

*MANDELA POSTURE, IDENTITY AND SCHOLARSHIP
VIRTUAL WORKSHOP*

Workshop Report

Ndungu, Jane (Ms) (Summerstrand Campus South)

Engagement and Transformation Portfolio | Nelson Mandela University

MANDELA POSTURE, IDENTITY AND SCHOLARSHIP

VIRTUAL WORKSHOP PROGRAMME

13TH APRIL 2021 - 10H00 TO 12H00

Purpose: To engage with current Mandela-related scholarship, identify and explore fresh lines of inquiry, and distill critical questions which would be helpful for the processes related to configuring Critical Mandela Studies and inform the Mandela University identity and posture.

Facilitator: Ms Nobubele Phuza, *Lecturer, Nelson Mandela University*

TIME	ACTIVITY	LED BY:
10:00 – 10:15	Welcome	Prof Sibongile Muthwa, <i>VC: Nelson Mandela University</i>
10:15 – 10:35	Mapping and reflection on Mandela scholarship globally	Prof Verne Harris, <i>Adjunct Professor: Nelson Mandela University</i>
10:35 – 10:45	Responses to Prof Harris	All participants
10:45 – 11:10	Breakaway session	All participants
11:10 – 11:30	Open conversation	All participants
11:30 – 11:40	Reflections	Dr Laura Best
11:40 – 11:50	Reflections	Prof Crain Soudien, <i>Nelson Mandela University</i>
11:50 – 12:00	Closing / Way Forward	Prof André Keet - <i>DVC, Engagement and Transformation Portfolio: Nelson Mandela University</i>

Breakaway session discussion

- (a) What do Mandela Studies mean for us as Nelson Mandela University?
- (b) How would the practical expressions of such meanings look like?

Present

Nobulele Phuza (Department of Sociology) – Facilitator, Prof André Keet (DVC: Engagement and Transformation Portfolio), Prof Verne Harris (Nelson Mandela Foundation), Prof Crain Soudien (Nelson Mandela University), Prof Sibongile Muthwa (VC: Nelson Mandela University), Dr. Laura Best (Office of the VC), Prof Darelle van Greunen (Faculty of Engineering, the Built Environment, and Technology), Dr Bridget de Villiers (Faculty of Business and Economic Sciences), Ms Asanda Fotoyi (of Business and Economic sciences), Ms Alice Makochieng (Faculty of Business and economic sciences), Dr Sam Webber (Faculty of Business and Economic Sciences), Prof Amanda Spies (Faculty of Law), Mr Alphonso Goliath (Faculty of Law), Dr Lourett Smith (Faculty of Health Sciences), Dr Denver Webb (Office of Strategic Resource Mobilisation), Dr Bruce Damons (Faculty of Education), Prof Shervani Pillay (Faculty of Education), Prof Sijekula Mbanga (Department of Housing), Dr Tinyiko Chauke (ETP), Mr Neil Honeycomb (ETP), Ms Jane Ndungu (ETP), Dr Jenny du Preez (*CriSHET*), Pedro Mzeleni (*CriSHET*), Amy de Raedt (*CriSHET*), Ms Razia Saleh (Nelson Mandela Foundation), Prof Pamela Maseko (Faculty of Humanities), Ms Paulette Coetzee (Faculty of Humanities)

Apologies

Pieter Binsbergen (Faculty of Humanities), Mr du Preez (Faculty of Engineering, the Built Environment, and Technology), Ms Oriole Friedemann (ETP), Prof Yaseen Ally (Faculty of Health Sciences), Prof Janet Cherry (Faculty of Business and Economic Sciences), Prof Danie Hattingh (Faculty of Engineering, the Built Environment, and Technology)

Workshop proceedings

Introduction

The workshop was facilitated by a very insightful lecturer, Ms Nobubele Phuza, from the Department of Sociology, Nelson Mandela University. The Vice-Chancellor of Nelson Mandela University, Prof Sibongile Muthwa, commenced the workshop by extending her welcome to the University's friends from Nelson Mandela Foundation, led by the University's Adjunct Professor, Verne Harris, Professor Crain Soudien who has been co-traveling many roads with the University, including this one on *Mandela*, the social figure; and the University colleagues from across the faculties, divisions, and entities.

The VC then delivered powerful remarks reiterating the University's commitment to giving intellectual and programmatic flesh to the University's name of *Mandela*. She also indicated the University's cognisance of the honour and responsibility that is bestowed on the University by being the only higher education institution on the globe that bears the name of the iconic former president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, and the commitment to striving to bring to the fore his values and ideals. Some of the efforts put in place to achieve this endeavour include the Mandela centenary programme from July 2018 to July 2019, which closed with two remarkable lectures from Prof Mangcu; the Mandela Colloquium; various public lectures, and formalization of the relationship with the Nelson Mandela Foundation via a Memorandum of Agreement which bore the Mandela Scholarship imperative – driven by the establishment of the Transdisciplinary Institute for Mandela Studies (TIMS) where the University is building a critical scholarly network that is orbiting it (TIMS).

The VC ended her remarks by echoing Prof Verne Harris's postulation of the complexity that lies in truly mastering Mandela studies and Collin Bundy's proposition that the scholarly work on Mandela is far from finished. She then presented the workshop, which aimed at engaging with current Mandela-related scholarship and exploring fresh lines of inquiry. The VC put forward hope that the workshop would aid in distilling critical questions, which would be helpful for the processes related to configuring Critical Mandela Studies, and informing the Mandela University identity and posture. She believed that the workshop would go a long way towards crafting the University's intellectual and social project and integrate these across the faculties and divisions, in partnership with the University's external friends.

Mapping of Mandela Studies globally

The University's Adjunct Professor Verne Harris led the participants on a brief journey where he illustrated various ways in which Mandela studies have manifested, globally. Prof Harris initiated this by speaking about the knowledge production on Mandela studies that had been done in the last two to three years. This has included: documentaries; videos on his life; and various books – such as the prison letters of Nelson Mandela, *The Resurrection of Winnie Mandela*, *Prisoner 913*, *A Lawyer's Odyssey*, *Reassessing Mandela*, and *Ghosts of Archive* amongst many others. Prof Harris also pointed to various sites being used as hubs of

knowledge production and tourism, for instance, Mandela's former residences in Soweto and Houghton, and the house he was incarcerated in at the former Victor Verster Prison. The other notable items were the potential establishment of a building and memorial at the University of Cape Town. Prof Harris closed by positing that Mandela knowledge production and presentation is a lot and ongoing; the patterns identified in the piece *Representing Madiba* remains in place; not enough deep scholarly work and insufficient engagement with the archive; and the questions raised on who controls and gets access to this archive.

Prof Harris then presented what he suggested to be the six most urgent, and potentially most fecund, lines of inquiry and spaces for scholarly and other forms of work within the rubric of Mandela Studies: the longer histories of the Eastern Cape before colonisation; the work of feminist economists in the context of an embrace of neoliberalism in South Africa during the transition to democracy; patriarchies, modernisms and other intersecting vectors of oppressive power; histories of non-racialism and black consciousness; Mandela and the arts; and the commodification of Mandela.

In her reflections, Prof Maseko from the Faculty of Humanities indicated her appreciation of Prof Harris bringing in the value of the archive. She indicated that in addition to questions of control, ownership, and access to the archive, the "medium" in which the archive is presented is also worth looking into. The Mandela legacy is less informed by the "vernacular" archive. She posed a question, "What value does this play in Mandela scholarship? How do we access it given that most who engage in Mandela scholarship do so in English only?"

Prof Keet, DVC of the Engagement and Transformation Portfolio, reflected on the thoughts of Prof Harris by challenging the participants to question themselves, "*what kind of University should we become in pursuit of the lines of inquiry presented by Prof Harris?*" This, he said, should transcend *what should be done* to *how should we become a particular type of institution*. This remains the main point the University is grappling with, and what should be honed in by an institution carrying the name of Nelson Mandela.

In her reflections, the VC put forward a powerful statement by Dr Luchaba following the public outcry emanating from the lecture he gave to his first years at UCT. Dr Luchaba said, "*the*

courageous duty of an intellectual, and of a University is to say things that might be offensive but that would lead to healing and things that a society has not yet thought about.” She challenged the University to engage with that thought in relation to the possibilities of intellectual posture in a University that carries the name of Nelson Mandela.

These sentiments from the VC and DVC were echoed by the participants. For example, Ms Alice Makochieng, from the Faculty of Business and economic sciences, asked, *“In a deeper sense, what kind of University should we become?”*

In response, Prof Harris indicated that the archive is indeed not decolonised enough but work to address this is being undertaken. He tied this in with questioning what a decolonised University ought to look like. In this thinking, he challenged universities to connect with the long histories, to trust the archive, to enable our institutions to be shaped profoundly by these archives, and simultaneously to have the courage to think what hasn't been thought yet - outside of any framing that we know of yet.

Breakaway discussions

(a) *What do Mandela Studies mean for us as Nelson Mandela University?*

Some of the captivating thoughts emerging from the discussions include:

- ‘On a greater front, think of Mandela as a social figure – not as a person; then reflect on what that figure means in the world.’
- ‘It is better to better to translate values and principles from the social figure than from the person.’
- ‘As we are shaping the study of Mandela, it ought to be done in a way that is not limited to a certain group of disciplines but touches all departments/disciplines within the university.’
- ‘A uniting set of **values** (University values and those that are associated with Mandela)’
- ‘The role of **leadership** in carrying the Mandela identity.’
- ‘The importance of **ethics**.’
- ‘Research, engagement, and learning and teaching should be moving to integrate the Mandela approach in some way. As presentations were made, I was thinking about

the **vision** of the University itself as an African University to produce cutting-edge knowledge. Vision needs to incorporate aspects of Mandela.'

- 'Mandela's values very important and how we state – not just ubuntu, etc., but also things like perseverance, courage (translated into our scholarship). The question of academic freedom – the autonomy of academics but based on a set of shared values. We also need to find a way to action these values – what we actually do will be the ultimate test for us.'

Reflections

Dr Laura Best highlighted the different kinds of expressions of feeling/being put forward by participants, including the discomfort and difficulty expressed in the embarkment of this *searching* journey. She also pointed to the openness and courage required in the work of shaping and reshaping these ideas and understandings of the Mandela-related scholarship, because it involves excavating an icon. She also challenged the Nelson Mandela University community to reflect on the University values such as *Ubuntu* and how these speak to Mandela and his character. Dr Best noted that this workshop was a sort of a call-to-action and that the engagement in this workshop and thereafter could catapult the University into different challenging spaces which can be inherently powerful. Such spaces include: trans-disciplinarity, decolonisation, and pre-colonisation, gender analysis, Africanisation, and 'intergenerationality'.

Professor Crain Soudien highlighted the significance of language and Mandela, and this as a provocation to the University to react to the manner in which English has enveloped and closed us in unthinkable ways. He had also engaged with the question of how the University should and would engage in building on the current resource which Mandela provides. This could be achieved, in part, by the University permitting itself the freedom and the right to ask questions that appear to not enjoy the valourisation and legitimacy of dominance. This will move us towards achieving these mentioned unthinkable and unspoken things. Prof Soudien warned that this is not an overnight task, but rather a long haul. He thus called for time and patience.

Closing and way forward

In closing, Prof André Keet indicated that the difficulty in thinking through the proposition that Nelson Mandela University is putting on the table provokes excitement. He started by acknowledging the shifting in the University's being, since 2017, in response to the name change. "Indeed, there is something that is shifting both in the University's epistemic frames, and the University's ways of beings in its ontological repositioning," he said. Prof Keet posited that the time of putting a scholarly expression to carrying the Mandela name is not such a straightforward question as one think it may be, if you just listen to that very straightforward framing of it. He cautioned that the Transdisciplinary Institute would not be able to represent all those expressions for people because an institute like that achieves its mandate by pursuing lines of inquiry put forward. However, there remains the institutionalisation work on how this may land into drawing the Mandela shape around our University. For example, in teaching and learning, Prof Keet challenged the Nelson Mandela community to examine what forms of pedagogy need to emerge, specifically those that align with the University's Mandela name. He called on a similar exploration in the areas of engagement governance as well.

From this, the question remains whether a University, via its central mandate, can re-formulate a picture of itself that takes shape around a particular proposition that it had put on the table. This remains the key challenge; how do we shift the University's institutional arrangement so that a new proposition takes, and one can see that work happening in our space? Prof Keet expressed his optimism in this journey that the University is embarking on and acknowledged the challenges therein. He expressed his gratitude to the friends from the Nelson Mandela Foundation, Prof Soudien, the executive, the Vice-Chancellor, the faculties, and the divisions that came forward to engage in grappling with these key questions raised in the workshop. He proposed that the participants see themselves as a working group that engages with the question of the University's posture and identity, and the meanings of Mandela within the University space, specifically the questions that this workshop was trying to tackle. Prof Keet also suggested introducing regular meetings where different discussions can be had, in pursuit of gaining understanding around how the institutionalised Mandela can take shape within the University space. He considered this as the first step, amongst many to come, in initiating particular discussion feeding into the broader vision 2030 of the University.

From this discussion, the reference group will distill different types of propositions from the big strategic imperatives of the university.

The workshop ended at 11:57:34 am.