 on 6 March 2019 with a welcoming dinner hosted by the Vice-Chancellor of Nelson Mandela University, Prof Sibongile Muthwa; and then moving through four sessions, the colloquium will conclude at 13h00 on Friday, 8 March 2019.

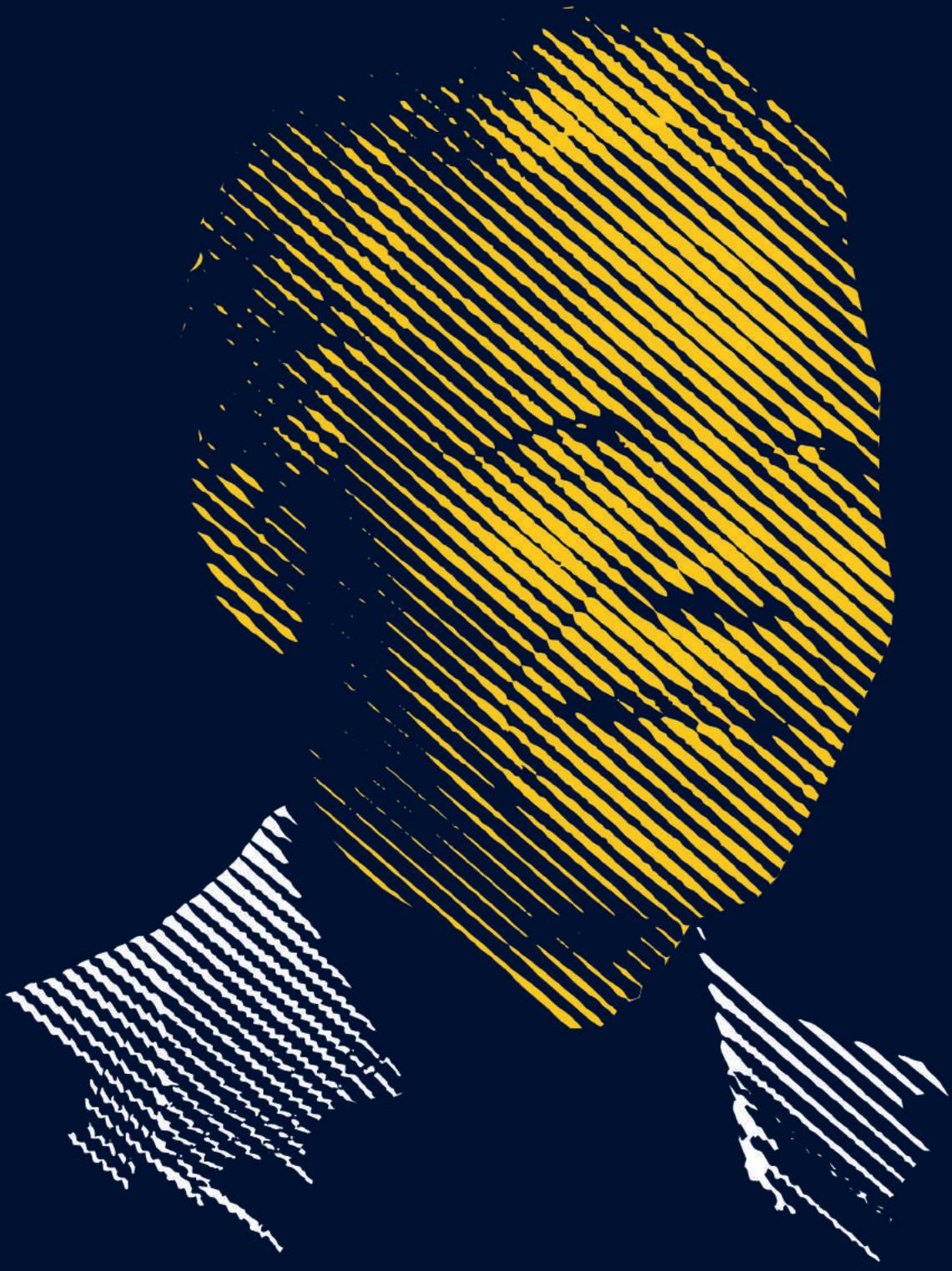
With thanks  
Verne Harris  
Crain Soudien  
André Keet  
14 November 2018

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<sup>2</sup> See Keet, A. (2011) based on Wilder, G. (2004). *Race, Reason, Impasse: Césaire, Fanon, and the Legacy of Emancipation*.

<sup>3</sup> See for instance Barnard, R. (ed.) (2014). *The Cambridge Companion to Mandela*.

<sup>4</sup> See A. Gordon, 2008.





# Towards a *Critical Mandela Studies* Programme

What are the most profound questions of our age, our time, for Nelson Mandela University? There is a sense that our present social, political, economic and environmental challenges are accompanied by a general (local and global) mistrust in democratic institutions, the neoliberal attrition of human rights, and the way these are knitted together with the status, quality and agency of citizenship, civic service and public leadership.

Commonly, a response to this question will also include the systemic anchoring of socio-economic inequalities; the escalation and deepening of war and organised political violence; the intensified mooring of discrimination and the spread and amplification of global racism, sexism, fundamentalisms, everyday fascism, and so on; environmental degradation and climate change; poverty and unemployment; the growth of the precariat; and the wanton expansion in human vulnerability and psychosocial, cultural and economic disaffiliation.

Some of our categories for self-clarification, those that we use to analyse socio-economic and other challenges, and the strategies and practices that ensue from it, appear to have reached their limits. They require deep rethinking and renewal; a kind of intellectual sharpness and pragmatic acuity that can re-animate the promise of democracy, rights, civic service and public leadership. It is, stated differently, a call for a pragmatic scholarship of critique in service of society.

This renewal intimates the revitalisation of the university, of Nelson Mandela University.

Institutionally, the university is gearing itself to be transformational to its limits; that is, to improve its day-to-day efficiencies in ways that can productively serve the transformative orientation of its strategic objectives,<sup>5</sup> as broadly co-constructed within the university spaces. In addition, there seems to be a seamless connection between the emerging thematic areas of staff and stakeholders across the depth and breadth of the university,<sup>6</sup> the inaugural address of the Vice-Chancellor' (April 2018) and the address of the Deputy President of the Country at the renaming ceremony of the university.

That is, there is a general anticipation resident in the Vice-Chancellor's vision, discursively linked to the thoughts of social agents within Nelson Mandela University and connected across the higher education sector and the local and global polity that this university, amidst the great questions and challenges of our

time, needs to offer something sui generis. Something unique, yet deeply connected; transformative, critical, relevant, constructive and capable of producing new propositions and praxes to tackle head-on the challenges of our time, our institutions, our communities ... our society.

This vision is interwoven with the grand challenges of this historical moment that demands from Nelson Mandela University to be the pre-eminent academic expression of *Mandela*. Far from being about Mandela, the scholarly formulation of *Mandela* is the endless, relentless pursuit to bring an intellectual angle to this figure of justice to generate new praxes for engaging social injustices ... to move the very idea of justice further than Mandela.

Thus, the university is considering the establishment of a *Transdisciplinary Institute for Mandela Studies* (TIMS) as a mechanism for developing a *Critical Mandela Studies* programme. To this end it will engage in various internal and external consultative processes to give shape to the idea. The *Dalibhunga: This Time? That Mandela?* colloquium is one of these processes. There are many academic institutes and centres named after Mandela, the person. None, as far as we can establish, is dedicated to *Critical Mandela Studies*, as a distinct scholarly configuration around this social figure.

TIMS may be well-positioned to engage the Institutional Research Themes of Ocean and Coastal Sciences; Social justice and Democracy; Environmental Stewardship and Sustainable Livelihoods; Innovation and the Digital Economy; Origins, Culture, Heritage and Memory; and Humanising Pedagogies in a truly transdisciplinary fashion. In addition, it may contribute to the tasks set out in the VC's inaugural in the following way: 'the expansion of human understanding; pushing forward the frontiers of knowledge in all sciences to cultivate humanity; and contributing to the well-being of our city, our province, our nation, our continent and our world'.



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<sup>5</sup> These are to: Embrace a distinctive educational purpose and philosophy that contributes to student access and success; Develop and cultivate an engaged, innovative scholarship culture that generates knowledge recognised for its contribution to sustainability; Foster an affirming, transformative institutional culture that promotes diversity and social cohesion; Enhance long-term financial sustainability through effective resource mobilisation and responsible resource stewardship; Position the University as an employer of first choice by investing in talented, high-performing staff; and, Provide and sustain enabling systems and infrastructure that promote an exceptional experience for students, staff and key stakeholders.

<sup>6</sup> This is generally referred as the Vice-Chancellor's listening campaign that started in the first quarter of 2018. It encompasses a series of ongoing gatherings where staff formulate their experiences and aspirations, for themselves, the university and society. The listening campaign has yielded broad thematic areas is embedded in institutional strategy up to 2020 and beyond, namely: Positioning our institutional identity in line with Nelson Mandela's lifelong commitment to social justice and his unwavering belief in the value of education to change the trajectory of those who are marginalised and vulnerable; Inculcating a transformative, inclusive institutional culture that fosters social solidarity and a sense of belonging for all students and staff; Rethinking the content and approach of our teaching and learning, our research agenda, and our engagement to unleash the full potential of our staff and graduates to "change the world" through their scholarly and societal contributions; Ensuring that our human resource policies and systems are agile, people-friendly, responsive and efficient; Promoting the financial sustainability of the University through innovative resource mobilisation and responsible resource stewardship; Modernising institutional support systems and processes to promote agility, flexibility and responsiveness in an increasingly digitised and competitive higher education landscape nationally and globally; and Enhancing student success through the execution of vibrant student-centric support and value-adding intellectual, social, cultural, sport, recreational and other programmes on campus.

<sup>7</sup> Cyril Ramaphosa, 20 July, 2017:

'The decision to become Nelson Mandela University is not simply an exercise in corporate re-branding. It is a statement of intent. It is a statement of values. It is a validation of the struggles of our people against colonial occupation and apartheid oppression. It is an affirmation of their history and identity, of their dignity and rights. The act by the colonial authorities of naming this locality Port Elizabeth was an act of dispossession. The act by the democratic government of renaming it was an act of reclamation. So too with the renaming of the university. It makes a statement about justice, rehabilitation and reconciliation. It starts to reshape our South African identity. It helps us to move forward, together, as a people. That is because Nelson Mandela embodied the best in us. He represented the values which we South Africans, black and white, united in our diversity, cherish and uphold'.



# Contributors

**Professor Sibongile Muthwa** is the Vice-Chancellor of Nelson Mandela University, South Africa. She holds a PhD from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, an MSc in Development Policy and Planning from London School of Economics and Political Science, a BA (SW) Honours (Wits), and BA in Social Work (Fort Hare).

She has a distinguished career both in South Africa, the United Kingdom and internationally, working in both development and public sector institutions, as well as in academia. Between 2010 and 2017, she was the Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Institutional Support at Nelson Mandela University.

Between 2004 and 2010, she served as Director General of the Eastern Cape Provincial Government. Before joining government, she was Director of the Fort Hare Institute of Government, University of Fort Hare for five years.

In 2014, she was appointed as a Commissioner of the Financial and Fiscal Commission, and in July 2017, she was appointed as its Deputy Chairperson.



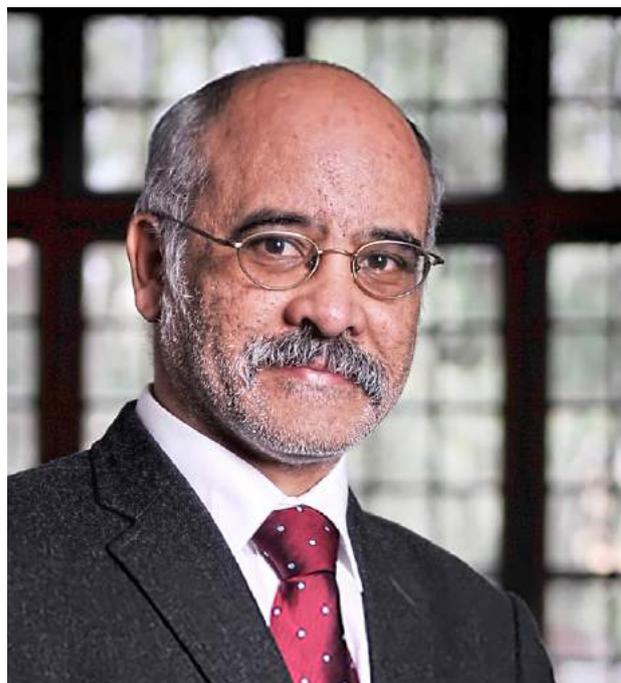
**Ambassador Nozipho January-Bardill** is the Chairperson of the Nelson Mandela University Council and is the first black African woman to be at this helm of leadership. Her leadership and management experience at board and executive levels spans the public, private, non-governmental sectors and the United Nations in the fields of education, diplomacy, as well as the ICT, mining and manufacturing sectors.

She also serves as a non-executive director on the boards of Anglo Gold Ashanti (AGA), Mercedes Benz South Africa (MBSA) and the MTN Foundation. She is the Chair of the AGA and MBSA Social, Ethics and Sustainability Sub-Committees and chairs the UN Global Compact Local Network. She is an active advocate of race and gender equality, social justice, responsible and ethical corporate governance and sustainable development.



**Sello Hatang** is the Chief Executive Officer of the Nelson Mandela Foundation. Previously he was the Head of Information Communications and spokesperson for the South African Human Rights Commission. He participated in the post-1994 transformation of the National Archives, including providing archival support for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and is a former Director of the South African History Archive (SAHA) at Wits University. He serves on the boards of the Open Democracy Advice Centre and Council for the Advancement of the South African Constitution (CASAC). He is a member of the editorial team for Nelson Mandela's book *Conversations with Myself* and co-editor of *Nelson Mandela: By Himself: The Authorised Book of Quotations*. He is a 2014 Archbishop Tutu Fellow. He recently successfully summited Mount Kilimanjaro twice to help keep girl children in school.

**Crain Soudien** is the Chief Executive Officer of the Human Sciences Research Council and formerly a Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the University of Cape Town, where he remains an emeritus professor in Education and African Studies. His publications in the areas of social difference, culture, education policy, comparative education, educational change, public history and popular culture, include three books, four edited collections and over 190 articles, reviews, reports, and book chapters. He is also the co-editor of three books on District Six, Cape Town, a jointly edited book on comparative education and the author of *The Making of Youth Identity in Contemporary South Africa: Race, Culture and Schooling*, the author of *Realising the Dream: Unlearning the Logic of Race in the South African School*, and the co-author of *Inclusion and Exclusion in South Africa and Indian Schools*. He holds a PhD from the State University of New York at Buffalo. He is involved in a number of local, national and international social and cultural organisations, and is the Chairperson of the Independent Examinations Board, a former President of the World Council of Comparative Education Societies and is currently the chair of the Ministerial Committee to evaluate textbooks for discrimination.





**Professor Andrew Leitch** was appointed Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Engagement) of the Nelson Mandela University (formerly Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University) in November 2014. Previously, he served as the first Executive Dean of the Faculty of Science at the NMMU, from 2006 to 2014.

Prof Leitch holds a BSc (Physics and Applied Maths), BSc (Honours), MSc and a PhD (Physics), obtained from the former University of Port Elizabeth. He completed a Post-doc at the GEC Hirst Research Centre (Wembley, UK) in 1984 – 1985, and spent two sabbatical terms (12 months each) as a Visiting Scientist at the Max-Planck Institute for Solid State Research in Stuttgart, Germany (1990 – 1991, and 1996 – 1997).

He has published more than 100 scientific papers, mostly as a co-author linked to the Masters and Doctoral students he has supervised within the discipline of Physics.

As DVC, he is responsible for formulating and directing the Research and Engagement strategic priorities of Nelson Mandela University. Also included in his responsibility is the internationalisation strategy and the establishment of national and international partnerships for Mandela University, as well as Library Services.

He has been responsible for leading the establishment of several Research Entities at Mandela University, including the Institute for Coastal and Marine Research (CMR), the Centre for Energy Research (CER), the Centre for Broadband Communication (CBC) and the Centre for Rubber Science and Technology (CRST). He is part of the Task Team that has been set up to drive the Marine and Maritime Strategy for Mandela University.





**Professor Carolyn Hamilton** is the South African Research Chair in Archive and Public Culture at the University of Cape Town (UCT). She is the author of *Terrific Majesty: the Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Invention* (1998, Harvard), co-editor of the *Cambridge History of South Africa*, and of numerous collections of essays including *Babel Unbound: Rage, Reason and Revolutions in Public Life* (submitted, WUP); *Tribing and Untribing the Archive* (two vols. 2016. UKZN Press); *Uncertain Curature: In and out of the Archive* (2014); special focus on Archive, *South African Historical Journal*, 65, 1 (2013); special double edition focus, "Exceeding Public Spheres," *Social Dynamics* 35(2) and 36(1) (2009-2010); *Refiguring the Archive* (2002) and *The Mfecane Aftermath* (1995). Her research interests range from the roles and forms of public deliberation in increasingly unsettled democracies to the operations of power in and through archives, and include the pre-industrial history of southern Africa. A trustee of the Nelson Mandela Foundation, she has been the founding board member of a number of activist archives and has extensive experience in the production of Open Reports on topics of public concern.

Director of Archive and Dialogue at the Nelson Mandela Foundation, **Verne Harris** was Mandela's archivist from 2004 to 2013. He is an honorary research fellow with the University of Cape Town, participated in a range of structures, which transformed South Africa's apartheid archival landscape, including the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and is a former Deputy Director of the National Archives. Verne is also Adjunct Professor in the Chair for Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation at the Nelson Mandela University. Widely published, he is probably best known for leading the editorial team on the best-seller *Nelson Mandela: Conversations with Myself*. He is the recipient of an honorary doctorate from the University of Cordoba in Argentina (2014), archival publication awards from Australia, Canada and South Africa, and both his novels were short-listed for South Africa's M-Net Book Prize. He has served on the Boards of Archival Science, the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation, the Freedom of Expression Institute, and the South African History Archive.





**Sumaya Hendricks** is an Analyst on the Dialogue and Advocacy programme at the Nelson Mandela Foundation. Sumaya was awarded the Chancellor Yunus Scholarship to pursue an MSc in Social Business and Microfinance at Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) in Scotland, which she passed with distinction. She holds an Economics Honours degree from the University of Witwatersrand and a Bachelor of Commerce degree in Politics, Philosophy and Economics from the University of Cape Town (UCT). She is currently completing a Doctor of Philosophy (Education) at the University of Witwatersrand. Sumaya was the Coordinator of the ASRI Future Leaders Programme and served on the 2009/2010 SRC at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in the position of Chair of Academics. For her performance on the SRC, she received the Executive Director of the Department of Student Affairs (DSA) Student Leader Award.



**Professor André Keet** worked in national human rights institutions in post-1994 South Africa. He served as Deputy-CEO of the South African Human Rights Commission, and as a Commissioner at the Commission for Gender Equality. He joined the University of Fort Hare in October 2008. He also spent time at the University of the Free State as Director of the Institute for Reconciliation and Social Justice, advisor to the university president and as Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Student Affairs and External Relations. He is an acknowledged social justice researcher, higher education transformation practitioner and academic citizen. André is presently the Chair for Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation at Nelson Mandela University, the Chairperson of the Ministerial Oversight Committee on Transformation in South African Public Universities, former Member of the Council on Higher Education, and Visiting Professor at the Centre for Race, Education and Decoloniality, Carnegie School of Education, Leeds Beckett University in the UK.



**Xolela Mangcu** is Professor of Sociology at George Washington University in Washington D.C. He was previously Professor of Sociology at the University of Cape Town. In 2015, he was awarded the Harry Oppenheimer Fellowship, the top research award in Africa. He has also held distinguished fellowships at Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T.), University of London, The Rockefeller Foundation, The Brookings Institution and The Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars. He was also a columnist for the Sunday Independent, Business Day, Weekender, Sowetan, and City Press. Mangcu obtained his Ph.D. in City and Regional Planning from Cornell University, and BA and Masters degrees from Wits University. He has published nine books, including *Biko: A Biography*, which won the UCT Meritorius Book Award for 2013. He is currently writing a new biography of Nelson Mandela. The Sunday Times described Mangcu as “possibly South Africa’s most prolific public intellectual.”

**Pedro Mzileni** is a PhD Sociology candidate at Nelson Mandela University and a research assistant in the Chair for Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation. His research interests are on urban land spatial planning, student welfare, higher education transformation, and social movements.





**Joel Netshitenzhe** is the Executive Director and Board Vice-Chairperson of the Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection (MISTRA). He has a Master of Science (MSc) degree in Financial Economics and a post-graduate diploma in Economic Principles from the University of London, and a diploma in Political Science from the Institute of Social Sciences in Moscow. He is a Member of the Boards of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Nedbank Group and Life Healthcare Group; and a Champion Within Programme Pioneer of the Nelson Mandela Foundation and Life College Association. He is a member of the ANC National Executive Committee, and also served as a member of the National Planning Commission (2010 – 2015).

Before joining the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) as CEO in 1998, Mr Netshitenzhe was Head of Communication in President Nelson Mandela's office. In addition to being GCIS CEO, he was appointed Head of the Policy Co-ordination and Advisory Services (PCAS) in The Presidency, in 2001. He headed the PCAS on a full-time basis from 2006 until his retirement in 2009.

Before 1994, he served in various capacities within the ANC: Radio Freedom, Mayibuye editor, member of the ANC Politico-Military Council and Deputy Head of the Department of Information and Publicity, and as part of the ANC negotiating team.





**Tembeka Ngcukaitobi** is an author, and a human rights advocate in Johannesburg. His book, *The Land is Ours: South Africa's First Black Lawyers and the Birth of Constitutionalism* was published in 2018 and became an instant bestseller. He is researching a book on *Nelson Mandela: The Lawyer* to be published in 2020.

**Patronella Nqaba** holds a Bachelor of Economics degree and a Masters in Politics and International Studies qualification from Rhodes University. She currently works as the Researcher for the Atlantic Fellows for Racial Equity (AFRE-SA). She has worked as a researcher at the Public Affairs Research Institute (PARI) based in Johannesburg where she did work on Public Procurement reform and Local State Formation. She has published a number of academic and opinion pieces. She also has experience in communications and branding. She is passionate about issues of social justice and helping to address the racial inequities left us by our past. She believes that real change in the world is possible if we all pull together towards a common goal, saying it is important that we never become complacent in the face of inhumanity.





**Nobubele Phuza** is a research assistant at the Chair for Critical Studies in Higher Education, at Nelson Mandela University. She holds a BSc from Rhodes University and BA Honours from Nelson Mandela (Metropolitan) University. As a Master's student in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology (with the inclusion of History), Nobubele's research focuses on the (re)production of culturally valued gender identities in sport. Her research interests are broadly located in the field of gender with key interests in social change, time, space and the body. Nobubele remains a student activist. Since serving in the SRC of 2017/18 she has continued to advocate for the advancement of gender equality and anti-gender based violence in the Nelson Mandela University Community. Her current focus is on activist pedagogy through Activist ConneXions – a social activist platform that supports the decentralised growth of movement networks at Nelson Mandela University.



**Ciraj Rassool** is Professor of History at the University of the Western Cape and directs the Remaking Societies, Remaking Persons Supranational Forum. He has published widely in the fields of political biography, museum and heritage studies, memory politics and visual history. His latest publications are *The Politics of Heritage in Africa: Economies, Histories and Infrastructures* (Cambridge University Press, New York 2015), co-edited with Derek Peterson and Kodzo Gavua; *Unsettled History: Making South African Public Pasts* (University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2017), written with Leslie Witz and Gary Minkley; and *Missing and Missed: Subject, Politics, Memorialisation* (published as *Kronos: Southern African Histories*, 44, 2018), co-edited with Nicky Rousseau and Riedwaan Moosage. He has been on the boards of the District Six Museum, Iziko Museums of South Africa, the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) and the National Heritage Council of South Africa. He has previously chaired the Scientific Committee of the International Council of African Museums, and currently serves on the High Level Museums Advisory Committee of UNESCO.

# The Opening Event

## Programme

Welcome	Prof Andrew Leitch, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Engagement, Nelson Mandela University
Contribution	Mr Sello Hatang, Chief Executive: Nelson Mandela Foundation
Contribution	Prof Crain Soudien, Chief Executive Officer: Human Sciences Research Council
Opening address	Prof Sibongile Muthwa, Vice-Chancellor: Nelson Mandela University
Vote of thanks	Ambassador Nozipho January-Bardill, Chairperson of Council: Nelson Mandela University
Master of Ceremonies	Vuyo Bongela

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The opening event took place in the Art Gallery on Nelson Mandela University's Bird Street Campus, amidst the artworks produced for the *we are present* exhibition. This event brought together the colloquium contributors and attendees for the first time, as the leaders of the three organisations who collaborated on the colloquium—Mr Sello Hatang of the Nelson Mandela Foundation, Prof Crain Soudien of the Human Sciences Research Council, and Professor Sibongile Muthwa of Nelson Mandela University—framed the colloquium with their engaging contributions. Prof Andrew Leitch, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Research and Engagement at Nelson Mandela University and Ambassador Nozipho January-Bardill, the Chairperson of Council at Nelson Mandela University, also contributed to the proceedings, with the welcome and the vote of thanks respectively. The event was ably coordinated by the master of ceremonies, Ms Vuyo Bongela.

**The contributions, most explicitly in Mr Hatang's speech, foregrounded the responsibility towards transformation that comes with taking up the legacy of Mandela**

They also, in different ways, tied *Critical Mandela Studies* to the function of the university and, by extension, the grand challenges

faced by society. These speakers called for a socially engaged university, although in different ways. Prof Soudien spoke of the construction of a 'radically inclusive university' and mobilized Ernest Boyer's concept of 'engaged scholarship', while Prof Muthwa, in her opening address, referenced her inaugural speech call for a university in service of society.

The notion of the '*Ghost of Mandela*' and the agentic concept of '*haunting*' as key to our social justice work, as suggested by Prof Muthwa in her opening address, raised the question of how *Mandela* as a social figure could be a productive and generative way of engaging with pressing societal challenges and allow us to transformatively re-imagine higher education. 'Far from being about Mandela (the person), the scholarly formulation of *Mandela* (the construct, the embodiment, the touchstone) is the endless, relentless pursuit to bring an intellectual angle to this figure of justice, to generate new praxes for engaging social injustices [...] to move the very idea of justice further than *Mandela*', she argued.

These rich contributions are captured in the next few pages that follow, based on the written notes provided by the speakers. For the talks presented on the night, with in-the-moment additions, please go to [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K\\_BzkPkZx54&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K_BzkPkZx54&feature=youtu.be)



# Contribution

Mr Sello Hatang (Chief Executive, Nelson Mandela Foundation)

It's a single honour for me to say a few words this evening and to participate in an event that is linked to the centenary of Madiba's birth. And it's a pleasure to be working collaboratively again with André and Crain.

I believe this Colloquium to be an important intervention and one which I trust will mark the beginning of an elevated relationship between the Foundation and the Nelson Mandela University. I was lucky enough to spend an hour with the Vice-Chancellor this afternoon, and I came away enthused both by the University's determination to carry the name of Nelson Mandela with the gravitas that it deserves, and by the rich thinking and planning in relation to Madiba that the University is engaged in.

If we're honest with ourselves, the weight of the name 'Nelson Mandela' is a heavy one for any institution to bear. As the Vice-Chancellor and I both know and experience every day, along with honour and privilege, that name brings responsibility and complexity. And there's no blueprint for getting it right. But **IF** we are to get it right, then a commitment to transformation is of fundamental importance. Our Board of Trustees just last week adopted a new strategic plan for the Foundation, one which demands that we become impactful change agents in the world **and** that we set the bar high as a transforming, if not transformed, organisation. There are strong resonances between our Board's thinking and the thrust of the Vice-Chancellor's inaugural address last year. Let me quote one short paragraph from that address:

"In **transformational** terms, we need to work to make the University organisationally more efficient to serve our students, staff and community better. In **transformative** terms, we must give our University a sharper social justice purpose and praxis."

In my view, the University and the Foundation could not be more perfectly aligned.

Given the contingencies of this moment in South Africa's history, it is incumbent on the academy and on civil society more broadly to make transformation its anchor. Yes, we must contribute to cleaning up the mess created over the last decade. Yes, we

must help fix the broken institutions and systems. But our real challenge is how to support the fundamental transformation of our society, and this is a global challenge of course. Humanity faces a moment where it has become clear that the very future of the human project depends now on our capacity to do differently, and to do differently, we have to think transformationally.

Our test, arguably, is a test of imagination. Here in South Africa, for example, we have to reimagine constitutionalism as an instrument of transformation and wrestle it back from those who wield it as a liberal weapon to protect privilege, power and property. Justice itself must be reimagined – it has to be about more than just protecting rights – I would argue that it is about a transformational hospitality to 'the other'. We owe it to Madiba both to think differently and to do differently. Institutionally, we owe it to Madiba to be agents of change. I often quote Madiba's saying from prison in 1976 that a good heart and a good head are a formidable combination. But let me close now with a line from a speech he gave in 1994; the context was an OAU gathering, and Madiba was reflecting on the continent's contribution to South Africa's liberation struggle:

"She (Africa) opened her heart of hospitality and her head so full of wise counsel, so that we should emerge victorious."

My hope for the Colloquium which will unfold over the next two days is that it will speak to our hearts and to our heads, and that it will inspire us to go out into an increasingly complex world with confidence that we can make a difference.

Thank you all for being here this evening. And thank you to everyone who is supporting the Colloquium.



# Contribution

Prof Crain Soudien (Chief Executive Officer, Human Sciences Research Council)

Good evening colleagues, friends and comrades. It is a great pleasure and honour to be here with you all and to be partnering with the Nelson Mandela University and the Nelson Mandela Foundation in the organisation of this Centenary Event.

Thank you Vice-Chancellor Sibongile Muthwa and CEO Sello Hatang for agreeing to work together on this initiative. Thank you, also, to my colleagues André Keet and Verne Harris in thinking together on how we could construct and manage this event.

This Mandela focus is of course not the first in the country. I was, and it is important to acknowledge, privileged to have played a role in the organisation of a colloquium on the subject of Mr Mandela in the early 2000s. This event happens, as everybody knows, in the context of the centenary commemorations of Mr Mandela and Ma Sisulu. It is different to the countless other celebrations that have taken place around the country in honour of Mr Mandela and also to the Fort Hare event. It is different because we want here to build something. We want to build, through our institutions, through the Nelson Mandela University, the Nelson Mandela Foundation and through the Human Sciences Research Council; we want to build a scholarly project around the significance of Mr Mandela. This project, I would like to suggest, is more than the academy celebrating the figure of Mr Mandela. It is also more than political hagiography – the obligatory genuflection in uncritical homage to the so-called father of the new South Africa. It is about engaged scholarship. Scholarship in honour of Mr Mandela, and we will do so unapologetically, but never uncritically.

What is engaged scholarship? And how do you do engaged scholarship around a figure as seductive, let me say that, as that of Mr Mandela? Let me briefly attempt to put these two questions into perspective.

The person who coined the term ‘engaged scholarship’ was an academic called Ernst Boyer. He described engaged scholarship as teaching and research that ‘connects the rich resources of the university to our most pressing social, civic, and ethical problems.’ It is about giving the university or the research community a sense of how it might imagine itself differently in the world to the traditional ‘ivory tower’ image which most people have of it.

It is about giving it a sense of urgency. It is about working out how those things that make a university distinctive, those things that are the inescapable attributes of a university, things such as the deliberate and deliberative cultivation of the mind, the preoccupation with critical thinking, the deep abiding interest of the university operating at its best in how life works, the interest in explaining all kinds of phenomena – it is about taking all of these things, and asking how all of these distinctive and unquestionably specialist things, can be directed towards a focussed engagement with the immediate urgency of the problems of the world. There is a tension here, of course. That tension is turning the university entirely in an instrumental direction. Away from curiosity and critical thinking towards instrumentality, political and ideological subjection, and, worst of all, dogmatism. How you construct a university in that creative tension – around a sense of public interest, a sense of publicness which is radically inclusive and never sectional in any kind of way – is what this engaged scholarship is about.

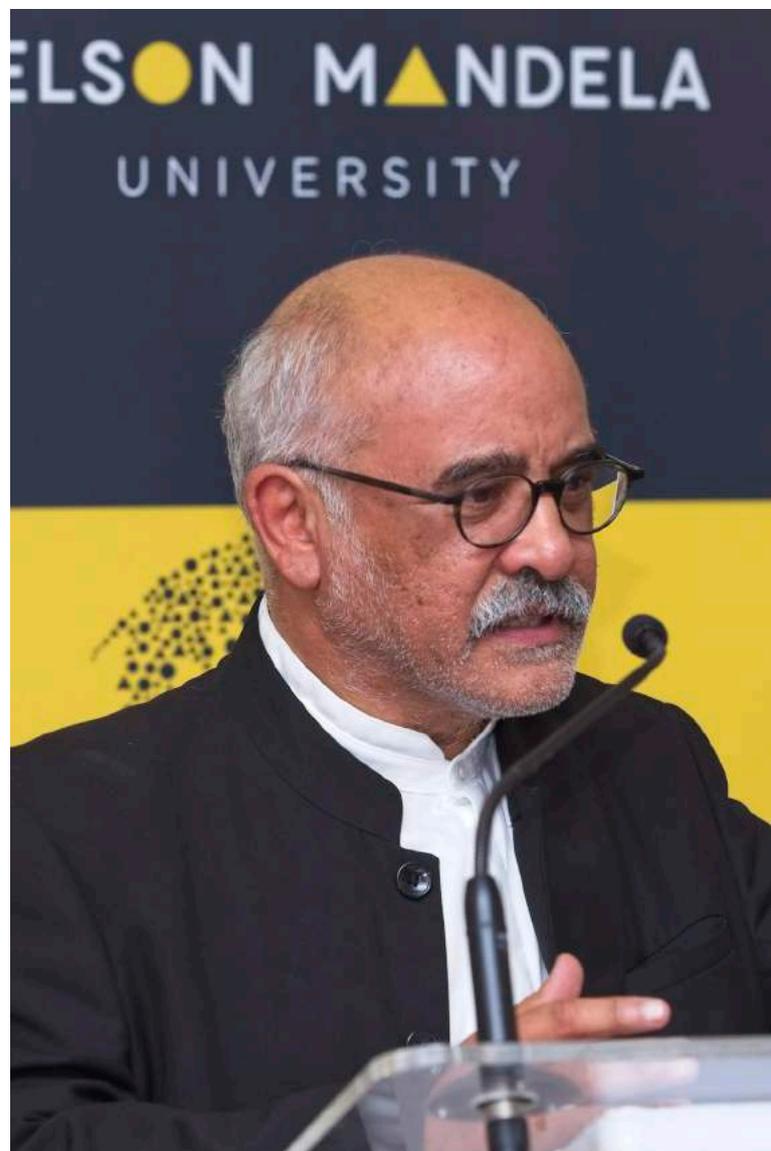
**And then, the second part of this, is how one does this with the idea of Mandela. How do you take a compelling human subject such as Mandela, as one would take Gandhi, and make this subject a prism through which to reflect on the problems of climate change, inequality, the durability of anti-social phenomena, or, more prosaically, democracy, and ask critical questions about how this subject sheds light on these questions?**

The challenge for all of us here is how significantly the idea of a Mandela produces for us responsibility – as opposed to, on the one hand, political authority and permission – the idea of a kind of exclusive ownership of Mandela which authorises us in particular kinds of ways, a Mandela which licences us, and, on the other, a Mandela of prohibitions. We want to make this Mandela of responsibility a debating point over these two days. It is an attempt to make our institutions face and confront their lived



presence in the social spaces in which they find themselves to make them learn and able to speak back into these social spaces, and so to engender an idea of what it means to be in continuous learning mode.

So, of course, each [of] our institutions could have initiated these possibilities by themselves. But, in coming together today we signal, in the spirit of Mr Mandela, a commitment to the principle that we do better when we work together. The principle of us working together, I will suggest, is critical for our future as a country and as a globe hangs on it. The big question that this colloquium has to address, is that of how the idea of Mandela, as he is appropriated here and anywhere else in the world, is productive, generative and provocative in thinking about how we work together?





# Opening Address

Prof Sibongile Muthwa (Vice Chancellor, Nelson Mandela University)

Honoured Guests. This is a gathering of friends, collaborators, colleagues, co-travellers and critical interlocutors to make sense, if this is at all possible, of Mandela; the person chosen by the global community to put a human face to our aspirations for a socially just world. This is the plain, straightforward truth that we are required to deconstruct, that we are expected to problematize ... so as to unweave its simplicity. For, certainly, massive layers of complexities and ambiguities are captured in this statement and this position; between veneration and critique of Mandela.

The university's name change in 2017, from Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University to Nelson Mandela University, at first appears merely to drop a word, or to edit the acronym. The 'M' of Metropolitan, the geo-municipal name, is simply deleted; some may think. Far from it. As you know, the drop of the 'M' shifts the entire angle, the essence, of the university and our intellectual and social project. My address to you this evening deals with one aspect of this shift. That is, to develop, with partners—you—an academic and scholarly expression of the name 'Mandela'.

In his address on the name change occasion, then-Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa emphasised that we are 'shouldering a great responsibility' by taking on the name of Mandela (Ramaphosa, 2017). Our response has been, as we foregrounded in my inaugural speech, to position Nelson Mandela University as a university in service of society; and all the exciting and productive work that comes with that through our core mandates.

You have picked up from the concept note that guides this colloquium that we make a distinction between Mandela, the person, and the italicized *Mandela*, the social figure. About Mandela, the person, an infinite number of books, films and documentaries already exist. It is an industry, 'arguably supporting a saturated market dominated by work, which reproduces the same basic narrative and the same well-known images' (2018), as Prof Verne Harris argued in his talk at our university last year.

For Nelson Mandela University, the *Mandela* in italics, in a deep sense, refers to the social figure ... the dense location of scholarly work where history and subjectivity make social life.<sup>8</sup> Such reading of *Mandela* is scant, or non-existent; a point also underscored by

Prof Verne Harris in his talk I referred to earlier. He suggests that 'all too rare are the fresh line of enquiry, the unexpected insight, sustained critical analysis, and the deep, deconstructive reading of archive. Here precisely lies the potential for the Nelson Mandela University to take the lead in promoting what we could call loosely 'Mandela Studies'' (2018). More about this later.

Shortly after the university's name change, I began my tenure as Vice-Chancellor. This, at a singular and personal level, ties me directly to the University Council's profound and, for me, daunting proposal for us to reflect '*on the moral and social responsibility associated with embracing this name, its implications for our identity and strategic choices, as well as transformations we need to make in order to align ourselves more appropriately to the name*' (2017).

I have, since then, started an extensive listening campaign within the university and with its publics; engaging our academic and support services outfits, the research and engagement entities, and so on. These are continuing. Key to our engagement within and outside the university is the idea of the 'Mandela' name. I have presided over a range of strategy discussions on this subject matter, and opened and launched many events, research initiatives, chairs and centres under the rubric of the university's Mandela Centenary Celebrations. We are generating a renewed impetus for humanising pedagogy in our teaching and learning endeavours; and we are in the process of reimagining 'engagement' beyond the bounds of conventional university practices.

Our university is, first and foremost, a university; and it has to execute its mandates as part of its public function, across the sciences, knowledge fields and in service of society. It does so against the backdrop of the grand challenges of our time, the challenges that Mandela engaged with almost his entire life. They are well known, with poverty and inequality key amongst them. We need new interpretive schemes and practices to challenge them. This is the task of the university.

Because we are a university carrying the Mandela name, one way, amongst others, of responding to these challenges is to



become a productive academic expression of *Mandela*, like no other institution of education. Our university should be known as a foremost scholarly formulation of the Mandela legacy, with pragmatic import and real-life programmes that make a difference to ordinary people.

Far from being about Mandela (the person), the scholarly formulation of *Mandela* (the construct, the embodiment, the touchstone) is the endless, relentless pursuit to bring an intellectual angle to this figure of justice, to generate new praxes for engaging social injustices ... to move the very idea of justice further than Mandela.

When we chose *Dalibhunga* to signal our engagement on *Mandela*, we had the convening of dialogues, as the name intimates, in mind. But, we also ask, **This time? That Mandela?**, to put upfront our conviction that Mandela should be encountered in the plural.

Much of what I am sharing with you in these remarks has been stated in different forms over the past year at our university. However, I would like to make three key arguments that may have a bearing on this colloquium.

One: To work with *Mandela*, the social figure, is to accept that legacy is not a 'static inheritance, but a disruptive re-visitation of the past'<sup>9</sup>. Here I am mobilising the work of Wilder (2004) on two great 'Black' intellectual figures, Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon. In relation to them, Wilder argues that a legacy, 'neither means that it constitutes a static piece of the past that remains unchanged over time nor that it expresses a harmonious evolutionary unity between the past and the present' (2004: 53). *Legacy* suggests rich possibilities for conceptualizing the relation between past and present so that we can work against the lasting structures of domination. This presupposes an intellectual and practical solidarity with our Continent, and the Global South. *Mandela* invites us to do just this, as a key orientation of a Mandela Studies Programme.

*Legacy*, in the way we want it to be employed, refers to all struggles against oppression, here and elsewhere. It also refers to Mandela's context, his co-travellers, Winne Madikizela Mandela and Albertina Sisulu, to name just two.

Two: There is a staleness about our intellectual, social and political imaginations in the higher education sector. All universities, it seems, are now social-justice oriented ... and they throw around the concepts of transformation, diversity, inclusivity, decolonisation, curriculum renewal, and so on, in their 'branding' and 'public relations' exercises.

Nelson Mandela University, at this time, under our leadership,

must reject this approach. Our *work* must be the university's branding; it must be able to speak for itself. We must be seen to cultivate humanity, and put effort into engaging ourselves, and our communities, in as yet unimaginable ways. New forms and modes of thought, and new practices of producing, framing and distributing knowledge and its relationship to society need to emerge.

So, this is the question: how do we work towards transforming this university into one that is indisputably *in service of society*? Ramaphosa (2017) offers the answer in his address when he states that '[b]y recognising the legacy of Madiba, by studying what he stood for and what he means to our people, you will fully realise the transformative value of higher education.' *Mandela* is then not just a name for the university, or a signifier of responsibility, but our guide for how we can live up to the *Mandela* legacy. A Mandela Studies programme, worthy of its name, will meet this challenge head-on.

Three: What does it mean to engage *Mandela* (in italics)? What does it imply to contest him as a social figure?

Allow me to spend some time on this, please.

There are two ways, probably many more, in which the 'image' of the ghost can be brought into conversation with our idea of the social figure of *Mandela*.

Firstly, Elleke Boehmer, who would have joined us at this event if it were not for a family bereavement, has already explored *Mandela* as a Spectre in the Prison Garden on Robben Island in her 2008 book: *Mandela as a living ghost*, so to speak, as a 'prisoner-for-life'. She argues:

It was in relation to their ghostly dimension of mere living-on [...] that concepts of justice and dignity were most clearly to be comprehended, unrestricted by the circumstances of finite, ordinary life. As Mandela himself wrote in a key essay, 'National Liberation': '[Here] [o]ne is able to stand back and look at the entire movement from a distance.' (2008: 157)

This ghostly dimension of prison life allowed Mandela and his comrades on the island to formulate sharper categories of justice and human dignity. In a sense, the living ghost of Mandela during the prison years paved the way for *Mandela*, the ghost after his death.

Secondly, *Mandela* is a social figure in the way Avery Gordon understands the ghost to be a social figure: he haunts us in our endeavours to re-imagine and reclaim the university. Gordon argues that investigating the 'ghost' can 'lead to that dense site



where history and subjectivity make social life' (2008: 8). It is this dense site that we want to begin to explore in this colloquium.

Thinking of *Mandela* in this way, through the lens of 'haunting', is also a means of coming to *know* differently. It is part of the necessary transformative labour surrounding *how* we know. It is this labour that will allow us to transform our relationship to society.

Here, then, is a suggestion of the potential power that resides in calling on the social figure of *Mandela* to create anew the university's social justice intentions; and to make transformational and transformative leadership a standard orientation within the university.

*Mandela* is more than a set of decontextualized values. The figure of *Mandela* mobilises affect, in multiple and complex ways. His haunting of this institution requires that we be drawn, 'sometimes against our will and always a bit magically' (Gordon, 2008: 8), into a constant process of engagement; not only with the traces of the past, but also with the future imagined at the moment of transition. *Mandela* is inextricably entwined with both this past and this future.

The belief in the realisation of this future has largely been lost, along with a global loss of faith in democratic institutions and their promises of a more equal society. It is the social figure of *Mandela*, his ghost, who tells us that this future is not lost ... his future is haunting us; and we must respond.

Janice Radway eloquently describes Gordon's call for a new way of knowing as 'a practice of being attuned to the echoes and murmurs of that which has been lost but which is still present among us in the form of intimations, hints, suggestions, and portents' (2008: xi). It is fitting that we consider *Mandela* as a figure who draws together the past, present and future in a dynamic and productive way; to hear these murmurs, import them into the present, and project them into the future. We hope that this colloquium will be this kind of 'ear'; a form of hearing that can be taken up by a Mandela Studies Programme.

I hope that I, with these three points, have stirred your interest into imagining how intellectually exciting and challenging; as well as socially pragmatic and politically productive, a Mandela Studies Programme can be. The idea of *Mandela*, the social figure, permeates the work that some of you are already doing ... we try to keep abreast of these developments because it is instructive for our work as a university; we are pleased that you are here.

A Critical Mandela Studies Programme is already in the making.

Let me conclude.

One of the ways in which we intend to *become* a productive academic expression of *Mandela* is through the establishment of a *Transdisciplinary Institute for Mandela Studies* (TIMS). This colloquium is a warm invitation to all of you to help us think, do and co-travel this journey with us. We have left open both the 'idea' and 'form' of TIMS, so that it can emerge in our travelling discussions with each other. Critical openness should be a key principle of TIMS, to designate the idea of the 'critical' in Mandela Studies itself.

I, along with my team and colleagues, see TIMS as the principle articulation of my intellectual project as Vice-Chancellor of the Nelson Mandela University. It will work to bring together the academic themes of my inaugural address. These themes being: social justice; poverty, inequality and unemployment; public, transformative leadership; university transformation; non-racialism, equality, human rights and democracy; university, community and society; the Mandela identity and posture; renewal of academy and curriculum; humanising pedagogy; transdisciplinarity; revitalising the humanities; and student-centrism.

TIMS will be key in framing our university's response to these themes. In particular, it needs to develop a Pan-African intellectual solidarity and scholarship; mobilise Mandela Studies to contribute to redrawing the frontiers between the natural sciences and the humanities; and explore the renewal of humanities in various forms.

The 'real' conversation between the 'natural sciences' and the 'humanities' has not yet begun. TIMS needs to facilitate discussions on how different disciplinary ways of knowing can be bridged; for the natural sciences and humanities to 'pierce' each other's boundaries. Moreover, it needs to be seized by the question: how can such transdisciplinary knowledges be co-created with our publics? Ultimately, TIMS may be one of the outfits that works in ways that puts the question of what the university is for firmly on the table. To rethink, in deep ways, the purposes of the university endeavour.

At this colloquium, we have many consummate Mandela scholars ... those who have already engaged *Mandela* (in italics) and in plural. We are grateful for your time, solidarity and expertise. The same goes for our co-travellers, friends and interlocutors from the NMF and HSRC; our students, staff, invited colloquium attendees; and the university's executive and council.

Enjoy your time here at our university; I wish you a productive colloquium. I am looking forward to receiving the report of this



colloquium as a 'guide' on how, through the name of Mandela and its social figure, we can live up to our ambition of a university in service of society.

Many thanks for journeying with us; this is a 'beginning'.

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<sup>8</sup> Based on Gordon, A. (2008), *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, 8.

<sup>9</sup> See Keet, A. (2011), based on Wilder, G. (2004), 'Race, Reason, Impasse: Césaire, Fanon, and the Legacy of Emancipation'.

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# The 'Idea' Behind It All

Presented by: Prof André Keet, Prof Crain Soudien and Prof Verne Harris

In this session, the three organisers, Prof André Keet, Prof Crain Soudien and Prof Verne Harris, came together to explain the conception of the colloquium and to outline a few ideas regarding its intentions and purpose. Prof Keet began the session by acknowledging the Nelson Mandela University shutdown by student protestors. He noted that the university needs to be able to respond to the grand challenges of poverty and inequality that students are faced with, as well as the failure of university systems in general. He further suggested that the colloquium taking place as the students protested on South Campus was an example of one of the multiple contradictions with which we are always entangled. He also noted the all-male introductory panel, and that it was a problematic reproduction of the system.

Prof Keet situated the initial spark for the colloquium within Prof Muthwa's inaugural speech as Vice-Chancellor of Nelson Mandela University, which, among other things, addressed the university's name-change and what this might mean for the institution. The idea of a *Critical Mandela Studies* programme, Prof Keet explained, is the result of the university's reflections on how best it can respond to the name-change and, at the same time, offer something distinct and productive. These reflections were led by Prof Muthwa in consultation with her executive team and other stakeholders within and outside of the university. Prof Keet framed the *Critical Mandela Studies* envisaged as one that engaged with *Mandela* in both public discourse and history, in order to frame 'a useable present and productive futures'.

Prof Soudien situated the colloquium within the Centenary Celebrations of Mandela's Birth, and the celebrations of Albertina Sisulu, by noting that this colloquium was about honouring Mandela. However, he immediately highlighted the critical nature of the colloquium by noting that we would have to trouble the idea of Mandela as 'father' of the nation. For him, this important critical edge entails engaging *Mandela* in ways that speak to the broader national programme and interventions by other entities, but also offering something different. He suggested that this might take the form of examining the different processes and modalities through which the figures of our history are engaged and how they come to take up places of significance in various institutions.

Prof Soudien expressed his own personal interest in the idea of *Mandela* as a figure of modernity—an angle largely absent in the plethora of literature on Mandela—through whom we might think through South Africa's emergence into colonialism and modernity, possibly even entering the 'modern' in transgressive ways. Referring to a story about Mandela refusing the prescripts of his elders and 'running away' to Johannesburg, Prof Soudien tied *Mandela* to modernity and the politics of being. For Prof Soudien, then, *Mandela* seems to offer a set of possibilities for thinking through a range of important issues.

Prof Harris responded to the call to explain the 'idea behind it all' in a self-proclaimed 'bureaucratic' way. He noted that there were four layers to the Nelson Mandela Foundation's consideration of the university's proposal. The first was that it was very seldom that one of the 60 plus institutions bearing the Mandela name that the NMF oversees came with a proposal to do meaningful work. The second was that the proposal aligned with the new mandate from Mandela in 2007 to transform the NMF from a post-presidential office to an NGO tasked with promoting social justice through difficult memory and dialogue work, which included building ties with universities. The third was that Prof Harris saw it as contributing to a *Mandela* scholarship still in its infancy, largely dominated by white voices, male voices, and non-South African voices, propagating a single, dominant narrative. Prof Harris asserted the necessity of robust, critical work to address the deficiencies in this scholarship. Finally, Prof Harris noted the personal level of the decision, that he had worked with both Prof Keet and Prof Soudien before on issues of poverty and inequality and how this impacts the issue of access, to the academy, to publishing, to various platforms. He thus situated the project of the colloquium as engaging with the legacy of *Mandela/Mandela* whilst grappling with these issues of poverty and inequality.

Prof Keet then noted that universities are complex systems and that any *Critical Mandela Studies* programme emerging from the colloquium would need to be able to respond both to the bureaucratic impulses of the university and the creativity of the intellectual project. He explained that the format of the colloquium was intended to respond to this, by remaining open to promote the ideas of co-travelling and co-creation. The colloquium was



also intended to bring in a strong student voice, such as in the *Mandela@MustFall* panel.

Prof Soudien also linked the colloquium and its various obligations (scholarly, political, social justice) to the university. He explicitly raised the question of what the South African university could be and positioned the colloquium as a fertile space for this discussion, while also noting that these kinds of discussions were happening all across the country. Tied to this, for him, was engaging with a range of disciplines and their interpretations, especially in light of the decolonial critique of the disciplines and their derivative nature. Prof Soudien's challenge to all those present was to take the opportunity to deal with dominant canons and to try and devise new analytic categories for understanding our world. In doing so, he noted, we would have to be bold and courageous, make mistakes and then deal with those mistakes.



The organisers of the colloquium, Prof Crain Soudien from the HSRC, Prof André Keet from Nelson Mandela University, and Prof Verne Harris from the NMF, presented on the 'idea behind it all'





# Mandela@MustFall

Moderator: Ms Nobubele Phuza

Provocations/Animations: Ms Patronella Nqaba; Ms Sumaya Hendricks; and Mr Pedro Mzileni

Sense making: Advocate Tembeka Ngcukaitobi

## Introduction

This session, under the title *Mandela@MustFall*, took up the contentious issue of the figure of *Mandela* in relation to the recent student movements, where he has not generally been invoked, unlike Steve Biko or Robert Sobukwe. Ms Nobubele Phuza opened the session with a brief introduction of the provocateurs and the sense-maker. She indicated that she wanted to facilitate a vibrant, conversational discussion and turned to the provocateurs—Ms Patronella Nqaba, Mr Pedro Mzileni and Ms Sumaya Hendricks—to respond to the title of the session. After their initial input, Ms Phuza continued the conversation by posing questions to the provocateurs before Advocate Tembeka Ngcukaitobi presented his take and the discussion was opened to the floor.

## Provocations/Animations

All the provocateurs foregrounded their own positions in relation to student activism and the #MustFall movement. Ms Nqaba explained that she was a generation before the #MustFall students and elaborated on how protests at Rhodes during her time abided by certain rules, such as restricting protest action to lunch times so as not to disrupt teaching. Her own experiences thus meant she experienced a certain amount of discomfort around the strategies of the #MustFall protests, while also being in awe of the courage and imagination of the students who initiated them. Ms Nqaba linked these shifting politics and techniques of protest to the analysis of Mandela as various personas—Mandela the Radical, Mandela the Lawyer—and the techniques of resistance he employed. Ms Hendricks positioned herself as someone who was in awe of the student movement. Similarly to Ms Nqaba, Ms Hendricks described the changes she has seen in student voice and agency since serving on the SRC at UCT in 2010. At that time, protest was foreign to the UCT culture and students were pleased to have been able to negotiate fee increases down from 12% to 8%, largely seeing free education as a pipedream. Mr Mzileni, on the other hand, was SRC president at Nelson Mandela University during the #FeesMustFall protest.

The foregrounding of these various positionalities served to highlight the issue of context and how this shapes possibilities

of protest/activist action. Mr Mzileni crystallised this issue when he noted, alluding to a quotation by Marx, that leaders do not choose their contexts and that these material conditions dictate the type of resistance they can enact, with this also being true of Mandela.

A number of significant themes emerged out of the discussion. Leadership was one of these. Through the discussion, Ms Nqaba tied the issue of Mandela's leadership to her work for the Atlantic Fellows for Racial Equity, which attempts to convene leaders from all over the world who are part of social movements or are change-makers in some capacity in relation to racial equity. She noted that *Mandela*, as a figure, has been designed around principles that are generally expected to be aspired towards in regard to leadership today. However, while there are many who admire *Mandela/Mandela* for these principles, she has also seen disenchantment among many young leaders about *Mandela*, not as a man, but as a symbol of a promise that never came. Therefore, in her work, they have had to grapple with what this disenchantment means, what to take and what to leave behind, and how to reconceptualise leadership and purpose in the contemporary moment.

The issue of disenchantment with *Mandela/Mandela* and his type of leadership was also noted in relation to the student movement and a general critique of him as not being radical enough in his leadership. Ms Phuza picked up on this in her questions, querying the disjuncture between *Mandela* the social figure and *Mandela* the man and his struggle credentials, drawing this from Ms Hendrick's assertion of Mandela's struggle credentials while also noting that he has come to be known as 'a cuddly old man that dances at concerts'. Mr Mzileni also noted the contestations around *Mandela/Mandela*, his leadership and his limitations, while himself asserting that Mandela should be recognised by student movements as a radical black leader rather than as his commodified and mass-marketed image. Ms Phuza also queried what student leadership might be drawing from *Mandela* in their own struggles. Ms Hendricks suggested that each generation takes on a certain group of role models, and that Mandela does not appeal to the current generation because he is seen as representative of the 'old order'. Both her and Mr Mzileni noted



that there has been a limited engagement with Mandela/*Mandela* by students.

Ms Hendricks also provided an important contribution to the discussion of *Mandela* and leadership by considering how Mandela saw his own leadership role. She suggested that he had always understood that it was not up to him to run the whole race; his hope being that the leaders coming after him would truly serve the interests of people and continue the race on their behalf. She described this through the analogy, drawn from his 1997 speech when he passed on the leadership of the ANC to Thabo Mbeki, of handing over the 'baton' of liberation in a relay race. Unfortunately, this change of leadership and power has not been realised as she and her peers believe they found the 'baton' discarded, and therefore decided it was time to pick it up and continue the race. She thus positioned student movements as a continuation of the fight for liberation that Mandela was involved in, even if they do not recognise Mandela as a role model. Mr Mzileni reinforced the idea of students today picking up the discarded baton and continuing where Mandela left off, as the issues being raised even today by the students are not new but a continuation of the same struggle, such as the land question.

Implicit in much of the discussion was the issue of legacy—Mandela's legacy as well as the legacy recognised and drawn from by young leadership, both in the student movements and elsewhere. Ms Nqaba explicitly foregrounded the issue of legacy in her contributions. She noted that one of the questions they have asked in their work at the Atlantic Fellows for Racial Equity is how to stand on the shoulders of giants; looking to the past in order to chart a way forward. She noted the courage of the #MustFall protestors to leave a legacy, and that she brought her own legacy into the room with her when she was speaking, including all those people who have had an impact on her life. She said that she came to the colloquium looking for an openness and real engagement with what it means to survive in a South Africa created by the choices of those who came before us. Ms Hendricks also foregrounded Mandela's acknowledgement of those who had shaped him and their role in his own development. Fundamental to the conversation was the question of 'the university', particularly in relation to the student movements and the decolonial critique. Mr Mzileni was particularly vocal on this issue. His intervention focused on the need for universities in South Africa to escape the capitalist and neoliberal thinking they have been trapped by, and asserted that for a university to follow Mandela's legacy of social justice the focus must be on education as a public good and a critical programme that moves it towards decolonial and progressive possibilities for the black child. This echoed Ms Nqaba's earlier call for a values-based education rather than one simply focused on imparting technical skills. Mr Mzileni stated that universities remain conservative institutions that resist progressive change and fail to hold management accountable

for the lack of meaningful transformation efforts in their faculties or departments. Further, he believes that the existing colonial architecture of universities are causing mental health issues for the students by perpetuating established forms of socialising students into whiteness. He thus focused on the economic structure of the contemporary university (with fees as its main form of revenue) as well as its institutional culture.

Ms Hendricks explained that in her experience of education she had not felt that universities were truly meeting their purpose to serve humanity. She therefore posed the following question: How do we expect students to go out and be of service to their community when their points of contact within University spaces aren't asking of themselves the very same questions? She asserted that community representatives should increasingly be included in university spaces in order to ensure proper understandings of the issues at hand. She also suggested that the tendency to be overly critical in general, and of Mandela/*Mandela* in particular, might be seen as symptomatic of a lack of self-reflexivity embedded in our own education systems.

Both Mr Mzileni and Ms Hendricks expressed concerns regarding the universities' response to the call for decolonisation. Mr Mzileni focused on the risk of university management hijacking and commodifying the term 'decolonisation'; using it as a mechanism for career academics to get promotions, for new offices to be created, and for bolstering CVs, yet none of these fundamentally seeking to improve the black lives for which students are struggling. He called into question whether decolonisation programmes at universities could truly be realised when vice-chancellors use their positions to bolster post-office credentials, whilst there seems to be very little accountability for enacting long-lasting change.

While Mr Mzileni foregrounded the responsibility of students to maintain the rhythm of contestation to pull universities towards progressive possibilities, Ms Hendricks expressed a concern that the universities were placing the burden of decolonisation, especially its theorisation, onto students. She suggested it was enough that students were raising important questions, and that it should be the responsibility of academics to take up the burden of rigorous decolonial work. Ms Nqaba also picked up on this issue, noting how students were being unfairly expected to strive for change and were being crushed by the system.

Ms Phuza homed in on this seeming contradiction, asking what the panel saw students' roles as, whether they should be both victim of oppression, activist and solution-finder, as Mandela was. Ms Hendricks, drawing from Mandela's account of those who taught and shaped him, suggested that to create 'a generation of Madibas', it was essential that students were supported in their own development towards their full potential rather than wanting them to be reflections of our own expectations and being overly



critical of their limitations. Ms Nqaba supported this, noting that it was not an 'either/or' proposition, but rather that everyone needed to do their part instead of shifting all the responsibility onto one particular group, such as students.

Another significant theme was that of imagination. This came out strongly in Ms Nqaba's contributions, as she suggested that many people today default to an overly critical stance because of a lack of imaginative resources. She also highlighted the necessity of reimagining leadership. Ms Phuza asked the panel to think about what it might mean to reimagine what *Mandela* should mean today, as well as how to reimagine the world and to reimagine the university when the 'problems of society' to be theorised are no longer separate from it, but in its space. Ms Nqaba asserted that universities should be creating collaborative spaces in which students are truly able to 'come as themselves in their fullness', and thus chart a path of self-determination. She also challenged students to ask themselves how understanding *Mandela/Mandela* (outside of media perpetuated images) might help them to begin to understand themselves better and their purpose in bringing about the change they desire.

Throughout the discussion, there were invocations of different *Mandelas*. These included mention of Mandela the Radical and Mandela the Lawyer. A slippery distinction arose between the commodified, mainstream image of Mandela, Mandela the ideal leader with global appeal, and Mandela as a black South African leader with indisputable struggle credentials as part of a tradition of black radical leadership. While the disenchantment with *Mandela/Mandela* was noted, the panel saw value in reimagining Mandela, particularly through situating him within this legacy of black radical leadership, while remaining critical of both commodified versions of Mandela and his potential limitations as a leader, especially as a president.

### Sense-making

Ms Phuza brought Advocate Ngcukaitobi into the conversation by asking him, along with the other panellists, to respond to a question regarding the 'design of protest' and how employing interdicts meant student protestors have had to negotiate boundaries between legal and illegal forms of protest.

Advocate Ngcukaitobi began by tackling the issue of how Mandela himself confronted the dilemmas of legality versus illegality. He characterised Mandela as an 'outlaw' and as the 'original fallist', providing examples such as Mandela's role in breaking up meetings and when Mandela challenged the legitimacy of the judge in his 1962 trial. According to Advocate Ngcukaitobi, the historical record reveals Mandela as a man whose greatest attribute was his clarity of thought, and lack of equivocation, regarding the issue of justice versus legality. In fact, Advocate Ngcukaitobi asserted, had

Mandela been alive today, he very likely would not have attended this colloquium, or he would have broken up the discussions with the accusation that we are wasting time intellectualising.

He suggested there are two lessons that fallists might take from this period of Mandela's life. The first being to always stand on the side of what is right, rather than what is defined as legal. The second being that what is important is personal sacrifice, as Mandela was always willing to foreground his own life in the struggle.

Advocate Ngcukaitobi then provided his response to the panel discussion more broadly, by addressing what he saw as the important points raised by each of the provocateurs.

He first responded to Mr Mzileni's concerns regarding the continued exploitative, extractive structure of the economy and the cultural domination of whiteness, particularly in university spaces. Advocate Ngcukaitobi linked these to the criticism of Mandela for not adequately addressing these in what the advocate referred to as the transition from political apartheid to economic apartheid. He suggested that it would indeed be important to raise the question of the impact of Mandela's leadership on the state of the economy, whilst acknowledging that the apparent lack of impact might be attributed to Mandela's efforts being located largely in the arena of the political, to the neglect of economic issues. Advocate Ngcukaitobi also raised the need for self-reflexivity amongst university academics in regard to cultural domination, suggesting that their positionality means that they are 'truly captured', as this identity does not exist outside of the university space.

The advocate then highlighted what he saw as a crucial point made by Ms Nqaba—the question of how to take Mandela out of the grand conversations about the political and the economic and making him personal. That is, asking: What does Mandela actually mean for me, as an individual? Advocate Ngcukaitobi suggested that Mandela might offer lessons about protest, but also about how to deal with, and express our own insecurities within, the context of the so-called struggle. He emphasised that the struggle is not homogenous, and that the people involved in it have many personal failings, including racism and sexism. He pointed to Mandela's own apparent sexism, seeing this as something to be accounted for, but which should detract from his positive qualities. Advocate Ngcukaitobi also pointed out that it could not be assumed that the revolutionary movement was necessarily a good thing; that it could have a negative impact on an individual, even while being a net positive for society. He tied all these aspects together as the issue of the negotiation of the personal versus the political. In this way, he drew out the tensions between the broad political concerns raised by Mr Mzileni, and the issue of personal politics Ms Nqaba's contribution highlighted. Advocate Ngcukaitobi also addressed Ms Hendricks's question



about why Mandela has been divorced from our history, being seen as a kind of ahistorical figure—the dancing grandfather who kisses children. The advocate used the branded Nelson Mandela University backdrop to the panel—an image of Mandela next to a blank, white space—as a way to illustrate how little we know about Mandela and thus how we see him as a blank canvas onto which we can write anything. He thus made it clear that Mandela has not been properly understood because he has not been rigorously historicized and researched, and called for attention to what has been made invisible about Mandela in the current body of scholarship.

In his discussion, Advocate Ngcukaitobi suggested that doing this required that we begin by problematizing history and how we understand the past, that we do not judge Mandela's choices through the lenses of the present but try to place ourselves in Mandela's context, and that we approach the process of understanding Mandela with compassion. He also raised a topic that would be unpacked in-depth in a later session of the colloquium, the archive, which he insisted needed to be taken seriously. He stated that universities should be funding students to reconstruct the archive and reminded us that the archive lives not only in documents, but also memory, particularly in regard to the black archive. It is in this archive that new stories about Mandela are waiting to be told. This was also related to his note that generations of activists who came before Mandela have been erased and forgotten, and that research on Mandela should exist within a broader project of finding stories of black intellectual traditions, as Mandela did not exist in isolation from his time and his predecessors. In his explication of this, he observed that we should not only be re-imagining the future, but also the past.

In insisting on a proper historicization of Mandela, Advocate Ngcukaitobi also insisted on understanding the real choices available to Mandela in his particular political context and being wary of overly critical judgements. He illustrated this point by recounting a story where he was very critical of the ANC's choices regarding the land issue at the end of the apartheid era. He was very chastened when an old man stood up and pointed out that, at the time when those choices were made, the National Party still controlled the military and so taking the land was not an option. Advocate Ngcukaitobi also contextualised the decisions on land within the broader context of Southern Africa, specifically Zimbabwe and Namibia. In this way, he shared the lesson that radical theories are not always viable in the face of practical realities. This being said, he did note that, in the current context, there was no reason things should not change, specifically in response to Mr Mzileni's concerns about the lack of change regarding the university.

Advocate Ngcukaitobi also suggested that we do Mandela a disservice by focusing mostly on his legacy as president, and

ignoring the fact that, in the advocate's analysis, he is also the greatest revolutionary of the 20th and 21st centuries. He suggested that Mandela's life might be understood in two parts: as president and as revolutionary. As a president, Advocate Ngcukaitobi stated, he might have been ordinary, or even dismal, but as a revolutionary he is potentially a demoralising figure to contemplate, as he set the standards so high it is almost impossible to aspire to them, especially considering he was willing to make the ultimate sacrifice—his life. In concluding, the advocate stated that although he started off as a critic of Mandela, he has ended up becoming a huge fan.





## Engagement

A number of themes from the panel discussion were returned to in the questions from the floor. Decolonisation was a significant issue. A question querying whether the legacy of Mandela, situated within the university, provided sufficient theoretical handles to decolonise society, received a range of responses from the panel, although all offered cautions of some kind. Ms Hendricks noted the traumatic history of education in South Africa, designed to prepare black people for menial labour, and the consequences of this for trying to foreground technical skills in higher education. Mr Mzileni called for students to continue confronting the status quo, while cautioning against Mandela Studies becoming an empty slogan for decolonisation. Ms Nqaba, while agreeing with Mr Mzileni that students should create spaces for reimagining and recreating universities, warned that they should not rush the process, but rather acknowledge that the road of discovery is a long one.

Advocate Ngcukaitobi, like Ms Hendricks, also noted that the process of 'educating the native' was a traumatic one. He proposed that one way of dealing with this and the issue of decolonisation was to take African knowledges seriously, while also noting the dangers of parochial forms of decolonisation. He noted that Mandela rejected parochialism, and echoed Ms Nqaba's observation that there is no easy solution.

Another important issue, identified from the floor as being significant in Ms Hendricks's contribution particularly, was that of generational differences which Ms Hendricks had frequently discussed in her contribution. The question was raised about how to bridge the gap between old university bureaucrats and students, and compassion was identified as a possible key factor in this kind of bridge-building, drawn from the example of Mandela's compassion after 27 years in prison. In her response, Ms Hendricks affirmed the importance of this, but also noted that it was essential for the demographic composition of university academics to change to reflect student demographics so that the gap was not as stark. Later, she also argued that white academics should be working to help students self-actualize through their own projects.

The issue of economics was also raised again, with a question from the floor about why #FeesMustFall discussions tend to neglect scholars who can speak to the issues of capital markets, and a suggestion that future colloquia of this sort include a broader spectrum of participants with a wider range of expertise. Mandela was invoked as an example of someone with a skill for bringing together people with different perspectives to solve fundamental problems. Mr Mzileni was dismissive of the suggestion that financial specialists be brought into these discussions, due to their input on the report commissioned to investigate the feasibility of

free higher education and what he saw as their lack of interest in social justice issues. He framed the colloquium as being less about financial issues and more about the development of critical scholarship on *Mandela*.

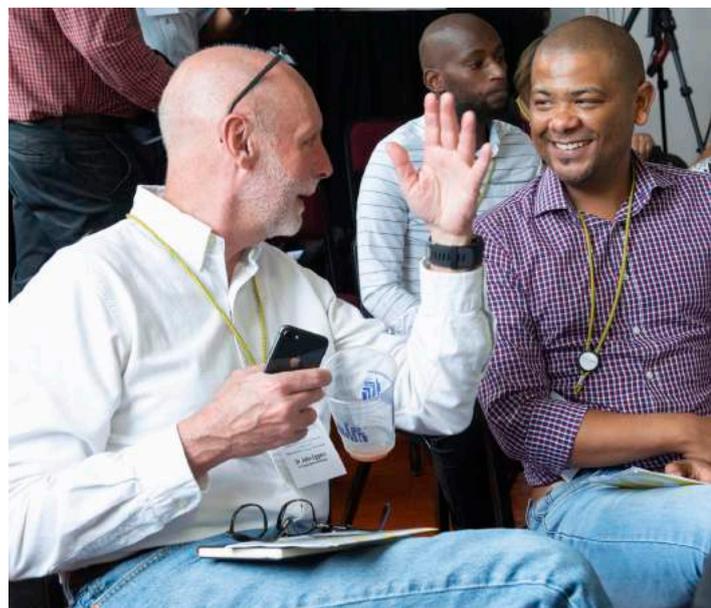
An important suggestion was also made from the floor that the project of decolonisation might be enriched by reading literature from alternative voices to the 'fashionable' figures of the times, such as Frantz Fanon and Steve Biko. Feminist literature was raised as a potentially useful resource for building theoretical tools to support the movement towards decolonised or transformed ways of being.

Another response picked up on the idea of the commodified, liberal version of Mandela, suggesting it was this figure of *Mandela*, reduced to peace and tolerance, that 'must fall'. This was linked to a similarly reduced idea of ubuntu. A critique was made of the colloquium itself, as merely a forum for the 'translation of black issues', especially when the students were busy protesting. The very discussion of *Mandela@MustFall* was seen as a contradiction considering the context.

The final comments from the panel touched again on many of the main themes of the conversation, such as decoloniality, commitment towards critical scholarship, the importance of the archive, realistic approaches to the pervasiveness of power and how it functions and reproduces itself, the need to reach across divides to build a truly inclusive future, and the contradictions of South African society. Specifically around *Mandela*, Advocate Ngcukaitobi reiterated many of his previous points, highlighting how *Mandela/Mandela* has never been a single thing, how he has been shaped into symbols both of collective resistance and nationalisation by the ANC. He argued that these multiple aspects of Mandela should be explored, such as Mandela the husband and father. For the advocate, this kind of research should not try to develop a uniform understanding of *Mandela*, but rather explore his complexities in-depth.



Advocate Tembeka Ngcukaitobi, Ms Sumaya Hendricks, Mr Pedro Mzileni, Ms Patronella Nqaba and Ms Nobubele Phuza made up the panel for a vibrant discussion on Mandela's place in the #MustFall Movement





# On 'Making' Mandela

Moderator: Prof Crain Soudien

Provocations/Animations: Prof Ciraj Rassool

Sense making: Prof Relebohile Moletsane

## Introduction

This session focused on the way *Mandela* has been constructed, with Prof Soudien as moderator, Prof Ciraj Rassool as provocateur and Prof Relebohile Moletsane as sense-maker. As Prof Soudien foregrounded in his introduction, the making of *Mandela* has to do with the making of history in South Africa. When critically considering the 'making' of *Mandela*, it is necessary to engage with the dominant narratives that have emerged around this figure and to ask questions around how these *Mandelas* have been constructed. Prof Soudien raised the important point that Nelson Mandela played a role in his own making in various ways, in ways that might be critiqued, but also in ways that reflect self-awareness and consciousness of leadership. We might look at his autobiography, *A Long Walk to Freedom*, as an example of this kind of self-authoring.

## Provocation/Animation

Prof Rassool's provocation delved in-depth into the issue of the 'making' of *Mandela* through the lens of biography. He proposed biography as a form of history production and contestation and suggested that contemporary South Africa can be characterised as a biographic order. In order to unpack these issues in relation to *Mandela*, Prof Rassool used the example of two depictions of the event of the red Mercedes S-class, built in 1990 by hand by workers at the Mercedes SA factory and presented as a gift to the recently released Nelson Mandela. Mercedes donated the parts, but the workers built the car after hours in their own time over four days.

Suggesting that we consider biography more broadly beyond traditional categories such as books like *A Long Walk to Freedom*, Prof Rassool went on to unpack two filmic depictions of the Mercedes gift. The first is a 2013 film produced by Mercedes, entitled *Labour of Love*. The second film, *Red* (2014), about Simon Gush's art installation of the same name. These two works frame the Mercedes gift in distinctly different ways, and, in doing so, not only contest what meaning is ascribed to the event, but also what meaning we make of *Mandela/Mandela*.

*Labour of Love* is a celebratory take on the event, framing Mercedes as a 'pioneer of reconciliation' and reinforcing a sense of its commitment to its workers and to South Africa. This film thus draws on Mandela's association with change and unity in order to paint itself in an uncritically positive light. Simon Gush's installation contests this corporate depiction of the Mercedes gift by including the context of the nine week strike and sleep-in by Mercedes workers which followed a few weeks after the creation of the gift. Gush's installation exhibits a replica of the car, its component parts such as doors and bonnet surrounding its deconstructed chassis as well as scaffolding and mattresses representing the sleep-in. In Prof Rassool's reading, through this installation, Gush is intervening in how the events of the Mercedes gift should be remembered, revealing a far more divided workforce than the utopian unity presented in *Labour of Love* and a far more complex set of meanings around the gift.

Alongside the contestations of biography, Prof Rassool suggested, there is biographic maintenance that needs to be performed, with political implications. He pointed out that the cultural study of Mandela has largely been limited to Mandela as symbol, neglecting the important study of the cultural politics of biography – politics that can be traced in the two films about the Mercedes gift, but also in the overtly political use of biography.

According to Prof Rassool, there have been several phases of this kind of biographic maintenance by the ANC for political purposes in relation to Mandela as he was 'repurposed' for the changing times. Prof Rassool outlined the basic stages in Mandela's biography. The first stage came after Mandela's Rivonia Trial speech in 1964, when the ANC realised they needed a charismatic leader to personify the struggle. This was the beginning of Mandela's biography, as the ANC began to use biographic tactics to create a weapon for globalising the anti-apartheid struggle. This culminated in the construction of Mandela as Father with paternal authority. When Mandela was released and the ANC voted to power, there was a biographic transition from one of desire for an absent leader to the biography of a state president. *Mandela* remained useful even into the Zuma years, where, Prof Rassool argued, he was employed to uphold the appearance of



ethical governance. Here, then, are several of the plural *Mandelas* implied in this conference's subtitle *This Time? That Mandela?*

Prof Rassool returned to Gush's installation as a means of highlighting what biography might be beyond the political purposes apparent in its use by the ANC and the branding exercise of Mercedes. Prof Rassool argued that Gush's installation can be seen as an artwork of inquiry. Through the disassembled car, it performs a post-mortem on the history of Mandela, the workers, and the strike, freeing the vehicle from the corporate world and reframing it as an artefact of labour history. Gush's work thus becomes a resource for critical social inquiry. Prof Rassool's contention was that biography, of which Gush's installation might be read as a form, should be employed as a resource for critical inquiry. Biography of Mandela, Prof Rassool argued, should not be 'captured' by the narrative of *The Long Walk to Freedom*. Mandela biography needs to become a means of social enablement, like Gush's installation, rather than a means of containment, such as *A Labour of Love* was intended to be.

In disrupting the dominant biographic narratives of Mandela, such as the self-made narrative of the triumph of the ANC, Prof Rassool suggested that the Nelson Mandela Foundation, as custodians of the Mandela archive, could, and should, be a prime site of disruption and the kind of critical resource he proposed for biography.

### Sense-making

In her sense-making, Prof Moletsane, pointed out that Mandela's biography reminds us that, to quote a classic feminist phrase, 'the personal is political'. She highlighted three important aspects of *Mandela*: his textuality, his materiality and his commodification. She also called on us to recognise the *Mandelas* amongst us.

Prof Moletsane also reminded us that decolonisation should not be a metaphor for many of the irrelevant things that the state and other institutions do. She turned to Eve Tuck who defines decolonisation as the repatriation of human dignity to those who have been dispossessed. Here lies an important reminder that the scholarly work to be done around *Mandela/Mandela* should not be overly glorified, nor separated from material necessities of any kind of decolonial project. In the same vein, she also pointed out that the modern university resembles the colonial university. Even though it is based in Africa, it has inherited the categories, hierarchies and disciplines of the colonial institution. An extension of this is the contemporary neoliberalisation of the university and the commodification of knowledge production. Prof Moletsane argued that we need to challenge the performative expectations placed on academics by universities, and that there should also be a movement towards pedagogies of desire. This is an idea from feminist thought, which moves away from damage-centred

pedagogy, which only highlights dispossession, towards the possibilities of alternative knowledges. It aims to show students how to harness their own knowledges, and to take the voices of the people who are experiencing the phenomena we are studying seriously. Here, again, was a reminder to ensure that a *Critical Mandela Studies* programme does not become an esoteric intellectual project divorced from the lives of 'ordinary' people.

### Engagement

The question of biography was engaged with from many different perspectives during the engagement with the audience. One response from the floor noted that the very nature of biography is not clear, and that we might need to consider what a writer might be doing in taking on the responsibility, or a position of judgement, by writing a biography. It was suggested that writing biography might be a process of vicariously watching another person act in order to think about ourselves and how we act in history, and confronting an ethical frontier.

Based on the idea of biography as a resource for critical inquiry, there was also a query addressed to Prof Moletsane regarding how women might lean on *Mandela* as figure of democracy and justice itself in order to mobilise for equity for women and against gender-based violence. Prof Moletsane responded by noting the obvious struggle with the biography of Mandela as a tool for feminist scholarship. However, she suggested that the silences and blindspots in Mandela's biography offer opportunities for feminists to ask: 'Why am I interested in Mandela's biography as a black South African woman?'

Prof Xolela Mangcu raised the issue of the racialised order of biography, raising a question he would pursue in more depth in the final session of the colloquium, about why so much has been written about Mandela, but no full-length biographies are by African scholars. He suggested that perhaps the problem with the story of Mandela is that they have not been told by Africans or even black people more generally, and many have been written from the UK and the US. A question was also raised about why Mandela chose to co-author his autobiography with a non-African person and suggested that a psychobiography of Mandela was perhaps necessary.

Prof Rassool expanded on some of his points about biography. He once again reiterated alternative understandings of biography, such as the idea of biography as cultural studies and the idea of social biography. He suggested that traditional biography is marked by methodological individualism, and that its empiricist and chronological attributes should be subject to critique. He noted that biography is a narrative of life that can be expressed in many different mediums, and should not just be thought of as a book. In troubling the empiricist claims of biography, he noted



that 'biography is never without autobiography', in the sense that writing the life story of another is always also a writing of the self. In a note that linked back to Prof Soudien's opening remarks about history, Prof Rassool pointed to the significance of biography in the production of history, as well as how biography has been rejected and embraced within the history of the liberation movement.

Questions were also raised about the images of Mandela chosen for Nelson Mandela University's branding. One such question was about why the image chosen for him was one of him representing tolerance rather than, more appropriately to the era of colonisation, one of him as an activist. Prof Rassool responded to this by reflecting on the visual biographies of Mandela, the fact that photographs of Mandela are a matter of commercial rights and that each image has its own history of how it is produced and transferred. He linked these issues to the fact that by taking on the name, as a Broederbond-created university, Nelson Mandela University was taking on a huge responsibility and needed to do serious work if the name-change was not simply to be crass opportunism. He argued that by taking on this name, the university would need to become a home of the critical humanities and that it was time for it to embrace public scholarship.

The issue of 'the university' also emerged more broadly. Prof Rassool noted that universities function to confer privilege onto their students who are given the trusteeship of power of their communities. One of the questions from the floor asked about infusing scholarship in our practice—a kind of scholarship of being, suggesting a breaking down of the division between scholarship and praxes—and what elements of *Mandela* could be chosen to advance this agenda for scholarship. This question picked up on Prof Moletsane's caution about discipline-based approaches to exploring issues and the focus on publication to the detriment of other kinds of engagement. Prof Moletsane suggested that we need to reclaim humanity in our communities; that this project would need to be transdisciplinary, take social issues as a starting point and that good scholarship would be one which worked with communities and helped identify workable solutions. She argued that this would be truly engaged scholarship.

There were also some thoughts about the place of the university in relation to the loss of a civil society movement (although it was noted this might be re-emerging) with the myth of the great leader taking the place of broader societal responsibility for problem-solving. The challenges of decolonising the curriculum at university were also raised, with the example of the failed project of decolonising school curricula in South Africa provided as a caution. It was also asserted that we should be careful not to underestimate the knowledge of students, and that issues of the alienation of black people in colonial universities needed to be recognised. There was a call for academics to organise around this issue and to acknowledge that all academics have baggage

due to having been trained in colonial institutions. Prof Soudien picked up on this and asked how we are going to make sure that TIMS and critical work around Mandela/Mandela is not merely going to be symbolic.

Prof Moletsane closed off the session by imagining a session on the other side of the grave happening parallel to the Mandela colloquium. She imagined that this would include Nelson Mandela, Albertina Sisulu, John Langalibalele Dube and Nokutela Dube, considering what contributions they made to the liberation of South Africa and how they impacted the post-liberation moment. Watching from the shadows was a lesser-known Xhosa poet, Nontsizi Mgqwetho, who would write a very melodic poem based on the discussion of these four struggle heroes.



Prof Crain Soudien, Prof Ciraj Rassool and Prof Relebohile Moletsane formed the panel for the discussion "On 'Making' Mandela"





# The Archive

Moderator: Prof Verne Harris

Provocations/Animations: Prof Xolela Mangcu and Mr Joel Netshitenzhe

Sense-making: Prof Carolyn Hamilton

## Introduction

This session engaged directly with the archive, a topic which had emerged as a significant aspect of the discussion of *Mandela* in both previous sessions. Prof Harris noted the gender imbalance on the panel, explaining that Dr Victoria Collis-Buthelezi had been meant to join as one of the provocateurs, but had to pull out at the last minute for personal reasons. Prof Carolyn Hamilton was thus repositioned as a provocateur alongside Prof Xolela Mangcu and Mr Joel Netshitenzhe, rather than solely as sense-maker. Prof Harris framed the discussion as being concerned with archive as metaphor as well as archives as public resources for scholarship and continuing struggles for justice. Specifically, the conversation was to engage with the Mandela Archive, 'in all its complexity, in all its fragments, in all its manifestations', as well as the range of theoretical lenses on archive employed by scholars.

## Provocations/Animations

Prof Mangcu opened the discussion through a consideration of biography as archive, thus harking back to the 'Making' *Mandela* session of the day before. In his estimation, all of the biographies on Mandela, including his own autobiography, are conceptually and methodologically flawed. He situated this within a dearth of biographies on African leaders and activists in general and written by African scholars particularly. All of this, his contribution asserted, not only impacts our collective understanding of Mandela, but is also detrimental to our understanding of South African intellectual tradition and our history more broadly. This has led him to conclude that the work of decolonisation in South Africa lies in writing biographies of the important figures of black intellectual tradition in the country and including them in curricula. For Prof Mangcu, if you properly understand black political history and modernity, then what Mandela was able to achieve no longer appears miraculous, but rather as a product of long tradition of 'tragic' black political pragmatism.

In writing such biographies, including Mandela's, Prof Mangcu insisted that we need to go back to the beginning, to the underlying hypotheses that shape the stories that are told repeatedly in biographies until they become undisputed as the

truth. He identified the flawed hypothesis at the core of most Mandela biographies as the notion that his understanding of leadership was informed by watching the chief of the village run village meetings through consensus. This, he argued, cannot be the whole explanation and excludes an account of African political modernity and Mandela's political heritage.

He situated this as emerging out of a tendency to tribalise and traditionalise African democracy that fits a particular anthropological and colonial stereotype of African society. In explicating this tendency, Prof Mangcu provided many overlooked details of the history of African political modernity in Thembuland and the Transkei, particularly as it pertained to the important institution of the Bhunga, a parliamentary-like structure for governance and decision-making, of which Mandela's father was a leader. He noted that the archive of this history exists, but that these aspects have been ignored to maintain a particular version of Mandela/*Mandela* and South African political history.

Prof Mangcu's other main contention was that the notion of Mandela as a revolutionary is flawed. He maintained that Mandela belonged to the African educated elite who saw themselves as British and whose militancy stemmed from a frustration at not being accepted as such. For him, Mandela's understanding of leadership would thus have been informed by the ideals of honour, duty and service, which would have been instilled in him at an early age as he was groomed to be an advisor to the Thembu royal family. He also saw Mandela's Victorian education at Hill Town and Fort Hare, which was funded by the Bhunga, as influences. He noted that there were many black South Africans who had alliances with colonial institutions, and that it was problematic to neglect this history. For Mandela, this history included a history of black men as voters, a long history of political activism, and many influences who were members of the Bhunga. In other words, Mandela's history is inextricable from a particular history of African political modernity. Prof Mangcu's contribution thus expanded on Prof Soudien's mention of the significance of *Mandela* as a figure of modernity.

Mr Netshitenzhe spoke after Prof Mangcu and underscored that the Mandela Archive should be thought of as a living system. He



also emphasised the importance of socio-economic and socio-political context both in terms of how we understand *Mandela/Mandela*, and the archive. He questioned whether archiving could be an entirely objective undertaking and framed *Mandela/Mandela* as a figure who came, through coincidence as much as force of character, to facilitate the birth of an epoch. For Mr Netshitenzhe, Mandela was a complex personality who could not be defined by a single moment in history or a single characteristic, and that only by looking at all of these facets could a picture of Mandela in his totality emerge. He also identified a distinction between Mandela's conscious persona and his actual personality, noting that when individuals become icons they become the collective properties of their admirers.

Extremely important to Mr Netshitenzhe's discussion was the 'constellation' of other luminaries who were Mandela's peers and influenced his development as an icon. Later in the conversation, Prof Mangcu would pick up on this term as a beautiful way for describing his own work on the various constellations Mandela would find himself part of throughout his life. Mr Netshitenzhe observed that without these influences, such as the Sisulus, the Ngoyis, Joe Slovo and others, as well as their inspiration by a noble ideal, Mandela might have followed his father into the Bhunga, become a Bantustan leader, or even a don of a mafia gang in Alexandria township. For Mr Netshitenzhe, the starting point of constructing the archive needs to be the contextualisation of the development of his social consciousness, of which his contemporaries were an integral part. He noted Mandela's personal qualities of diffidence, self-assertion and ambition, the ideas of his peer group and the socio-economic and socio-political circumstances of his time as fusing 'in splendid combination to produce the Mandela we know'. In the archive, all of these need to be recognised, especially his peers who, he argued, collectively hold the best of *Mandela* as an icon and cannot be treated as incidental to his development.

Mr Netshitenzhe also spoke of the implications of the way in which nations, or even the world, adopt an icon as an expression of the best in themselves. In this regard, he considered the aspects of Mandela that were perhaps not adequately invoked as part of global campaigns, such as his hatred of senseless wars, or his stances on protectionism, narrow nationalism and xenophobia, when these are so prominent in the global polity, all of which he suggested the archives should foreground. He also raised the issues of privileged access to archives and the dominance of subjective interpretations of Mandela by the privileged. He further suggested that the archives need to surface Mandela's innermost thoughts during the transition by considering the relationship between the generosity of spirit he is most known for and his strategic and tactical acumen in managing the delicate transition of political power at the end of apartheid.

In this discussion, Mr Netshitenzhe reopened the debate on Mandela as a revolutionary, by indicating that it needed to be continued in a different space. His response to Prof Mangcu's dismissal of the idea of Mandela as revolutionary due to his position as an educated elite with ties to colonial institutions was to caution once again against defining Mandela by a particular moment in history, and emphasising the evolution of Mandela and his thinking. The implication here being that a revolutionary figure could indeed emerge from such a background. He also tied this to the issue of ethics, noting the evolution of Mandela and the ANC's adoption of a gendered perspective and prompting us to question why this perspective was only adopted later.

This issue of ethics was also raised more directly in relation to the current prevalence of corruption and unethical behaviour within the ANC. He highlighted Mandela's clear abhorrence of this, but also suggested that it was the role of the archivist to ask whether Mandela had done enough about this at the time. This he tied to how Mandela himself balanced personal and political fundraising and the patronage that came with this. In this regard, Mr Netshitenzhe, insisted that we need a proper understanding of corruption in order to deal with it systematically.

In conclusion, Mr Netshitenzhe suggested the following about the archive: That it should drill beyond appearance and bring to the fore profound questions about the present. That it should challenge privilege, while also taking advantage of current socio-economic systems for noble ideals. That it should record and preserve the obvious, but also function as a living space to debate the paradoxes of Mandela's life. In doing so, it should bring to the surface Mandela's humanity, but also 'ruffle feathers'. The archive thus requires a complex mixture of passion and dispassion in order to portray the making of a saint who, in his own words, was a sinner who kept trying.

### Provocation & Sense-making

Prof Hamilton noted that the two provocateurs before her had provided detailed analysis, while also pulling back to ask big questions. In response to the discussion in her session, as well as to the inputs from the day before, she suggested that there were three horizons in view of thinking about *Mandela/Mandela* emerging from the overall discussion.

The first horizon is Mandela, the man, in close-up, or the making of the man and how he makes the world around him. As a man, an ordinary person, he is the object of critical scrutiny and therefore carries the extraordinary burden of history and his times. The second horizon pulls back to look at *Mandela* as phenomenon and figure. She noted that this figure/phenomenon, like the man, also has a biography and archive of its own and is thus a cultural product. Therefore, we should investigate the work that



the figure/phenomenon of *Mandela* is doing in contemporary social and political life. This biography is both shaping the world, and being changed by the world. Finally, the third horizon is the 'Archive of Possibilities' in which *Mandela* is regarded as a set of possibilities, but ones that would also carry certain limitations where decolonial discussions come to bear.

In talking about the limitations of the archive, she identified that the archive also includes those things that have shaped each of us and how this constitutes our knowledge. This, she argued, is in some sense a deep limitation. Another limit is the size of the archive itself, especially if the archive is too limited to provide necessary answers. Turning to Advocate Ngcukaitobi's contribution of the day before, she highlighted the importance of going into the archive that does exist and asking new questions of material that has been ignored. She also asked the question of reconstructing or refiguring the archive – what is included or excluded and what the circumstances of this inclusion or exclusion might be. These, she posited, were the questions on the broad horizon of thinking about Mandela and the archive – questions about the inherited archive and about knowledge itself.

Prof Hamilton challenged the mantra of the archive that it should never be interfered with, stating this this was not actually true, because the archive shapes sets of possibilities and is constantly being shaped by various forces. She thus suggested that the Mandela archive becomes a very engaging prospect as a point of contestation around the very ideas of the nature of archive itself. Here, she was arguing that this particular archive's very over-determination was what gave it this potential, but that it required a responsibility and role of the Mandela archive to question the archive and to champion access to, and the reconstruction of, archive. These questions of *Mandela/Mandela*, like the decolonial project, are fully imbricated in the political.

### Engagement

A contestation emerged during the engagement, as Mr Mzileni challenged Prof Mangcu's assertion that Mandela was a black 'elite'. He argued that although Mandela and his family have been labelled as such by white historians, this is an inaccurate term for black people who have been completely dispossessed, including economically, culturally and intellectually, through colonialism and apartheid. Prof Mangcu responded by saying that it is painful to see how little African history we actually know and that this has ramifications for the contemporary student movements. He noted that he has been calling on the students to pay attention to black South African intellectual history and that this call has been ignored. He tied this to the importance of humility in scholarship, and that before one makes any declarative statement, one should leave room for the possibility that the archive might reveal that you are wrong.

Prof Soudien agreed with Prof Mangcu's argument about the existence of a black elite, speaking of it in a Foucauldian sense. Mr Netshitenzhe also responded to Mr Mzileni's concern about the term 'elites', arguing that there is nothing shameful about being an 'elite'. In fact, he noted that many leaders of revolutionary movements have come out of this class, and that what is important is whether the elites come to understand their socio-economic contexts and are willing to fight to change them if they are unjust. Both Prof Soudien and Mr Netshitenzhe also foregrounded the idea that what is generally seen as a white or Western inheritance is in fact our collective inheritance, framed as white by a colonial history. Mr Netshitenzhe pointed specifically to ideas about the efficiency and professionalism of the bureaucracy of the modern state, arguing that this was not something that came out of the West, but rather originated in the East, in countries such as China.

Later, Prof Mangcu raised questions about the history of South African intellectual traditions and important historical figures and how they relate to contemporary understandings of decolonisation, which he argued were largely drawn from the work of the likes of Fanon and Ngūgī wa Thiong'o. He was interested in how, in the contemporary political moment, we would conceptualise the early black South African intellectuals who had rights to vote, saw themselves as part as the colonial system and aspired towards a British identity. He argued that it was the disenfranchisement of this 'elite' in 1936 that radicalised the political movement. He wanted to know whether we would see them as colonial or decolonial subjects and whether we would be comfortable characterising our ancestors as 'sell outs' for their aspirations. Again, he reiterated the importance of doing research on this history, stating that if the student movement was to talk about Biko and Sobukwe, they would need to do what they did, which included the kind of research he was talking about.

Ms Hendricks also contributed from the floor with a call to think about the calibre of students the university and the programme of TIMS wants to create and to consider how to instil the importance of the role of the archive and the research of black history for the process of decolonisation. She also noted that the sole focus on *Mandela/Mandela* was discomfiting from a feminist perspective and that there was a need to conceptualise the women who played an influential role in our history alongside Mandela, thus drawing on the idea of the constellation but from a gendered perspective. She suggested that *Mandela/Mandela* could inspire us to explore the neglected stories of women who were integral parts of the struggle.

Mr Mzileni also addressed the issue of ethical leadership that Mr Netshitenzhe raised. Specifically, he wanted to know about Mandela's role in the corruption surrounding the arms deal and the shift from a reconstruction and development programme to the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) policy



implemented by Mandela in 1996. He suggested that Mandela had been immune from critical scrutiny, especially from within the factional politics of the ANC, and that this era of his leadership requires critical scrutiny. Mr Netshitenzhe responded by saying that there was a need to study the various documents set up to manage the procurement process of the arms deal, and arguing that the corruption that did occur was largely part of the secondary rather than primary contracting process and was far removed from Mandela's involvement. He also suggested that we needed to question whether we fully understand the circumstances under which GEAR was introduced, which he framed as a self-imposed structural adjustment programme intended to address South Africa's macro-economic woes at the time. He claimed that it was in fact successful, and that we have been in a post-GEAR period since 2001. Mr Netshitenzhe asserted that the archivist cannot avoid being a public intellectual and should take up the responsibility of surfacing relevant issues from the archive and making an input into the current discourse. He suggested that we need to think about what networks an archivist needs to build in order to make this contribution and that Nelson Mandela University could play a role in this.

Prof Rassool picked up on the duality of the archive as a service, on the one hand, and as an idea, concept or epistemology, on the other hand. He suggested that we might think of 'archivalities'. He wanted to trouble the archival impetus of governmentality, institutionalisation and regulation that tends to come with archive as service. This impetus, he argued, tends to impose limits and constrain the horizon of possibilities. He asked how, when thinking through archivalities and trying to imagine a different archive, we prevent governmentality from coming to dominate the discussion. He also argued that there is a relationship between the government of persons and things (such as the archive) and the government of persons (such as the possibilities for students). He wondered how a Mandela archive conceptualised beyond the governmental might avail the widest horizon of possibilities.

Prof Hamilton's contribution also highlighted the issue of institutionalisation and governmentality of the archive, suggesting that archivists need to understand the limits of institutionalised record, which is set up in the interests of its convenors, as well as where other places of record might be and how to create other possibilities of archive—where anyone can convene materials—and how this process would create a multiplicity of archives, but that this virtual archive would also be mediated. She noted that certain archives are valorised at certain times, then challenged, and other archives brought to the fore. She framed this process of archive as working as a spiral across time, a punctuated process, and continual rhythm of struggle. Archive, she argued, is both shaped by and continues to shape intellectual practice.



Prof Carolyn Hamilton, Prof Xolela Mangcu, Prof Verne Harris and Mr Joel Netshitenzhe were the panel for the colloquium's most contentious session yet, on 'The Archive'



# What Now?

Presented by: Prof André Keet, Prof Crain Soudien and Prof Verne Harris

The presenters opened the floor for the identification of key themes, discussion points that had emerged and suggestions for how to move the TIMS project forward. Some significant issues that emerged or were reinforced were: Mandela as part of a constellation rather than being understood as simply an exceptional individual; the 'vocation' of *Mandela*; *Mandela* as a social phenomenon; *Mandela* as a figure who raises big philosophical and spiritual questions; the metaphysical or 'quantum' *Mandela*; the oral tradition in relation to the construction of history; questions and difficulties around *Mandela* and decoloniality; woundedness; critique of the modern university and the challenges of changing it; and issues of social elitism.

A number of concrete suggestions were also made for TIMS. One broad suggestion came from Ambassador January-Bardill, that in the implementation of TIMS, the circle brought together at the colloquium should be broadened to include more university community stakeholders. This was supplemented by concerns from the floor about how to locate the project within the current socio-economic context of South Africa, and how to link it to already-existing decolonial projects. Similarly to Ambassador January-Bardill, who, as Chair of Council, pledged their full support, Prof Harris noted that the Nelson Mandela Foundation would provide strong support for TIMS. However, he stated that they would not take up a gate-keeping role. Their support would include access to the archive, and he also proposed a kind of 'banditry' in the archive in order to get access to important records to investigate some of the controversial topics around Mandela.

Like Ambassador January-Bardill, Prof Mangcu saw the need for engagement with the broader community. He proposed that TIMS should incorporate a programme around biographies on African leadership which should function to encourage more writing by African scholars. It was these conversations around leadership that he asserted should be part of a broader community, both inside and outside the university, including the youth. The historiographic and biographic research of TIMS, he argued, should be done on a systematic basis.

Prof Keet stressed that TIMS should contribute to the renewal of the humanities and the repurposing of the university. He also

emphasised the importance of the transdisciplinary aspect of the institute. Prof Moletsane mentioned the Vice-Chancellor's mention of gender and women's studies and asked how the project would consider transdisciplinary and collaborative work with these particular fields. Prof Rassool also highlighted TIMS's role in the rethinking of the humanities. Furthermore, he focused on the location of TIMS and *Critical Mandela Studies* in this university and should be grounded in the regional identity of the Eastern Cape. He suggested that *Critical Mandela Studies* should ask 1) ethical questions, 2) social questions and 3) historical questions.

Prof Hamilton pointed to the contestations around *Mandela/Mandela* and how that creates a level of worry for any institution that bears the name of Mandela. She noted that it was clear from the discussions during the colloquium there were many 'burning' issues. Her suggestion was that it was necessary for TIMS to invest time and effort into investigating the difficulties and contestations around Mandela in order to ensure that he was properly historicized and understood. Prof Soudien built on Prof Hamilton's observations, by proposing that building TIMS required starting from a principled basis, and with questions about the nature of the university. He argued that two important fundamentals of a university should be a lack of fear about controversy and a rejection of the dogmatic. In considering the university and doing something fundamentally different in the university and with TIMS, we would need to be both experimental and pragmatic.

Mr Hatang highlighted the importance of doing things differently. He insisted on the importance of not sacrificing the intellectual agenda for 'lazy sloganeering'. He also attached the project to the grand challenges of society, such as the violence and woundedness embedded in South African society, asking how we could do something new that could touch the lives of many people beyond the Eastern Cape.

**He invoked Mandela as the 'Ancestor of Hope' and Winnie Mandela as the 'Ancestor of Active Citizenship', calling on us to take up these legacies in the project going forward.**





# Mandela & Art

Mandela was also engaged through the medium of art through two art exhibitions. These were the we are present exhibition, and the [Provoke/Ukuchukumisa/Daag-Uit] exhibition, both in collaboration with, and response to, the colloquium. Through the interaction between the colloquium conversations and these exhibitions, the question of transdisciplinarity and ways of knowing were raised in profound ways.

The launch of the [Provoke/Ukuchukumisa/Daag-Uit] exhibition engaged Mandela/Mandela through food, song and dance, and even fashion. Notably, the food was prepared by Ms Xoliswa Ndoiyi, Mandela's chef during his presidency and beyond, who was also the guest speaker. She provided a personal perspective of Mandela as a man who loved home-cooked food and had both a deep humility and great sense of humour. This added a personal and intimate take on Mandela, a reminder of the human being behind the social figure of justice, the president, the sometimes revolutionary, and the commodified embodiment of the 'rainbow nation'.

## we are present

The Department of Visual Arts, the recently reconfigured creative product of a merger of three former discipline specific departments, is presenting its very first combined staff and postgraduate student show at the university's Art Gallery on the Bird Street Campus, as a contribution to the event programme for the Mandela Colloquium. The key conceptual thematic of the exhibition is informed by the colloquium's theme – *Dalibhunga*. Our collective of designers, photographers, sculptors, printmakers, painters and ceramists make a visual contribution to the scholarly dialogue of what it means to us to be at Mandela, and of Mandela at this time. This is a timeous opportunity for visual artists to foreground the contribution that the practice-based disciplines can make to knowledge creation at this time of epistemic reconsideration and transformation.

The work on display reflects who we are, at this point on a journey of co-creation in our new department.

It serves as a point of reference to us as we continue necessary disciplinary conversations about what it means to be in the critical space of 'making' at this time, when key debates in South African Visual Art are centred on the incisive disrupting and de-centering of the dominant discourses, and the shifting of structures. As befits that moment, the art on the show is varied – displayed alongside one another are explorations of materiality and expressions of socio-political consciousness; whilst adjacent are works that are the product of fluid iterations of rigorous theoretical engagement and studio practice, and works produced by makers driven by a purist desire to create beautiful, magical forms.

## [Provoke/Ukuchukumisa/Daag-Uit]

As the world continues to commemorate Nelson Mandela and his centenary, we are impelled, as an institution, to take pride and responsibility in the legacy of our institutional name – Nelson Mandela University. In alignment with the *Dalibhunga: This Time? That Mandela?* colloquium, hosted by the institution, the Archives and Exhibition Centre presents the [Provoke/Ukuchukumisa/Daag-Uit] Exhibition as part of Mandela's Centenary Celebrations. This exhibition speaks to the multitude of perceptions, images and discourses associated with the name Nelson Mandela, across time and space. The themes of this exhibition opportune interrogation, reflection and redefinition of the Mandela name and legacy as a strategic inheritance and responsibility.

we are present



Vulindlela Nyoni, *Yenza into ephelayo*  
Copper, inked mezzotint plate



Kader Abdulla, *The rest of me*  
Mixed media



Jeffrey Allan, *Unfinished*  
Laminated wood



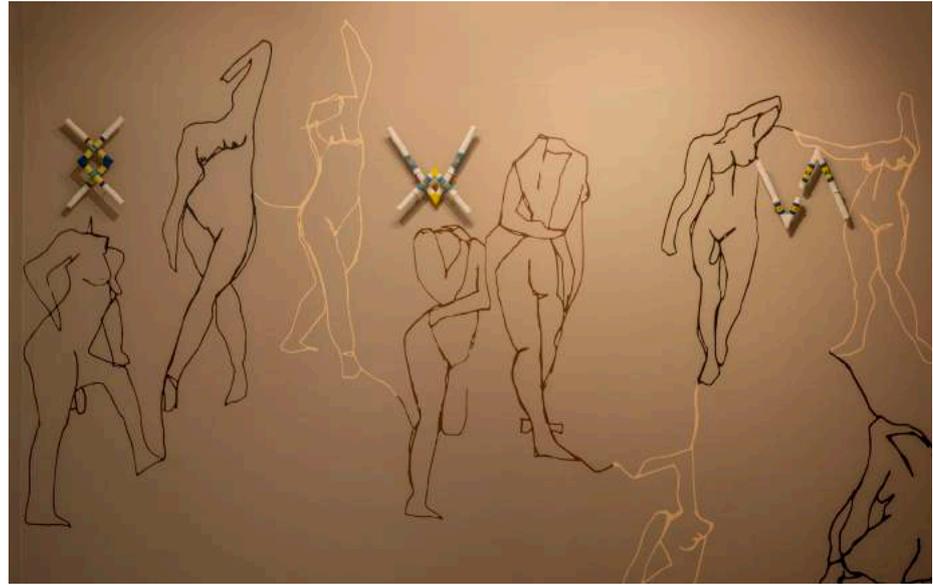
Angel Mey, *Creator of Worlds*  
Paper, wire



Jonathan van der Walt, *The Red Carpet* (detail)  
Bronze, heat-resistant foundry gloves, leather



WO IMAN IDELA  
Christelle Grobler, Mandela and Feminism



COMPL [yx]  
Nandipha Ntengenyana, Mandela and Gender



Colonisable and Exploitable: Political Geography of Africa since the Colonial Scramble  
Savo Heleta and Sakhile Phiri, Mandela and Africa



Mortal, Fallible  
Nehemiah Latolla, Mandela and Fashion



Mandela Sculpture  
Christelle Grobler, Mandela and Animism





# Key Themes

The idea of a *Critical Mandela Studies* programme tied to the TIMS proposal has received substantive, yet critical, support, as well as intellectual justification across the panels and contributions. Despite the complexities that will inevitably tag this 'project', participants consider it a worthwhile differentiator within the higher education space given the gap in scholarship and academic programming on this score.

A number of key thematic areas emerged from the colloquium. Some of these were explored in-depth, while others emerged tangentially from the main discussions. All of them offer rich veins of inquiry for a Critical Mandela Studies located in TIMS. They can be summarised as follows:

## **Mandela, feminisms and intersectionality**

This theme emerged throughout the colloquium, although it was not the subject of any specific panel. It emerged in relation to Mandela's own history in relation to gender issues and treatment of women, as well as a more general discomfort expressed by various contributors and attendees about the sole focus on Mandela/*Mandela* obscuring histories of important women in South Africa's struggle history. There were concrete suggestions made that Mandela/*Mandela* should inspire us to do research on these female figures.

## **Mandela, social justice and 'the university'**

This theme was an essential one to the colloquium, tied specifically to the Vice-Chancellor's characterisation of Nelson Mandela University as a university in service of society and the framing of *Mandela* as a social figure of justice. In the *Mandela@MustFall* session, this was brought into conversation with the student movement. It also came up in all the discussions during the colloquium through broad questions about the purpose of the university more broadly.

## **Mandela, transformation and decoloniality**

This theme was closely tied to the previous theme of social justice and 'the university', especially the issue of decolonising the

curriculum. There were also contestations around what *Mandela/Mandela* might mean for decolonial movements, and what decolonisation should look like in South African scholarship. It was asserted that an important research area under this theme would be black South African intellectual and activist tradition.

## **Mandela, knowledge production and 'the sciences'**

*Critical Mandela Studies* was situated as a project within the humanities, and its revitalisation. The question of disciplines, and their limitations, was also raised, with transdisciplinarity being put forward as essential in unpacking *Mandela*.

## **Mandela, modernity, auto/biography and history**

Mandela's biography and history was framed as a way to think through the history of South Africa's modernity. Biography was a particularly important theme in the colloquium, dealt with in-depth in the 'On Making *Mandela*' session. Questions about the nature of biography were raised, critique of the methodological and conceptual underpinnings of the main biographies of *Mandela* was put forward, it was asserted the biography always contained autobiography, and biography was seen as a means of critical inquiry.

## **Mandela, the 'revolutionary'**

This theme was a particularly contentious one. Opposing views on this emerged, from the assertion of *Mandela* as the ultimate revolutionary, to the argument that *Mandela* was in fact an elite from a background of colonial complicity. This contention was nuanced by discussions of the evolution of *Mandela*'s thinking, distinctions between *Mandela* as activist and president, and the insistence of considering *Mandela* within his socio-economic context and within a constellation of other luminaries.

## **Mandela, context, critique, contestations and 'the archive'**

The issues of context, critique and contestation constantly returned to the theme of 'the archive', delved into in the final session. The overdetermination of the *Mandela* archive was framed as a



moment of possibility for rethinking archive more broadly, both as service and idea. Questions about the limitations and possibilities of archive were raised. The call was continually raised to go back to the archive in order to address the contestations around Mandela, refine critical *Mandela* scholarship and explicate his context.

#### **Mandela, and the arts**

This theme was largely implicit, raised by the colloquium's situation within the art gallery amidst the we are present exhibition and in collaboration with the *[Provoke/Ukuchukumisa/Daag-Uit]* exhibition. Prof Rassool's analysis of an art installation in his discussion and the issue of the corporate branding of Nelson Mandela University also opened up ideas in relation to this theme.

#### **Mandela, political economy and neoliberalisms**

This theme emerged in relation to the neoliberal university, Mandela's own involvement as president in South Africa's economy, and the neoliberal commodification of his presidential image. Less directly, concerns about individualistic notions of biography, such as ignoring the constellation of people around Mandela, also spoke to neoliberal discourse.



# Acknowledgements

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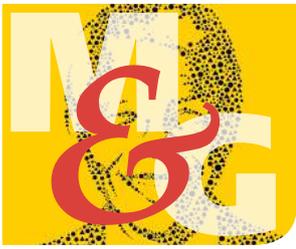
The Department of Visual Arts

The Arts, Culture & Heritage Unit

The Communication & Stakeholder Liaison (CSL)

The Chair for Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation (*CriSHET*)





## Unique colloquium introduces Mandela studies at Nelson Mandela University

### What does it mean to be a university named after Nelson Mandela?

Since its name changed two years ago, Nelson Mandela University has been exploring its role as the only university in the world that carries Madiba's name, and the enormous responsibility that goes with this. This sparked an idea to introduce Critical Mandela Studies at the university — studies where Mandela, as a figure of social justice, becomes the lens through which the huge challenges of our time can be viewed, grappled with and understood, and ultimately pave the way towards new and better ways to solve them. The idea of Critical Mandela Studies was the focus of the Dalibhunga: This time? That Mandela? colloquium, held recently at Nelson Mandela University.

Nicky Willemse

When Nelson Mandela University dropped "Metropolitan" from its name in 2017, it was no longer named after a city, but the person, Nelson Mandela, the global icon for social justice.

And there was a huge responsibility that went with that, a point emphasised by then Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa at the official ceremony marking the name change, who said: "The decision to become Nelson Mandela University is not simply an exercise in corporate rebranding. It is a statement of intent. It is a statement of values ... It makes a statement about justice, rehabilitation and reconciliation."

As the university grappled with how it would meet this responsibility, the idea of a programme of Critical Mandela Studies housed within a Transdisciplinary Institute of Mandela Studies (TIMS) was born. It would be much more than studying the person, but rather using the social figure of Mandela to make sense of the greatest challenges of our time — and then using this understanding to drive meaningful, practical solutions.

"These challenges are well known, with poverty, inequality and discrimination chief among them. We need new interpretive schemes and practices to challenge them. This is the task of the university," said Nelson Mandela University Vice Chancellor Sibongile Muthwa at the opening address of the colloquium run in partnership with the Nelson Mandela Foundation and the



Sharing their ideas around the Transdisciplinary Institute of Mandela Studies (Tims) are (from left) Human Sciences Research Council chief executive Crain Soudien, Nelson Mandela University's Chair for Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation (CriSHET) Andre Keet, and Nelson Mandela Foundation's director of archive and dialogue Verne Harris. Photo: Supplied

Human Sciences Research Council.

Held from March 6 to 8, the colloquium brought together Mandela scholars from across the country and abroad to debate and discuss what Critical Mandela Studies should look like, and how TIMS could be framed.

"Our university should be known as a foremost academic expression of the Mandela legacy, with practical import and real-life programmes that make a difference to ordinary people," said Muthwa.

#### The journey towards TIMS

"Though many academic entities and outfits are named after Nelson Mandela, no programme on Mandela Studies yet exists, as far as we can tell. Nor is there an outfit like TIMS anywhere in the world," said André Keet, Chair for Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation (CriSHET) at Nelson Mandela University.

The idea of a Mandela Studies programme is the result of the university's reflections on how best it can respond to its name-change and at the same time offer something distinct and productive. These reflections were led by Muthwa.

"Through TIMS, we want to develop Mandela scholars. There are many people doing great work in isolation, but not in a programme that will bring them together. That's the uniqueness of TIMS ... We want to attract people who have a deep sense of the issues Nelson Mandela would have been interested in, and to study them at a post-graduate level," said Keet.

Once the idea had taken shape within the university space, Keet contacted Crain Soudien, Chief Executive of the Human Sciences Research Council, and Verne Harris, Director of Archive and Dialogue at the Nelson Mandela Foundation, to establish whether it was "feasible and worthwhile, and to check if it had been tried in another space," Keet explained.

"Both agreed it was a unique proposition." Nelson Mandela Foundation Chief Executive Sello Hatang supported it too — and it was decided the three organisations would work together to support it, not as gatekeepers, but as friends and collaborators, according to Keet.

Together, they developed a proposal, and then hosted the March colloquium, to debate and test their initial proposal and grow the framework for TIMS, which will likely be developed and, after all the internal processes have been followed, will be launched over the next 18 months.

The initial TIMS proposal started with a question: what are the most profound

questions of our age, our time, for Nelson Mandela University?

It went on to describe the general feeling that current practices and thinking had "reached their limits" to try and address these, and that these issues required a "deep rethinking and renewal, a kind of intellectual [and practical] sharpness ... that can reanimate the promise of democracy, rights, civic service and public leadership."

It is a way of gearing up Nelson Mandela University and other universities to be true agents of social change, both within the university space and outside of it.

Far from being an academic study about Mandela, the man, it is rather the intellectual exploration of Mandela as a "figure of justice to generate new [practices] for engaging social injustices" — and to move this idea beyond Mandela.

TIMS will address the issues presented in Muthwa's inaugural address as vice chancellor in 2017, shortly after the university's name changed, which included social justice; poverty, inequality and unemployment; public transformative leadership; university transformation; non-racism, equality, human rights and democracy; engagement between university, community and society; the memory and legacy of Mandela; the renewal of academy and curriculum; humanising pedagogy [where it is recognised that knowledge also comes from teachers and learners, and should not just be imposed on them]; trans-disciplinarity [the commons between the sciences and humanities]; revitalising the humanities; and student-centrism.

The proposal continued: "In essence, its key focus is to contribute to the tasks set out in the inaugural address in the following ways: [expanding] understanding, pushing forward the frontiers of knowledge in all sciences to cultivate humanity, and contributing to the wellbeing of our city, our province, our nation, our continent and our world."

And it ended with the notion that a whole range of discussions needed to inform the proposal further, which was one of the purposes of the colloquium.

#### Where to next for TIMS?

At the end of the Dalibhunga: This time? That Mandela? colloquium, a team working through Nelson Mandela University's Chair for Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation (CriSHET), headed by Keet, compiled a draft report with some of the initial findings that would frame the establishment of a Transdisciplinary Institute for Mandela Studies (TIMS) at the university.

The idea of TIMS was also presented to

and discussed by the university council and will now go through the formal university structures.

In addition to providing short summaries of each of the sessions at the colloquium, CriSHET's draft report provided a broad overview of the entire colloquium, stating that the idea of a Critical Mandela Studies programme tied to the TIMS proposal had received "substantive, yet critical, support as well as intellectual justification across the panels and contributions". And, though setting up the programme and outfit would not be easy, participants felt it would indeed be worthwhile, as nothing like this has yet been tried.

"Participants agreed on the need to develop a Critical Mandela Studies Programme as a strategic humanities project that converses with the richness of African intellectual traditions and redraws the frontiers between the sciences and humanities. The university will continue working with its partners and the public to make this happen," said Keet.

#### The identified themes to be explored through TIMS include:

- Mandela, feminism and intersectionality
- Mandela, social justice and "the university"
- Mandela, transformation and decoloniality
- Mandela, knowledge production and "the sciences"
- Mandela, modernity, auto/biography and history
- Mandela, the revolutionary
- Mandela, context, critique, contestations and "the archive"
- Mandela and the arts
- Mandela, political economy and neoliberalisms

#### Colloquium critique: Lack of a feminist lens

One of the criticisms that emerged from the colloquium was the absence of a feminist viewpoint in the discussions of Mandela.

The final summary of the colloquium notes that the panels were dominated by men and that a "discomfort" had been expressed, both in and outside of the sessions, that "the gendered aspects and problematics of Mandela as a patriarchal figure of authority" had not been adequately addressed at the colloquium.

Keet said a future colloquium was already being planned on Mandela, feminism and intersectionality.

Harris said existing Mandela scholarship was a space "dominated by white male voices — and most of those voices come from outside the country" with the dominant narrative repeated again and again.

"A programme on Critical Mandela Studies needs to include feminist readings of Nelson Mandela," added Keet.

#### An invitation for others to join the conversation

The general public and other academic institutions are invited to provide their insights and thoughts around the framing of a Critical Mandela Studies Programme and the Transdisciplinary Institute of Mandela Studies (TIMS) at Nelson Mandela University.

Keet said: "We have left the idea of TIMS very open as part of a journey to co-travel and co-create with communities, students, academics and Mandela scholars."

"We hope to have the framework for TIMS in place by the end of June," he said.

TIMS will likely be up and running at the university by the end of 2020.

Anybody who would like to offer further ideas or suggestions around TIMS can contact Keet at: [tims@mandela.ac.za](mailto:tims@mandela.ac.za)

## Nelson Mandela University

### Mandela colloquium:

# A conversation to frame Critical Mandela Studies

Mandela the social figure of justice requires greater 'excavation'

Nicky Willemse

The colloquium Dalibhunga: This time? That Mandela? — held from March 6 to 8 at Nelson Mandela University (NMU) — was essentially a conversation to explore, debate and discuss what the proposed Transdisciplinary Institute for Mandela Studies (TIMS) could look like, including the main themes that

should be explored within it.

The name "Dalibhunga" was the name Mandela was given after undergoing initiation, meaning "creator of the council" or "convenor of the dialogue". It was chosen for the colloquium as it was the bringing together of a community of scholars and practitioners to debate and discuss Mandela as a social figure, and how the formulation of a Critical Mandela Studies programme could play a meaningful and prac-

tical role concerning the challenges of time.

At the opening of the colloquium, NMU vice chancellor Professor Sibongile Muthwa said the colloquium made a distinction between Mandela the person, whose life has been well-documented with the "same basic narratives, and the same well-known images" reproduced again and again, and Mandela the social figure of justice, both celebrated and criticised, who requires greater "excavation".

"Such a reading of Mandela is scant or non-existent." And it is an area of exploration in which NMU can take the lead by promoting Mandela studies.

"Our university is, first and foremost, a university; and it has to execute its mandates as part of a public function, across the sciences, knowledge fields and in service of society. It does so against the backdrop of the grand challenges of our time, the challenges that Mandela engaged with almost his entire life.

"They are well known, with poverty, inequality and discrimination chief among them. We need new interpretive schemes and practices to challenge them. This is the task of the university.

"Our university should be known as a foremost academic expression of the Mandela legacy, with practical import and real-life programmes that make a difference to ordinary people.

"[We want] to move the very idea of justice beyond Mandela, and I would dare to say, beyond Mandela."

She said there was a "staleness" in the higher education sector about how it approached social justice.

"All universities, it seems, are now social-justice oriented and they throw around the concepts of transformation, diversity, inclusivity, decolonisation, curriculum renewal and so on, in their 'branding' and 'public relations' exercises.

"Nelson Mandela University, at this time, under our leadership, must reject this approach. Our work must be the university's branding. It must be able to speak for itself."

She said one of the ways in which the university intended to become a "revitalising academic expression of Mandela" was through the establishment of TIMS.

"This colloquium is a warm invitation to all of you to help us think, do and co-travel this journey with us. We have left open both the idea and form of TIMS, so that it can emerge in our discussions with each other. Critical openness should be the key principle of TIMS, to designate the idea of the 'critical' in Mandela Studies itself.

"Ultimately, TIMS may be one of the outfits that works in ways that puts the question of what the university is for firmly on the table. To rethink, in deep ways, the purposes of the university endeavour."

Nelson Mandela Foundation chief executive Sello Hatang said: "The weight of the name Nelson Mandela is a heavy one for any institution to bear.

"Along with the honour and the privilege, that name brings responsibility and complexity and there's no blue print for getting it right. But if we are to get it right, then a commitment to transformation is of fundamental importance."

As part of its focus on social justice, he said the university should provide a transformative environment for students shaped by "a broken society".

"If we are to talk about transformation, it starts there: universities must begin to build a person who can come out of [the university] better than how they came in. They need to look at how we can build children coming out of violent societies, who are now practitioners of violence, having normalised abnormal behaviour."

He continued: "Our real challenge is how to support the fundamental transformation of our society ... It has become clear that the very future of the human project depends on our capacity to do differently. And to do differently, we have to think transformationally. It's a test of our imagination.

"Here in South Africa, we have to reimagine constitutionalism as an instrument of transformation and wrestle it back from those who

wield it as a liberal weapon to protect privilege, power and property. Justice itself must be reimagined — it has to be about more than just protecting rights — I would argue that it is about a transformational hospitality to the other."

"We owe it to Madiba both to think differently and to do differently. Institutionally, we owe it to Madiba to be agents of change."

HSRC chief executive Crain Soudien said an academic focus on Mandela's legacy was not new, but that this colloquium was different in that it was "building a scholarly project around the significance of Tata Madiba".

"It's about engaged scholarship [which is described by Ernest Boyer, who coined the term] as teaching and research that connects the rich resources of the university to our most pressing social, civic and ethical problems.

"The idea of being engaged is about giving the university or the research community a sense of how it might imagine itself differently in the world to the traditional ivory tower image that most people have of the university, and it's about giving it a sense of urgency.

"It's about how you work those things out. You work with those things that make a university distinctive, those things that are the inescapable attributes of a university, things such as: the deliberate and the liberative cultivation of the mind, the preoccupation with critical thinking, the deep abiding interest of a university operating at its best in how life works and trying to understand it, the interest in explaining all kinds of phenomena.

"It's about asking how you take all of these very distinctive and unquestionably specialist things, which make the university an unquestionably [specialist space] ... How do you take this space of the elites, and ... turn towards and focus on the problems of the world?"

He said there was a lot of interest in the world in how a "South African version of a university can provide an example to the rest of the world, of how a university ought to be and could be."

He said TIMS presented a "real opportunity here ... but we need to acknowledge that working with ... the figure of Mr Mandela, is going to be difficult, simply because Mr Mandela lends himself to these extreme forms of expression which land up in either disrespect, or this romantic explanation of what Mr Mandela is all about."

"We've got to ask how you take the idea of Mandela and use it to understand a whole lot of problems in front of us. How do we use that as a filter?"

He said it was similar to the traditional scholarship of Gandhi.

"The Gandhi tradition is a deeply productive tradition. It's full of debate, it's characterised by contestation with multiple positions, but it's very productive because it brings many vantage points, through this figure of Gandhi, to understand how you come to make sense of an issue, like climate change, for example, like literacy, like the work we need to be doing with gene modification, all of these questions. So we need to be asking how Mr Mandela helps us, as a prism, to get to those kinds of complexities.

"I'm very excited about what we've embarked upon here, and I'm excited because we're doing it together [with NMU and Nelson Mandela Foundation], because we're not going to solve these problems by ourselves."

"To grapple with the idea of Mandela is to open up the infinite possibilities of justice," said Professor André Keet, colloquium organiser and chair of Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation at Nelson Mandela University.

Themes that were explored and debated at the colloquium by well-known Mandela scholars, university staff and postgraduate students included rights, democracy and justice; cultural memory and the politics of the present; inheritance, legacy and commemoration; and representation and signification. These came through in three carefully crafted sessions: Mandela@MustFall; the "making" of Mandela; and "The Archive". [Deeper explorations of each of these sessions are included within this supplement.]

There were also two art exhibitions that explored, through art and music, the idea of Mandela as a figure of justice.



## Mandela's 'ghost' helps create better future for university and society

Madiba's time on Robben Island sharpened his understanding of justice and human dignity

Nicky Willemse

In her opening speech at the Dalibhunga: This time? That Mandela? colloquium, which ran from March 6 to 8, Nelson Mandela University vice chancellor Sibongile Muthwa said the university and society needed to be "haunted" by Mandela the social figure, as a means of pulling together past and present, to create a new and better future.

"[Mandela] haunts us in our endeavours to re-imagine and reclaim the university," she said, steps that were necessary to transform the university and its relationship to society, and approach differently the problems society faces.

Citing the work of Elleke Boehmer, a professor of world literature in English at the University of Oxford and author of the book *Nelson Mandela: A brief insight*, Muthwa said Mandela had become a "living ghost" during his years on Robben Island, separated from real, ordinary life — but this had allowed him to stand back and look at the entire struggle movement from a distance, sharpening his understanding of justice and human dignity.

"In a sense, the living ghost of Mandela during the prison years paved the way for Mandela, the ghost [the figure of social justice] after his death."

She said thinking of Mandela through the lens of "haunting" was a productive exercise that may lead to a better future.

"Thinking of Mandela in this way, through the lens of haunting, is also a means of coming to know differently. It is part of the necessary transformative labour surrounding how we get to know. It is this labour that will allow us to transform our relationship to society.

"Here then is a suggestion of the potential power that resides in calling on the social figure of Mandela to create anew the university's social justice intentions, and to make transformational and transformative leadership [the] standard orientation within the university."

She said the "haunting" of the institution required that the university was drawn into a constant process of engagement with traces of the past "but also with the future imagined at the moment of transition. Mandela is inextricably entwined with both this past and this future".

She went on to say: "The belief in the realisation of this [better] future has largely been lost, along with a global loss of faith in democratic institutions and their promises of a more equal society. It is the social figure of Mandela, his ghost, who tells us that this future is not lost ... this future is haunting us, and we have to respond.

"It is fitting that we consider Mandela as a figure who draws together past, present and future in a productive way, to hear these murmurs [of that which has been lost in the past, but the suggestion of which we still carry with us], to import them into the present and project them into the future."

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# Nelson Mandela University

## Why the HSRC and NMF came on board to support TIMS

Nicky Willemse

There are many reasons why the Nelson Mandela Foundation and the Human Sciences Research Council agreed to come on board with Nelson Mandela University to jointly establish the new Transdisciplinary Institute of Mandela Studies (TIMS) at the university.

Nelson Mandela Foundation's Director of Archive and Dialogue, Verne Harris, said the university was one of around 60 institutions worldwide authorised to carry Madiba's name but "it was very seldom that an institution carrying the name comes to us with a proposal to do really meaningful work".

He said a second reason for coming on board was that after Madiba in 2007 gave the foundation a new mandate to transform the Foundation from a post-presidential office to a human rights-oriented NGO "promoting social justice through difficult memory and dialogue, we very deliberately sought partnerships with universities and with the academy more broadly. To us, this partnership adds to what is a whole medley of relationships with universities".

He said Nelson Mandela scholarship was "really in its infancy" and was a space "dominated by white voices, by male voices, by voices from outside our country", an indication of the deficiencies within existing Mandela Scholarship, which tends to repeat the same dominant narrative over and over again.

"This project offers us a fecund [fertile] place to explore what could be done here ... We need to be encouraging more robust, critical work."

He said he also hoped the project would enable better access to information around Mandela. "Access to information is still a critical issue for our country and for this particular project: Who has access? Who has access to the academy? Who has access to publishing partners? Who gets to be heard on platforms?"

### Madiba will be used as a prism, through which modern problems can be viewed



**Nelson Mandela Foundation chief executive Sello Hatang (left) and HSRC chief executive Professor Crain Soudien (right) say that new things about Nelson Mandela are being discovered all the time.**  
Photos: Supplied



... Any project that is both engaging with the legacy [of Mandela] but also trying to pursue the unfinished business is simply going to have to grapple with those issues."

Giving reasons for why the HSRC came on board, the organisation's chief executive Crain Soudien said: "I am absolutely taken with the incredible possibilities of thinking about Mr Mandela as a figure of modernity [the times in which we find ourselves today] and how we come to understand Mr Mandela as a mode for us of entering the space of the modern."

"I have lots of books on Nelson Mandela, but I'm constantly amazed by the new things that keep emerging and there are new things coming out all the time, but we haven't yet come to pay attention to how this history provides us with an opportunity of thinking about South Africa's emergence into colonialism, [and] into modernity."

Soudien said he hoped the idea of TIMS would be carried further than Nelson Mandela University. "I really hope this is not the only place this is happening. This is an idea of what South African universities could be."

"Here we have a real opportunity for engag-

ing with history, sociology, politics, anthropology and a whole range of disciplines. The opportunity is of course about facts but it's also about interpretation, how you come to these fields, how you come to be a sociologist, how you come to be a literary theorist."

"The challenge that we have here, and that's the decolonial stuff, the challenge is that a lot of our disciplines are totally derivative. We depend so much on other people. I'm wanting to argue here that we have an opportunity. It's not an opportunity we must be arrogant about, but we must be bold, we must be courageous and take big steps. We must get things wrong and deal with getting them wrong."

Nelson Mandela Foundation chief executive Sello Hatang said the project needed to have relevance for today and the future. "Any project we think about must impact the lives of those who are still to be born."

He said it should speak to key issues in our society, including poverty, inequality and violence.

"The trauma we [as South Africans] are going through every day is our woundedness and that woundedness in my view is some-

thing a project like this needs to be looking into.

"How do we deal with the depth of the soul of this country? And deal with that woundedness?"

He said the project also needed to touch many lives beyond the Eastern Cape.

He said just as Mandela is viewed as "the ancestor of hope" (by Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana) and how many think of his former wife Winnie Madikizela-Mandela as "the ancestor of active citizenship", Hatang said he hoped the project would "help us become active citizens and living ancestors of hope ... that whoever looks at us can also say I want to also be a part of that."

André Keet, Chair for Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation (CriSHET) at Nelson Mandela University, said, through the exploration with scholars, the ideas around intellectual work relating to Mandela was increasing, which he called "a fascinating and great development".

"Put that together under a programme with so many collaborators and the possibilities are endless. It's something that we're looking forward to."

"Universities are complex systems and processing these various ideas into a programme that can respond both to the bureaucratic impulses of the university and also the creativity of the intellectual project is what the vice chancellor is processing through the different sets of structures."

"We have left the idea and its format very open as part of this journey to co-travel and to co-create and also to bring in a stronger young student voice into this space."

"Our responsibility is to work on an every-day basis towards the social justice ideals a university should stand for."

"If this is one avenue in which we can do that, with a particular kind of tagging with Madiba, then that will be great."

## Students debate Mandela's positioning in the #FeesMustFall movement

Today's students cannot identify with Mandela the revolutionary

Nicky Willemse

On one Nelson Mandela University campus, students and recent graduates debated the positioning of Nelson Mandela and his social justice ideals in the #FeesMustFall movement, while on another campus, a protest around fees was in full swing.

That was the backdrop to the Mandela@MustFall session at the Mandela Colloquium, held from March 6 to 8 at Nelson Mandela University. The opinions were varied and at times critical — some seeing the "dancing grandfatherly" image of Mandela they grew up with as far removed from current student activism.

Sumaya Hendricks, an analyst on the Dialogue and Advocacy programme at the Nelson Mandela Foundation who is completing her doctoral studies, referred to Madiba's 1997 speech during the handover of leadership to Thabo Mbeki. He said he was handing over the baton received from generations before to the next generation, to serve the interests of people and society.

"He didn't see himself as someone who ran the whole race. My contention is that [the #FeesMustFall] students weren't given the baton, but found it lying on the floor — at the time, it was really discarded — and they picked it up and have taken it forward. It's something we should all be proud of."

She went on to say the younger generation did not identify with the idea of Mandela as being part of the traditional radical activists "even though one can't discredit his revolutionary credentials". However, she said the post-prison Mandela they watched as they grew up was part of the old order, a hero of their parent's generation, no longer a "cool" role model for this generation.

"You want to rather draw on Fanon or Malcolm X. Maybe it's symptomatic of the human condition. We are forgetful. What we saw before us was a kindly old man who dances at concerts. It hasn't helped that people have reinforced this time and time again. So that what people in society praise is this kindly old man ... It's not surprising that students reject Madiba because that image has come to embody and characterise who Madiba is."

She also said students were "over-critical" of Mandela and

spoke of "a failure to see that we are saying something about ourselves in that harsh criticism".

Pedro Mzileni, who was Student Representative Council (SRC) president at Nelson Mandela University during the #FeesMustFall protest and is now a research assistant within the Chair for Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation and a candidate for doctoral studies in sociology, presented a different view: "Mandela is my leader. I know what he did for me to be here today ... I don't have time to chase nonsense that he was a sellout."

But he said Mandela had also become a commodity, the market had created its own version of him. "Our duty is to pull back all the time, to be critical of that commodification of Mandela ... to pull him back all the time to the comrade we know he is."

"We can't dispute Madiba's struggle credentials. All we can do is take the baton and move forward."

However, he said Mandela wouldn't be "immune from criticism from comrades who want to know: where did you go wrong? With all the injustices of apartheid, how come white people haven't been held accountable for apartheid? What happened to the land and property questions? And we will carry on with these questions of struggle until we reach a logical conclusion."

He said it was key that "whatever we do around interrogating Madiba's legacy takes us towards decolonial and progressive possibilities".

Patronella Ngaba, researcher for the Atlantic Fellows for Racial Equity South Africa (AFRE-SA), said her work with South African and United States leaders had revealed conflicting appeal for Madiba, with the dream or promise of Madiba on the one hand and, on the other, disenchantment about the promise that never came.

"We've had to wrestle with what that means and have had to redefine leadership. What do we take with us? What do we leave behind? And not just in terms of leadership in the future but in how we define ourselves and our purpose."

"It's been difficult, but it's also a very productive space as we reimagine what's currently not here."

Responding to a question on how Mandela University can go forward in a reimagined space, Mzileni said: "Critical studies must continue, and the scholarly project of Mandela Studies. There must be progress towards decolonial and progressive possibilities [with management held accountable for these]."

"For a university that carries Mandela's name, we need critique, there must be no holy cows ... The student movement

must never get tired of pulling universities back to the service of people."

He also touched on the cultural justice questions raised by the #MustFall movement.

"These institutes still socialise us into whiteness. How do we dismantle the cultural bias and carry the culture of communities of people? We need people to go out and tamper with the status quo of society."

Sense-maker Tembeka Ngcukaitobi, author and human rights advocate, said: "The greatest challenges when it comes to seeing Nelson Mandela is that we don't understand enough of him. There is so much of him that is still invisible."

"Our response is to try and make visible that which current scholarship has made invisible."

However, he said the deep digging into who Mandela was — and the uncovering of possible uncomfortable truths — needed to be done in a way that was "compassionate and tries to understand the man in the context of his own circumstances".

"But we must nevertheless make that visible."

He said just recently at the Pretoria archives, he had found an affidavit where Mandela admits striking his first wife with his elbow.

"How does one engage with this in the context of the big man, the hero? How does one try to tell that story? In a way that's compassionate and tries to understand the man in the context of his own circumstances. But we must nevertheless make that visible. How is it that so many people who have written about Mandela have missed this part of the evidence? ... And why don't we know about the personal correspondence between Robert Sobukwe [from the Pan Africanist Congress] and Mandela? Why is Mandela always seen as an enemy of the PAC? ... What is the way of making visible that which scholarship has made invisible?"

He said another problem was why Mandela was divorced from history.

"Why is it that the only understanding of Madiba is Mandela, the teddy bear — and yet Nelson Mandela is one of the greatest revolutionaries of the 21st Century?"

"Today, we are critical of Nelson Mandela and perhaps rightly so, but we are using today's lenses, we are not placing ourselves in that past moment in time."

"We do Nelson Mandela a disservice by focusing too much on his legacy as president. Possibly, he was just a normal president, a dismal president, but that shouldn't blind us from Nelson Mandela, the revolutionary."

## Nelson Mandela University

# Mandela archive as a living system

Nicky Willemse

**W**hat should an archive for Nelson Mandela look like? What does it need to tell us about the man and his life, and the way he continues to impact our society? What happens when critical information is erased from the archive? And how can we use the archive to grapple with the great questions of our time, including the decolonising of curricula?

These were just some of the questions raised and debated at arguably the most contentious session at the Dalibhunga: This time? That Mandela? colloquium at Nelson Mandela University, which was simply titled *The Archive*.

A key thought that emerged through the discussion was the archive as a living system, shaping the possibilities that help us to understand Mandela and our social and political society, while constantly being shaped and reshaped itself.

Starting the session, moderator Verne Harris, director of archive and dialogue at the Nelson Mandela Foundation, provided a broad overview of what could be included in the archive, from the obvious Mandela biographies to the less obvious PhD studies on Mandela, Mandela divorce-court case files, his doctors' memoirs, and even international intelligence files. "The question is how to make sense of it all."

Xolela Mangcu, professor of sociology at George Washington University in Washington DC — who is writing a new biography on Mandela — highlighted the absence of African scholarship and biography on Mandela and other important black figures, such as Robert Sobukwe.

"I think this lack of African biographers has come at a huge cost in terms of our understanding of Nelson Mandela.

"What I've been trying to do over the past three to four years is to push back against the received archive, which is the archive that exists in the existing biographies.

"I think the biographies are so flawed, all of them, including *Long Walk to Freedom* (penned by US writer Richard Stengel), that we need to go back to the beginning to rewrite the story of Nelson Mandela."

Citing author Hermione Lee, he said it was easy for biographers to fall into the habit of repeating the same narrative until it becomes the gospel truth.

"In that process, Lee writes, untruths gather weight by being repeated and they congeal into the received version of a life. They are repeated in biography after biography until or unless they are unpicked."

Mangcu said some biographers settled on a "single, possibly shaky hypothesis" to explain a whole life. "It is this single shaky hypothesis you find in every Madiba biography that I am contesting. Every biography says Mandela's notions of leadership were inspired by watching the chief Jongintaba in his village run meetings through consensus — and this informed his later notions of what it means to be a leader."

Mangcu argued there were many problems with that stereotypically African and tribalised foundation "unsullied by modernity"— and so much that had been left out, including Mandela's heritage of the "African political modernity of Thembuland and the Transkei", which included the alliance of his family [the Thembuland royal family] with the colonial government, and his father's leadership role in the Transkeian Territories General Council known as the "Bhunga", a quasi-parliament system set up in the Transkei, where all the chiefs came together, representing district councils.

"What puzzles me is why such an important institution in the history of black people in South Africa — and in the history of African political modernity — is not dis-



"Mandela and Animism", a piece by Marvin Carstens, which is on display at the *Provoke/Ukuchukumisa/Daag-Uit* exhibition at Nelson Mandela University. Photo: Supplied

cussed in any of the biographies. And the archive is there: that's the strange thing.

"Mandela says these things to Stengel. He tells him 'my father was a member of the Bhunga' ... but that never makes it into the book. There is a selective reading of the archive. There is a framing of African societies by these biographers that excludes what Mandela is telling them. And they erase it out of the archive."

He also argued [and it was a view that was hotly contested when the panel discussion was opened to the floor] that Mandela belonged to an educated African elite "who saw themselves as British, black Englishmen and black Englishwomen ... and took pride in being subjects of Queen Victoria".

He said Mandela himself wrote about being an anglophile.

"That's why instead of a revolutionary, I call him a militant. It's the militancy of the black educated elite who were rejected, and frustrated by their rejection by white folks, by the very English that they emulated ... Black national movements have arisen historically out of that sense of

rejection.

"If you want to have a sense of Nelson Mandela, you need to have an idea of his combined aristocracy and understand how the elites understood leadership — it was the idea of honour, duty and service."

He said there was much that was absent from the existing Mandela archive.

"People have to repopulate the archive.

Students, you have to do this work. You have to write biographies of Nelson Mandela and other important black figures. That, for me, is what decolonising the curriculum is. There's a lot of work to be done about our own intellectual history. Only then will we begin to understand people like Nelson Mandela and their development."

Continuing the panel discussion was Joel Netshitenzhe, executive director and vice chair of the board of Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection (Mistra) and former head of communications in Mandela's office during his presidency, who said certain factors informed "our reflection on the construction of the Mandela archive as a living system".

He said individuals characterised as

great historical figures, whether good or bad, attained their status not by "dint or force of character but because they become, through complex coincidences, facilitators of a historical epoch in gestation, an epoch about to be born".

He said the individual becomes "the collective property of all the admirers" — and contested views arise.

"A moment in history is selected as defining Nelson Mandela, the icon. And so, binaries emerge: reconciliation, forgiveness and generosity of spirit are presented as his beginning and end. On the other hand, there is the freedom fighter, the military commander, the victim of repression, persecuted prisoner and leader of a political party.

"Each of these characterisations on their own are inaccurate and misleading but combined, they start to approximate the totality of what Mandela was and what he sought to become, and whether and how he succeeded in depicting the desired persona."

He said we also needed to be looking at the contextualisation of the development of his social consciousness, his ambition, the ideas of his peers and his socioeconomic and socio-political circumstances.

"All of these are fused in splendid combination to produce the Nelson Mandela we know."

He went on to say: "The archive should seek to dig below appearances and bring to the fore the profound questions of our time. It should seek to extract the lessons about the present and future.

"It should also challenge the social and political issues of our time, such as the misappropriation by the privileged, while taking advantage of the realities of the global socioeconomic system. It should be a platform to record and preserve the obvious, and should also be a living space to pose and debate the paradoxes.

"This will bring to the surface Nelson Mandela's humanity, but it may also ruffle feathers."

The session's sense-maker Carolyn Hamilton, South African research chair in Archive and Public Culture at the University of Cape Town, said the Mandela archive was dealing with "three horizons at once".

The first was the story of Mandela, the man, his successes and failures. "It's the story of the making and shaping of the man and the way he makes and shapes the world — which is the essence of what the biographical task wants to do."

"He is burdened by history. It's not just history of the life he led, but it carries the burden of his time."

The second horizon was Mandela as "phenomenon and figure", with different versions of Mandela used or manipulated to suit contemporary social or political purposes.

"It has a biography of its own and it has an archive of its own. We are always having to navigate the work the 'figure phenomenon' is doing in contemporary social and political life. And that biography itself is changing things and being changed. It is shaping the world and being shaped by the world."

The third horizon was the archive of possibilities — or "Nelson Mandela as a set of possibilities". But she said this archive — "all the things that have shaped and made you, the very structure of knowledge" — was also a place of limitations. "This is where the depth of the challenging decolonisation and decoloniality discussion comes to bear."

She said questions about the archive were questions about knowledge itself.

In closing, Harris as moderator said: "In popular discourses, the archive is regarded as a pretty dull space, if not boring, but I'm glad this session has been the hottest so far."

**The existing Madiba biographies don't tell the whole story**

## Nelson Mandela University



Some of the artworks on display at Nelson Mandela University's 'we are present' exhibition included (from left) "Spiral" by Andrieta Wentzel, "The New Testament" by Pola Maneli, and "The traumas of responsibility in life and legend" by Michael Roderick Wedderburn. Behind Wedderburn's artwork is "Black sexuality under construction" by Raquel Adriaan. Photos: Supplied

# Two exhibitions link Mandela and art

Nicky Willemsse

**B**ird Street exhibition: 'we are present'. The opening session of the Dalibhunga: This time? That Mandela? colloquium took place in the spacious art gallery of Nelson Mandela University's Bird Street Campus, surrounded by artworks produced in response to the colloquium.

The exhibition, titled 'we are Present' featured works produced by staff and post-graduate student designers, photographers, sculptors, printmakers and painters from the Department of Visual Arts at Nelson Mandela University's School of Music, Art and Design (SOMAD).

Head of Department Professor Vulindlela Nyoni said he had invited his colleagues and students to consider "what it means to be us, working at Mandela University, in this place, at this critical time" and to produce visual responses.

Nyoni said the works "serve as a point of reference to us as we continue necessary disciplinary conversations about what it means to be in the critical space of 'making' at this time,

when key debates in South African visual art are centred on the disrupting and de-centering of the dominant discourses and the shifting of structures".

Participating artists and designers included Vulindlela Nyoni, David Jones, Jess Staple, Rachel Collett, Pola Maneli, Mary Duker, Pieter Binsburgen, Andrieta Wentzel, Michael Barry, Bruce Cadle, Senzo Xulu, Nii Botchway and Margot Muir.

### Second Avenue Campus exhibition: Provoke/Ukuchukumisa/Daag-Uit

The Provoke/Ukuchukumisa/Daag-Uit exhibition — created in response to the Dalibhunga: This time? That Mandela? colloquium, and as part of the university's ongoing Mandela Centenary Celebrations — is on display at the University's Archive Centre, Second Avenue Campus.

Although it was supposed to be officially launched at the colloquium, a collapsed function tent led to the venue being moved at the last minute to the South End Museum, where the artworks were displayed via the medium of video, while the rest of the evening's celebrations — a dinner of Mandela's favourite "home

foods" selected and prepared by his chef of 18 years, Xoliswa Ndoiyi, as well as songs and dancing from the university's choir — went ahead as planned.

Curator Christelle Grobler said the exhibition was a "legacy project" that seeks to build on the impressions of Nelson Mandela by "excavating Africa in the years of Mandela, exploring representation and signification through Mandela and fashion, and continuing the legacy of advocacy through Mandela and feminism".

She said the exhibition also sought to look at "the past and present to enable change, in the form of social justice, in our future".

The exhibition included a MaXhosa rug — an imitation of the blanket used by initiates — by accomplished international fashion designer Laduma Ngxokolo, a university alumnus whose Xhosa-inspired knitwear designs have appeared on runways across the world. The rug appeared at the exhibition "as if someone had just stepped out of it", symbolising the shedding of "problematic patriarchal ideology" and moving towards the more inclusive "Mandela mandate, which states that all men and women are created equal", explained Grobler.

Another artwork, Compl[yx], conceptualised by exhibition assistant Nandipha Ntengenyana with illustration and beading by Micaela Scholtz and Josef Greeff respectively, showcased androgynous figures and beadwork symbols, advocating for the recognition of gender-fluid identities in indigenous African cultures.

An artwork by Nehemiah Latolla, with painting and artwork by Kim Cunningham and Josef Greeff, showcased four mannequins wearing Madiba fashion statements at key points in his life, depicting the process of change over time.

A music piece by Caleb Vaughn-Jones, filmed by Nick Waring, looked at the social justice movement in the past, present and future, using indigenous instruments, western instruments and futuristic African sound elements to depict the struggle for harmony and democracy.

The exhibition also included a Mandela sculpture, a map and essay describing Mandela's journey to 12 African countries in 1962, and illustrations of three "fearless women champions" of Mandela's time: Veronica Sobukwe, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela and Albertina Sisulu.

## Cooking home food for Mandela, the 'ordinary man'

He was a loving but strict grandparent

Nicky Willemsse

**X**oliswa Ndoiyi prepared meals for Nelson Mandela for 18 years; his personal chef saw a very different side of the world icon.

Guest speaker at the opening dinner for the Mandela Colloquium exhibition titled Provoke/Ukuchukumisa/Daag-uit, Ndoiyi said: "Nelson Mandela was an ordinary person. I remember one morning, he woke up and wanted cereal and not his usual porridge, mixed with nuts and raisins."

That may have sounded like a simple request, except that Mandela's menus had to be cleared by both his medical and security teams — so Ndoiyi was forced to refuse his request. "I was worried that his blood pressure would go up and I would be in trouble."

Mandela reluctantly ate his porridge, but then asked Ndoiyi to sit down next to him and listen very carefully. He said: "I've honoured my mother enough." She then realised that all the years she had been feeding Mandela, she had symbolised his mother, who had fed him that same porridge throughout his childhood.



Xoliswa Ndoiyi, Mandela's chef for 18 years. Photo: Supplied

She also witnessed him as a father figure, loving the many grandchildren who shared his home, but also being extremely strict at times.

"He would punish and say things you wouldn't think he could say with his mouth. He would say to the children: 'If one of you is not at the table on time, nobody will eat.' There were times when all the kids would go to bed without food." It was a way of discipline that demonstrated that their actions not only affected themselves.

But more often than not, Mandela "used food to love people". And when he hosted guests at his house, they would often enjoy "home food" — traditional Xhosa meals. These were the meals served at the exhibition dinner, carefully selected and prepared by Ndoiyi herself for the event.

She said: "The old people especially, they wanted their

home food ... And I used to serve everyone coming to his house with love and dignity. I knew I was doing this for all the South Africans who wished to be with him, but couldn't be there.

"Tata would say that whether you are with your enemies or your friends, you should show them love with food. He also said to me many times: 'If you give people food, believe me, whatever you ask from them, they are going to give it to you.'"

Ndoiyi would sometimes receive unusual requests from Mandela.

On a visit to Qunu in 1995, Mandela remembered a good orthopaedic hospital in Mthatha and wanted to visit it. They drove there, and although the care was still good, he was shocked at how the hospital had deteriorated. He later organised its upgrading.

"He looked for the ward with the children. He saw their broken legs and ribs, but he also saw the hunger in their faces. When we left, he asked me to go to the shops to buy food to feed the children.

"That was the beginning of it. We made food parcels to feed the whole village of Qunu. He always reminded me that the ANC hadn't hired me to feed Qunu but to feed him, but still asked if I could please do this for him."

Ndoiyi, who is now serving on president Cyril Ramaphosa's kitchen team, was Mandela's chef from 1992 until his death in 2013. During this time, she not only cooked for the Mandela family but also for a large number of world leaders, celebrities, academics and business people.

"Tata was always transparent with me. He would say: 'Please prepare this food to your level best.' And then when the guests were saying thank you, he would send for me, saying: 'I don't take anybody's credit. She's the one who's behind it all. She's the one who was cooking.' What a long journey I had with food and with Tata!"

Ndoiyi's recipe book Ukutya Kwasekhaya, published in 2011, features more than 60 of the meals she cooked for Mandela.

## Nelson Mandela University



International knitwear designer Laduma Ngxokolo (centre) kickstarted his career by designing a new range of clothes for Xhosa initiates, which was inspired by traditional Xhosa beadwork. Photo: Supplied

## ‘Why I decided to call my brand MaXhosa’

Designer Ngxokolo has kept his family together in his business



Ngxokolo owns the factory where his specialist knitwear garments are manufactured by a team of 30. His three siblings Tina, Mangaliso and Lihle work with him in the business. Photo: Tiso Blackstar Group

# Nelson Mandela University



Ngxokolo's late mother Lindelwa (centre, on the screen behind him) was a knitwear designer herself. She bought a second-hand knitting machine for the family, where Ngxokolo first started learning his craft. Photo: Supplied

## Nicky Willemsse

From the time he was a boy, international knitwear designer Laduma Ngxokolo — whose brand MaXhosa by Laduma has wowed global runways — was fascinated by the Xhosa initiation rites into manhood. “I loved the sense of charisma the Xhosa initiates carried after their initiation, and I was so looking forward to being an initiate myself,” he said, during his talk at the opening of the *Provoke/Ukuchukumisa/Daag-uit* exhibition, where his MaXhosa rug imitating a Xhosa initiation blanket was on display. The exhibition formed part of the Dalibhunga: This time? That Mandela? colloquium.

However, when he became an initiate, he found the typical clothes worn after initiation, the hunter cap, jacket and shirt, all in earthy colours, did not “resonate enough” with the culture of the Xhosa initiates wearing them. “The clothes didn’t carry symbolism.”

So when he had to choose a textile design project for his BTech degree at Nelson Mandela University, he decided to design a new range of initiation-type clothes inspired by traditional Xhosa beadwork.

“My thesis for my BTech degree was: how can traditional Xhosa aesthetics be interpreted into contemporary knitwear for Xhosa initiates?”

His range won him an international competition in London, and thus started his journey towards commercialising his brand, and taking his knitwear to runways across the world. He has since extended the brand to women’s wear and household items such as rugs and cushions.

“I named my brand MaXhosa because I felt like there wasn’t justice done to the Xhosa people. As beautiful as they are and as elegant, there hasn’t been a globally-esteemed flagship [project] that says we are the Xhosa people, we’re beautiful ... we are African and proud.”

Today, his clothes are worn by celebrities such as Beyoncé and Alicia Keys.

“What fascinates me the most is not that we dress the celebrities but that we dress the ordinary people across cultures in South Africa. Some of my clients are Basotho, amaZulu, vhaVenda ... We’re trying to position ourselves as an African brand, not only for amaXhosa.”

Ngxokolo closed his talk by saying he had learned much from the wisdom of Nelson Mandela.

“When I read his book *Long Walk to Freedom*, I focused on the part where he went through his initiation journey. He says it was liberating to be introduced to his forefathers as this gave him confidence as a man. Once he learned about the wars that happened in the beautiful mountains of the Transkei, he told himself he would uphold the name of his people and uphold the belief that humanity and community is key in everything we do.

“I’m proud to have been on this journey with Nelson Mandela University ... I will make sure I document this special journey in a book one day.”

### The influence of a mother

Ngxokolo lost his mother Lindelwa, a single parent, while he was in high school, but her influence continues today.

During his talk at the opening of the *Provoke/Ukuchukumisa/Daag-uit* exhibition, he reflected on an occasion when he accompanied his mother on a quest to buy a second-hand television from the Salvation Army, but they came home with a knitting machine instead.

“My late mother was a knitwear designer in the 1980s. She couldn’t spread her wings wide enough because of the political circumstances at that time ... So that knitting machine was nostalgic to her.”

His three siblings were disappointed their new purchase wasn’t the TV they had begged their mother to buy, but Ngxokolo was curious about how the knitting machine worked and started playing around with it.

“I found that the machine creates fabric. You can make patterns and the fabric pops

up underneath ... I collected manuals and tried to learn as much as I could.”

Sadly, his mother passed away later that same year, in 2002. “The day before she died, she told us to stick together and to make sure no one comes between us.”

Then a child-headed household, the four school-going children sustained themselves with the skills their mother had taught them.

“As the leader of our home, my elder sister made dresses to sell. I made and sold scarves for bus fare and bread ... We were fortunate as very few people had skills that created income to put food on the table.

“Our mother had done all sorts of crafts at home — beadwork, crochet, sewing. We loved it and it kept us at home, away from trouble.

“Throughout our upbringing, we saw these images [of Xhosa women wearing traditional Xhosa beadwork]. And through the beads, she taught us anthropology. She said our identity and where we came from was important.”

Throughout his school career, Ngxokolo never told anyone about the pieces he was selling, as he feared he would be teased by his peers.

“I did textile design at Lawson Brown High in Port Elizabeth. I had a very supportive teacher who understood my circumstances, and saw my talent and supported me. And I made sure I worked as hard as possible.”

His efforts led to his studying textile design at Nelson Mandela University, where he continued to excel, attaining top results and receiving bursaries.

In his final year, he received a bursary from Mohair South Africa, and his eyes were opened to a new opportunity: the possibility of establishing a factory for specialist knitwear manufacturing, which would become a reality a few years later.

“South Africa is the number one exporter of mohair; we export 70% of our mohair, which means there are very limited jobs in this industry. I saw a business opportunity, especially in the Eastern Cape, which faces

the highest youth unemployment in the country.”

He completed his final-year project, creating a range of men’s knitwear inspired by traditional Xhosa beadwork patterns, all the time thinking about the factory and the jobs he wished to create.

After his final-year range won him an international competition in London in 2010 and prize money of £1000, he started taking steps to commercialise his project, approaching numerous funding agencies.

It was Nelson Mandela University that responded with a plan, by establishing a business incubator project, which has since been extended to many other graduates.

Through the incubator, he was paired with a private company and received mentorship, along with production and financial assistance. He received R150 000 for his start-up business, but lost it all “in the process of learning”.

What helped save his business was an order for 200 pieces from a client who continues to support him, seven years later. “It was a powerful investment and I couldn’t afford to make mistakes ... She loved the fact that [my range] was very organic and had a different story to tell.”

His range, which he extended to women’s wear in 2014, has now appeared on runways across the world.

In January last year, he finally bought the knitwear manufacturing factory he had dreamed about for so long. “We now have a team of around 30 people.”

His elder sister Tina, who is also an acclaimed fashion designer, and his two younger siblings, Mangaliso and Lihle, run the business with him — so the close-knit family continues to stick together.

He continues to remember and honour his mother: “I started my brand seven years ago. But I’ve realised for the past six years, I’ve been lying. On my email signature, it used to say ‘MaXhosa by Laduma, founder and MD’. But I’ve removed ‘founder’.”

He realised his late mother had always been the founder.

## Nelson Mandela University

# Mandela, the Merc and the making of stories

Nicky Willemse

**F**ive months after his release from prison in 1990, Nelson Mandela was given a brand-new car.

It was a red S-Class Mercedes Benz made in the factory in East London — and it was presented to him at a special ceremony at the Sisa Dukashe stadium in Mdantsane, in front of 30 000 people.

In 2013, with Mandela's health declining, the car company produced a celebratory film called *Labour of Love*, telling the story of the car, the firm's long association with the former president, and providing an account of the Mandela-inspired unity between management and the union-member workers who had built it after hours and by hand, in just four days.

The film ended with the words: "South Africa, together we are better."

During his address, titled "On 'making' Mandela", at the recent Mandela University colloquium Dalibhunga: This time? That Mandela?, University of the Western Cape professor of history Ciraj Rassool described a second film about the same event, but which revealed a completely different story.

He used the two films to illustrate the many layers of the stories and histories we are told about Mandela — how they are constructed, the details revealed and hidden, often reflecting the times and purposes of the story-tellers. And how they are never the full story — including Mandela's autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom* — but should rather be viewed as resources for critical inquiry and deeper exploration.

Both films included recollections by the automotive workers, union organisers, management and industrial conflict facilitators.

The second film, called *Red*, was made in 2014 by artist Simon Gush and actor and writer James Cairns. It formed part of Gush's exhibition in Johannesburg and East London.

"Gush sought to understand the producing and presenting of the car in light of the nine-week illegal strike and plant sleep-in that transpired a few weeks later," said Rassool.

"He was inspired by the commitment of the East London workers to produce a car for Mandela — as well as their resilience during the nine-week strike.

"Gush intervened in how events should be remembered. His film revealed a more complex story ... and revealed a much more divided workforce [at that time, prior to subsequent improved relations]."

In addition to the film, Gush's exhibition included the disassembled parts of a replica of the car alongside a reconstructed display of the sleep-in, with "strike beds" made from scaffolding, foam, upholstery and car headrests.

"The Mercedes-Benz replica, stripped down to its parts, turned into an enquiry, almost an autopsy, into the labour process and the events of the strike. It questioned the celebratory and reconciliatory view of the gift as a product of partnership between workers and management.

"The installation *Red* was also an engagement with the cultural production of Nelson Mandela, of the meaning of the man and how he should be remembered."

Rassool also critically examined Mandela's history as told in *Long Walk to Freedom*, published in 1994, which had "come to be inscribed into South Africa's process of nation-making as the seeming embodiment of its heritage and the immortal guarantor of its future".

"Mandela's autobiography/biography came to stand at the apex of the biographical order in South Africa."

He described how Mandela's "biographical maintenance" — the "process of producing, deploying, contesting and maintaining of Mandela's life story" — has gone through several different phases and purposes.

"Yet instead of trying to analyse the cultural history of Mandela's biography, much more has been made in terms of what his life



On 22 July 1990, Mercedes Benz employee Philip Groom handed the keys of a brand new Mercedes Benz to Nelson Mandela at the Sisa Dukashe Stadium in Mdantsane, near East London. Photo: Walter Dhladhla / AFP files

as activist, prisoner, president, leader and retired politician symbolised, in relation to the narrative of the South African nation and the triumph of the human spirit.

"We are limited to understanding Nelson Mandela as a symbol and how it is put to use as a brand of leadership, rather than as a study of cultural politics and Mandela's biography."

He went on to say that the "cultural production" of Mandela's life through the medium of biography was complex, and involved the interaction of experts and assistants, promoters, publicists and image-makers over time and through several media.

"Some narratives are also simultaneously autobiographical ... When writing about the life of another, it's also about writing about yourself ... It's interesting to realise how much hope and desire people put into biography. Biography doesn't have a sure footing in history. It's a product of culture and it's a product of history."

Rassool said the red Mercedes was "given to Mandela, importantly, at a time of transition in his autobiography/biography".

"The biography was changing alongside the shift in his life. This was a change-over from the biography of a desire for the absent revolutionary leader [Mandela in prison] to a biography of statesman and president, and it is this turning point in the biography that partly explains the ambiguous history of the gift of the car as labour of love ... It is significant that Simon Gush chose to take issue with the warm and celebratory interpretation of the gift.

"It was a labour of love turned into an artwork of inquiry."

He said Gush's film showed that Mandela's car had indeed been assembled with love and passion by the workers. "But as much as it represented love, it also represented labour. Mandela's Mercedes had become

an artefact of labour history ... This line of inquiry into the history of labour was a more appropriate way to understand the significance of Nelson Mandela.

"The installation was a vivid dis-assembly of the corporate narrative of reconciliation, and an insistence that Mandela's life history is best understood as a resource for critical inquiry."

As sense-maker of Rassool's session, Relebohile Moletsane, who holds the John Langalibalele Dube Chair in Rural Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, said Mandela's biographies revealed "Nelson Mandela's complexity, his multiplicity and his contributions" and required exploration across disciplines.

"Modern universities are still organised around disciplines and hierarchies. It doesn't help us to understand the very complex and intertwined issues our society presents us with," she said.

"Mandela's biography reminds us of the old feminist saying that the personal is political."

In responding to Rassool's talk, Xolela Mangcu, a professor of sociology at George Washington University in Washington DC, said there was not a single full-length autobiography or biography written by an African.

"Part of the problem with Nelson Mandela's biography is that his story has not been narrated by African people or by black people broadly. It has mainly been written by United States or United Kingdom authors [Long Walk to Freedom was penned by US author Richard Stengel], so there are problems of interpretation and knowledge about who Mandela was."

Another response came from Ihron Rensburg, former vice chancellor and principal of the University of Johannesburg, who spoke about the challenges universities face in decolonising university processes and cur-

ricula — even through dedicated decolonisation projects such as the proposed Critical Mandela Studies project. "In as much as we're reflecting on Madiba, in as much as we're seeking to excavate new insights and perspectives, in as much as we're seeking to retrieve him from the commercial and from interpretations that are problematic, I think we should challenge ourselves in this work, similarly, to ask questions and engage ourselves — how do we begin to nurture wider groups of masters and doctoral students and ourselves as young and established academics? How do we begin to form our own 'clubs' as academics to begin this [decolonisation] project? And so, that's a challenge I leave for us, that I think it is wrong for us, those of us who have been in the trenches, to look the other way instead of playing a role, of offering humility, insights, perspectives and to help secure this project so that it doesn't become a spectacular failure."

As moderator, Human Sciences Research Council chief executive Crain Southen responded to Van Rensburg, saying it was a challenge to ensure the Mandela Studies project was carried forward into something that was not just symbolic.

Returning to the question of biography, Carolyn Hamilton, who holds a South African Research Chair in Archive and Public Culture at the University of Cape Town, said: "One of the things we're interested in [with biographies] is this business of being able vicariously to watch another person act, which makes you think about yourself acting in history and in time. I wonder if that isn't a way of confronting an ethical frontier — so you read someone else's life either to see how they've failed, when you read the biography of a villain, or a hero [to see how they've succeeded], but how difficult when there is ethical compromise or ambiguity ... Another component that's incredibly hard to imagine is how does the writer of the biography presume to sit in judgement of another life in quite that way? Because it seems an extraordinary thing to represent another life ... How do you pick up that responsibility?"

### Two films about Mandela's car come to different conclusions

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