

RADICAL OPENNESS

TIMS Panel Discussion: Narrative Report,

Advancing Critical University Studies across Africa (ACUSAfrica) Colloquium 2022:

Reflexive Solidarities in Techno-Rational Times

Compiled by: ETP Office

Engagement and Transformation Portfolio | Nelson Mandela University

ACUSAfrica Colloquium Programme

2nd – 4th November 2022

 ACUSAfrica COLLOQUIUM <i>Reflexive Solidarities in Techno-Rational Times</i>	 ACUSAfrica COLLOQUIUM <i>Reflexive Solidarities in Techno-Rational Times</i>	 ACUSAfrica COLLOQUIUM <i>Reflexive Solidarities in Techno-Rational Times</i>
<p style="text-align: center;">PROGRAMME</p> <p>02 NOVEMBER</p> <p>Registration 09:30-10:00</p> <p>Introductory Address 10:00-10:30</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ACUSAfrica Network & CUS Coverage by <i>Dina Bellugi, André Keet, & Luan Staphorst</i> <p>Session 1: Self-Reflexive Solidarities in Techno-Rational Times</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10:30-11:00 Provocation by <i>Su-Ming Khoo</i> 11:00-11:15 Tea break 11:15-12:15 Disputations by <i>Amos Njuguna, Shireen Matala, & Daniella Rataely</i> 12:15-12:45 Open responses <p>Lunch 12:45-13:45</p> <p>Session 2: The Common Good of the University in Techno-Rational Times</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 14:00-14:30 Provocation by <i>Premesh Lalu</i> 14:30-15:30 Disputations by <i>Sharon Stein, Bruce Damons, Crain Soudien, & Ntmi Mtawa</i> 15:30-16:00 Open responses 16:00-16:30 Close & Afternoon tea <p>Break 16:30-18:00 Activities to be announced</p> <p>Critical University Studies - South Africa (CUS-SA): The Role & Programme for a Critical University Studies - South Africa Network</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 18:00-18:30 Cocktail snacks 18:30-18:45 Welcome by <i>André Keet</i> 18:45-19:20 A CUS-SA Network: Some Provocations by <i>Saleem Badat</i> 19:20-19:30 Response by <i>Nobubele Phuza</i> 19:30-19:45 Discussion moderated by <i>Muki Moeng</i> 19:45-20:00 Closing remarks <p><small>*Please note programme times reflect South African Standard Time</small></p> <p><small>IMPORTANT: The colloquium events will be broadcast on Livestream and recorded.</small></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">PROGRAMME</p> <p>03 NOVEMBER</p> <p>Day One Recap 10:00-10:15</p> <p>Session 3: The 'African' University in Techno-Rational Times</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10:15-10:45 Provocation by <i>Takyiwaa Manuh</i> 10:15-11:00 Tea break 11:00-12:00 Disputations by <i>Takako Mino, Taaba Mugume, & Uchenna Okeja</i> 12:00-12:30 Open responses <p>Lunch 12:30-13:30</p> <p>Session 4: Black Feminism and Critical University Studies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 13:30-14:00 Provocation by <i>Shirley Anne Tate</i> 14:00-15:00 Disputations by <i>Dikeledi Mokoena, Siphokazi Tau, & Alude Mahali</i> 15:00-15:45 Open responses 15:45-16:15 Close & Afternoon tea <p>Break 16:30-18:00 Activities to be announced</p> <div style="border: 2px solid orange; padding: 5px;"> <p>Transdisciplinary Institute for Mandela Studies (TIMS): Radical Openness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 18:00-18:30 Cocktail dinner 18:30-18:45 Opening address by <i>Crain Soudien</i> 18:45-19:20 Panel discussion featuring <i>Xolela Mangcu, Nomalanga Mkhize, Keneilwe Ntutu, & Rachel Collett</i> 19:20-19:30 Group discussions 19:30-19:50 Response and reflections 19:50-20:00 Conclusions and close </div> <p><small>*Please note programme times reflect South African Standard Time</small></p> <p><small>IMPORTANT: The colloquium events will be broadcast on Livestream and recorded.</small></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">PROGRAMME</p> <p>04 NOVEMBER</p> <p>Day two recap 08:30-08:45</p> <p>Book Launch: #FeesMustFall and Its Aftermath: Violence, Wellbeing and the Student Movement in South Africa</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 08:45-08:55 Introduction by <i>Ayanda Mlatsha</i> 08:55-09:25 Presentations by authors <i>Thierry Luescher & Keamogetse Marwe</i> 09:25-09:45 Review responses by <i>Lesley Powell & Dikeledi Mokoena</i> 09:45-10:15 Open discussion <p>Tea 10:15-10:30</p> <p>Session 5: New Questions about the University and CUS in Techno-Rational Times: Decolonial Options</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10:30-11:00 Provocation by <i>Michalinos Zembylas</i> 11:00-12:00 Disputations by <i>Asiphe Mxalisa, Ayanda Simayi, & Roxana Chiappa</i> 12:00-12:30 Open response 12:30-13:00 Closure and thanks <p>Lunch 13:00-14:00</p> <p><small>*Please note programme times reflect South African Standard Time</small></p> <p><small>IMPORTANT: The colloquium events will be broadcast on Livestream and recorded.</small></p> <div style="border: 1px solid gray; padding: 5px;"> <p>Information</p> <p>Website: https://www.acusafrica.com/</p> <p>Social media handle: @crisnet_mandelauniversity and @etp_mandelauni</p> <p>Colloquium organisers: <i>Dina Bellugi, André Keet, & Michael Okyerefo</i></p> <p>Event coordinators: <i>Jenny Du Preez, Fortunata Jwara, & Michaela Penkler</i></p> <p>For queries, please contact michaelap@mandela.ac.za</p> </div>
		

The Transdisciplinary Institute for Mandela Studies Presents

RADICAL OPENNESS

In undertaking the advancement of Critical University Studies across Africa with the spirit of reflexivity, we would like to engage in critique around institutional names. Specifically, the effect that a particular name has on tertiary institutions and its interconnectedness to institutional culture.

Assuming cultures require nurturing as the point of departure for this panel, we will look into investigative work undertaken at this university around names and culture. The project at Nelson Mandela University around the name Mandela is an opportunity to practically explore how nurturing practices are developed and determine their connectedness to the name Mandela. Based on engagements with students, it is evident that we find ourselves in a space of radical dissent. During the #FeesMustFall movement, factions declared Nelson Mandela a 'sell-out'. In the present climate, dissent is much more complex than that, subsuming ignorance and indifference toward the social figure of Mandela and the institution's culture. It is not a dissent characterised by the binary polarities of a radical student voice versus a conservative administration. It is dissent which is multivalent. Mandela is almost anything which anybody seeks for. He is what Stuart Hall calls a 'floating signifier'. Key aspects of recent engagements around the significance of the name Mandela will inform the discussions and illustrate the challenge of building and sustaining the project of Critical University Studies at the university.

We see this panel as an opportunity to uncover the multiple contradictions that exist around the name Mandela as a provocation to think about a critical university practice. We will have young voices in conversation with older scholars to ask how this project can be used as a medium for - and take expression as - critical university studies and to think about what might be required, particularly inter-generationally, to build generative and self-sustaining sites of critical thought in the university.



ACUSAfrica Colloquium

Reflexive Solidarities in Techno-Rational Times

¹ See *ADDENDUM A* for the ACUSAfrica Colloquium announcement and concept note.

Panel Discussion Programme

3rd November 2022 – 18h00 - 20h00

Purpose: To provide an opportunity to uncover the multiple contradictions around the name *Mandela* as a provocation to think about a critical university practice.

Welcome & introductions: Prof André Keet, *Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Engagement and Transformation, Nelson Mandela University*

TIME	ACTIVITY	SPEAKER
18h30 – 18h45	Opening address and provocation	Prof Crain Soudien, <i>Honorary Professor: Mandela University</i>
18h45 – 19h20	Panel discussion	Keneilwe Natu, <i>SRC Premier: Mandela University</i> Rachel Collett, <i>Programme Coordinator for Visual Studies: Mandela University</i> Prof Nomalanga Mkhize, <i>Acting Director of the School of Governmental and Social Sciences: Mandela University</i> Prof Xolela Mangcu, <i>Interim Director of Africana Studies: George Washington University</i>
19h20 – 19h30	Group discussions	All
19h30 – 19h50	Response and reflections	Panellists
19h50 – 20h00	Conclusions and closure	Prof André Keet, <i>Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Engagement and Transformation, Nelson Mandela University</i>

Introduction

The ACUSAfrica² network aims to advance Critical University Studies (CUS) across Africa in dialogue with the emerging scholarship from the global South. The endeavour to discover 'alternative' approaches to examine universities capable of imagining multiple kinds of emancipatory higher education imaginations and futures underpins its work. The 2022 Colloquium contextualised the network's formative questions within the framework of forging reflective solidarity within the African higher education sector and beyond. Given the pace with which conceptions of digital governance and techno-rationality are achieving hegemony in the industry, the colloquium focused on how these solidarities may be fostered. It invited provocations in various formats for the network to engage with these challenges while developing the network as a community of practice.

As part of the colloquium proceedings, the Transdisciplinary Institute for Mandela Studies (TIMS) hosted a panel discussion on the topic, *Radical Openness*. It provided an opportunity to uncover the multiple contradictions that exist around the name *Mandela* as a provocation to think about critical university practices. At this early point of the life of TIMS, the intention is to initiate an approach that seeks to work critically with the Mandela name. In the spirit of critique, TIMS has as its foundational commitment the aim of working with the name 'Mandela' in deliberately intellectual ways. It asks how the name can be turned into an intellectual expression that advances the academic and social identity of the University. In line with ideas centred around the social figure of Mandela, the project aims to reimagine and create strategies and practices to reconfigure the University's interactions with its commons and local settings.

Radical Openness follows a series of interactions with the University over the past several years around what the Mandela name means. It follows from the '[Mandela Posture, Identity and Scholarship](#)' workshop and '[Politics and Cultures of Naming](#)' workshop in 2021, as well as the '[Mandela Identity in the Context of University Transformation](#)' panel discussion at the Mandela University Transformation Indaba, a [Mandela Mapping Note](#), and the Faculty Focus Group Discussions held earlier this year.

The panel discussion was held on the second day of the colloquium and was introduced by Professor André Keet, DVC Engagement and Transformation and Chair for Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation (*CriSHET*) at Mandela University. Professor Crain Soudien, an *Honorary Professor at Mandela University's Centre for the Advancement of Non-Racialism and Democracy (CANRAD)*,

² Advancing Critical University Studies across Africa; www.acusafrica.com

provided an initial provocation which was discussed and responded to by four panellists: i) Prof Nomalanga Mkhize, *Acting Director of the School of Governmental and Social Sciences: Mandela University*, ii) Prof Xolela Mangcu, *Interim Director of Africana Studies: George Washington University*, iii) Rachel Collett, *Programme Coordinator for Visual Studies: Mandela University*, and iv) Keneilwe Natu, *SRC Premier: Mandela University*.

The panel discussion also formed part of the broader five-year name-change celebrations of the University. On 20 July 2017, the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University changed its name to the Nelson Mandela University: the only higher education institution in the world to carry the name of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela. The name change allowed the institution to rebrand and position itself continentally and globally while also allowing it to usher in a new era of renewed vigour towards meaningful transformation. The celebrations aim to embed socially programmatic work within a strong conceptual positioning. This panel discussion was one of many such engagements across faculties, schools, entities, units, and its in-between spaces where celebrations and commemorations aimed to catalyse deeper conversations into what it meant to bear the Mandela name within the complex social contexts in which our institution and its communities are located.

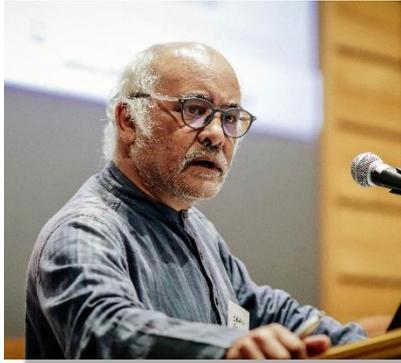


Panel discussion proceedings:

Provocation by Professor Crain Soudien

The session began with the primary question: does TIMS offer a possible site for the practice of critical university studies? The context is that of an emerging transdisciplinary institute for Mandela studies, which the University is working towards developing. The session aimed to stimulate discussion about the possibilities for cultivating a critical university praxis in undertaking an engagement with the name *Mandela*. Prof Soudien stated that the session further aimed to build on the knowledge gained from discussions in the ACUSAfrica colloquium thus far and proceed to consider an '*object*' (TIMS) and ask how this particular '*object*' might help us come to think about what a critical university praxis might be:

“Mandela, in its multiple forms of representation – is this a site from which we can begin to think critically about the world in which we live, and more importantly, a site from which and through which we might build a practice?”



Professor Crain Soudien

The argument emphasised the importance of practices and how practices are constructed. In considering dominance, for example, dominance *has* particular kinds of practices and is instituted *in* different kinds of practices. Thus, the problem here is the *urgency* of advancing the project of a critical university, with an urgency defined by the almost ubiquitous and totalising capture of the university; further, its over-determinedness by managerialism and its now almost unavoidable accountabilities.

These accountabilities have become shaping mechanisms for what contemporary universities are all about. Universities, almost everywhere in the world, have become commodified. They have succumbed to the corporate ideology of scorecard metrics, which, at the core, is performativity. This performativity has induced the constitutive reordering of academic life around instrumental reason, techno-positivism, and relationships characterised by clientelism between the university and its subjects and between the university and the state.

“We were in a previous era, right up until perhaps the 1960s, and this is how the colonial university comes into being, in which the University is essentially the handmaiden of the state. [...] We are in a different space now. The university is in a fundamentally *clientist* relationship now with what the market requires.”

Prof Soudien explained that teaching and learning, research, and social engagement have all been enclosed within this problematic system. Touching on the work of higher education scholar Bill Readings, his argument further suggested that the university has lost its fundamental commitment to critical inquiry and succumbed entirely to corporatisation. The needs of the capitalist market have entirely eclipsed its public good pretensions. ‘*Excellence*’ is an empty signifier based on key performance indicators which for themselves depend only on activity: “all that the system requires is for activity to take place and the empty notion of excellence refers to nothing other than the optimal input-output ratio in matters of information” (Readings, 1996). In light of this, Readings says the university has lost all content. It has become another bureaucratic corporation.

Drawing on his argument from the Disputation Panel, *The Common Good of the University in Techno-Rational Times*, Prof Soudien expressed Reading’s argument is an over-simplification of the many and often contradictory impulses and modalities which run through the university. The university is *never* a singular entity or organism; it is configured *in constant* contestation. Bureaucratic commodification and its attached accountabilities have come to define what the university expects of us. To define university life almost everywhere. Prof Soudien suggested this is most evident, and most damagingly

so, in how the human subjects of the university have been constitutively framed and shaped around the performative imperative of citations and impact metrics – one is constituted when one starts studying mathematics, one is constituted when one begins the study of anthropology, one is constituted when one becomes a lawyer.

We have, what Prof Soudien calls, a profound re-ontologisation of ourselves. Within this ontologisation are powerful authorising discourses, and the university is largely about the legitimacy of these discourses. These discourses are political and economic but are much more problematically social. They are social in all their racial, gendered, and class conceits. At the heart of this is an incontrovertible apotheosis, an incontestable narration of the ideal modern subject. This modern subject is represented in the liberal-reasoning human being – the human being who has overcome all of history's weaknesses. The subject that stands, in Fukuyama's terms, *at the end of history*. The effect of this narrative is ultimately the legitimation, the kind of modernity in which we find ourselves. Its cultural impulses to socialise us into its orthodoxies, orthodoxies which repeatedly and insistently return us to the comfort of the dominant order, and its sanctification of the underpinning's liniments, and substance of our normative order, and what it ought to be. The university presents itself, in these terms, in essentially preservative impulses.

Prof Soudien further argued that while the discursive register of the modern university is regularly framed by, and in the rhetorics of, inquiry – its understanding of its basic and foundational distinctive character, that very active inquiry is encoded in fundamental ideological terms. Considering Dr Luckiesh's speech in 1934 – at the height of the modernist movement in the 20th century – “Modern science is a great movement against the unknown. Its purpose is unchallengeable. It aims to understand by knowing the truth. Its method is uniquely dependable. It is a new kind of strategy that aims to establish the facts, unwarping by such human frailties as prejudice and egoism. The harvest of this movement is tested and testable knowledge, therefore incontestable knowledge.” Methodologically speaking, it is the idea that truth is achieved through objective study. Only observable facts determined through an objective distance provide the basis for determining truth. Truth, in this regard, presents itself here as a wonderful gift to global and civilisational development – it's incontestable, it is right. It has the object of the unquestioned public good built into it. Out of it has come what is perceived to be good science. In this good science, what are perceived to be foundational and canonical truths – provide a sense of certainty. As important as this posture is, it has also legitimised intolerance and inhospitality, making it difficult to see possibilities outside this particular narrative.

In the face of this dominance, what might we do? In answering this question, Prof Soudien drew on the political philosopher Bonnie Honig who talks about what she calls *holding environments*. Prof Soudien adjusted the term slightly to holding *cultures*. Such holding cultures can hold, engender, and reproduce. They reproduce the capacity and ability for particular ways of seeing, particular ways of being in the university, and particular socialities – of self and other – of developing. The dominant culture of commodification has refined the art of reproduction. It has refined the way in which this *holding culture* comes to manage itself. It has composed all of us. All of us tend to manage ourselves in relation to what its dominance is and its accountabilities. We almost do not have the capacity to escape it.

Prof Soudien emphasised that the night's discussion was to rethink the university. We are asking how to cultivate other possibilities, using this idea of holding cultures. Other possibilities of what this normative culture is all about and possibilities of disruption. A difficult question arises: how do you cultivate *holding cultures* of disruption? How do you cultivate cultures that can engender and inspire this thing of saying 'no, I refuse'; and provide the conditions for its reproduction? How do you engender disruption? It is against this that Prof Soudien takes from the work of Jacques Rancière, who refers to different ways in which democracy has come to manifest itself; Prof Soudien says that the complicated thing about true democracy is this capacity in any collective social space for always having division – and living with division. A radical democracy, Jacques Rancière argues, 'always divides anew'.

At times this division can be destructive and anti-social, but Rancière talks about division which is also generative – which will allow one to take an idea and to ask how that idea *does not come to be the final point* for what we need in order to think about our problem. How do we come to think about the possibility of an idea leading to yet another idea? Prof Soudien asked again, how does the name Mandela allow us to engender a culture like that?

We arrive at this question, particularly with the work we are doing at Mandela University, talking to people about *what does Mandela mean to you?* In these discussions, there is a dissent akin to the register that one got from the #FeesMustFall movement, which declared Mandela a sell-out. But it is also dissent which is, in some ways, ignorance; i.e. 'I want nothing to do with Mandela', 'don't bring me any imposition of what I must be', 'leave me alone please, just leave me alone'. It is, of course, radical; it is refusal and rejection – but it's also indifference. Indifference pervades the inside of the university, these new accountabilities that we are talking about proliferate, and spawn indifference –

because the self has become so privatised, so invested in its own being and its own becoming, that please ‘just leave me alone, just leave me alone’.

In closing, Prof Soudien expressed his enjoyment of being in the field and doing this work with the University by asking really hard questions of people: ‘what does Mandela mean for engineering? What does Mandela mean to mathematics? It may be easy for psychologists to make a response and easy for sociologists, historians, and so on. We are in encoded disciplines, and now we are asking how we put Mandela into a relationship with this encoding. How do we now cultivate a critical university practice through this particular object?’

Response from Keneilwe Natu



Keneilwe Natu

Mx Natu expressed their interest in being part of the panel and its discussion but also noted the magnitude of the task at hand and the associated anxieties that can arise. They stated that the name of Nelson Mandela holds much weight and historical significance in South Africa and goes beyond the name as a signifier of leadership. Values orbiting the name include humility, peace, hope, and integrity. Mx Natu voiced that the conversation around the figure of Mandela is indeed provocative and that it is

a conversation that we often avoid having. The importance of the topic in light of the rising contestations and controversies around the name Mandela was demonstrated through allusion to the #FeesMustFall (FMF) movement. At the heart of Nelson Mandela’s political activism was the importance of education; he believed that education was an important mechanism to rescue the oppressed from the ravages of Apartheid. The Apartheid system’s intentionally segregationist stance had designed the education offered to South Africa’s black population. Mandela played his role in transforming the socio-economic climate and status quo of the time with passion and appreciation for diversity and connectedness. It is the spirit of connectedness that Mx Natu enjoys about Mandela University.

The University’s new medical school on the Missionvale Campus is located in a community where black people are socially disadvantaged. Perhaps the name Mandela could be a signifier of hope within the community, but perhaps that hope could be lost within a system where tertiary education is a luxury. During FMF, the demand for free education made it challenging to live up to this conception of the name Mandela. Mx Natu noted several plausible explanations: i) the unappreciation of radicalism by institutions, and ii) the increasing number of challenges surrounding study fees. Such challenges have

become the norm for student activists, and for some, this norm may be for life when we consider the FMF movement. We now see the contrast between Madiba's values of education and the contemporary lack of accessibility to said education. According to Mandela, education should be easily accessible to South Africans for the betterment of their lives. In fact, Mx Natu noted, South African lives depend on it. Some students currently face a pressing sensitive issue: a lack of a certificate after completing a course due to academic debt and having to seek subsequent employment without said certificate.

A key part of the FMF movement was decoloniality, which in many spaces within the higher education system, speaks to recognising Africanity and African languages within the contexts of a historically oppressed nation. As a history student, Mx Natu noted gaps within the history department at our university – specifically the limited history material at students' disposal. In looking at the historical significance of the figure of Mandela, Mx Natu argued that Mandela University would be expected to be *the* school for politics and history. As one of the few history students at Mandela University, Mx Natu expressed that the Mandela name should accompany and prioritise a strong history department that focuses on Africanity and the identities of African people. Mx Natu acknowledged the African historians in the audience and conveyed their gratitude to Professor Ndlovu for their tutelage.

Other significant gaps noted by Mx Natu were the scarcity of black academics, limited student-scholar engagement, and language. It was highlighted that language is at the heart of decoloniality and that when it comes to Mandela University, Mx Natu believes language ought to be prioritised. Within the University, one finds that many registered students are from rural areas, the poorest of the poor, where they are not familiar with laptops and big English words – This further reveals the importance of language in accessible education. By using language that is more accessible, we are better aligned with the name Mandela.

Response from Rachel Collett

Ms Collett's contribution drew a connection between what Prof Soudien referred to as the corporatisation of the university and how the institution has used Nelson Mandela's image. In light of considering TIMS as a praxis of CUS, Ms Collett explored how critical studies on Mandela can be transferred from its isolated field of scholarship to the consciousness of the broader university community through the use of visual arts and media. The visual environment of a university is important. There is an insightful PhD thesis by Philippa Tumubweinee, who wrote about the physical layout of the spaces at the University of the Free State. She investigated how the physical spaces allowed or disallowed certain forms of engagement between different student groupings, different

students, and staff. Ntonbuyeni argues as French philosopher Henri Lefebvre says, “physical space helps construct social space, and representations in space provide the environment of, and the channel for, communication” (Tumubweinee 2018: 21). Building on this, Ms Collett’s response looked briefly at the public sculptures and imagery that represent Mandela at the University and offered a reading of these as icons of simultaneously ideal African and cosmopolitan citizenship.



Rachel Collett

To contextualise the way Mandela has been used at our university, Ms Collett looked at a general portraiture of Mandela that has come out of the so-called post-Apartheid era. Here she drew on Professor Lize van Robbroeck’s article about *The Visual Mandela*. In this article, van Robbroeck makes the case that artistic portraits such as paintings and sculptures tend to elide the contingent nature of indexical science that photographs capture. She takes us to one example of Paul Emsley’s

monumental, more than one (1) metre high pencil portrait of Mandela. Here, the artist has made a series of decisions to portray the sitter without context, to focus on his face (the seat of interiority), to portray him in black and white, and to ask his subject not to smile. The result, van Robbroeck argues, is that the viewer is invited to believe that they can read Mandela’s unique and coherent singular interiority through his portrait. One of the functions of the modern Western portrait is to convey this idea of the unique individual, a self, that one can see in the subject and somehow capture. The modern portrait is conceived of at the same time as the self is understood as individual and unitary, and importantly as a political subject, you have rights and also political responsibilities of citizenship.

Van Robbroeck points out that the Mandela represented here is a particular version of Mandela – Mandela as a self-commanding, stoic modern subject who portrays moral authority and epitomises the ideals of modern global citizenship. This is a version of Mandela that van Robbroeck argues was especially appealing to neoliberalism and was the same kind of representation used by Barack Obama. The only sign of his particular time and place, here, is his shirt. The Mandela shirt is interesting because it is a multivalent signifier. When asked about his shirts, Mandela apparently answered that he had been in prison for 27 years and wanted to feel freedom. And thus, the shirt is a symbol of freedom and also the power to reject the western suit. It also symbolises Mandela’s ideal of cosmopolitan global citizenship, as expressed in part of his Rivonia Trial statement where he said, “I have been influenced in my thinking by both west and east. I should tie myself to no particular system of society other than that of socialism. I must leave myself free to borrow from the west and the east.”

The Mandela sculpture, completed in 2015, is the largest sculpture symbolising Mandela on the Nelson Mandela University campuses. It is made from white and blue ceramic tiles, which give colour to it, but it is predominantly made of this wire mesh which gives a suggestion of transparency. Interestingly, the person of Mandela is not present here. It is now a shirt not filled by a body. It's more of an explicit tribute to the value system, abstracted from the particularities of Mandela, the person. It is further interesting to look at the place at which the sculpture is placed – situated outside of the main building: managerial power and the idea of moral citizenship and leadership are brought into proximity. Ms Collett showed a second image of the wire Mandela shirt that was frequently used in the marketing of postgraduate courses, indicating that many of these images of the public sculptures have been used extensively to market the university.

A second sculpture of Mandela is installed outside the South Campus library. Unveiled in 2018, the bronze sculpture also portrays the era of the Mandela shirt reading a large book seated on a bench. In some ways, it's quite different from the monumental shirt. It is not placed on a plinth. It invites participation. Taking part in a different convention of bringing public heroes to the people. It is accessible. But in light of critical university studies, it is interesting to ask *what form of participation does it invite?* The bench is frequently used for selfie opportunities by students, alumni, and visitors. Similar to the shirt, it is extensively used in marketing. In the photos shown during the presentation, one can see how it is used to promote a certain idea of student life on campus. The image of Mandela reading this generic book situated in relation to the library and the Main Building functions to sanction the form of education being offered here. But visualising Mandela in relation to education could also be used to explore the range of provocations that have been raised about the nature, purpose, and accessibility of that education. Van Robbroeck argues that the representation of the ideal, coherent, cosmopolitan synthesiser – *that* Mandela – functions as a kind of big '*other*', following Lacan. This icon interpolates the viewer, hailing us as citizens of the kind that he represents or this particular version represents.

In the TIMS survey of what students, staff, and the public associated with the name *Mandela*, it was interesting to note that the findings indicated that the majority of respondents related to Mandela on a symbolic level as a purveyor of values as opposed to a historical, or political level. These artworks provide an important point of connection to Mandela on campus. They also face the challenges of public sculpture, which do have to speak to a broad audience, and presenting something that is difficult to live with in public, and is also discomfiting, is a particular challenge to get comfort for.

These artworks are beautifully crafted and show care. They are a connection point to the figure of Mandela that would otherwise be completely absent. One could articulate an interest in different inflections of Mandela's image. The challenge would be to resist the appeal to reinforce images of Mandela as a singular, unified-ideal subject. To not only depict the various stages of Mandela's life and the different roles that he played but the relational aspects of his subjectivity as highlighted by various colleagues.

“Can Mandela university embrace experimental and discomfoting forms of visual representation of Mandela?”

This is just one way that the nuance of scholarship on Mandela can be more present in the campus environment. There are many other ways that have been suggested. For instance, in the course of the Mandela project engagements at the University, Dr Muki Moeng spoke about a grounding module that would encourage critical reflection on Mandela as a way of providing students with a conceptualisation that would assist them in tackling issues of human rights, the economy, and life beyond the classroom. There has been a further suggestion to have a stronger focus on innovation and entrepreneurship – if we take entrepreneurship back to the idea of innovation and creativity, we are privy to a powerful observation by one of our students³ when reflecting on what they felt about the name.

In closing, Ms Collett suggested ‘the visual’ as a metaphor for the accretion of dominant narratives and tropes. She explained that a proposal had been put forward to develop biography-centred modules and pondered the reception of this module by a student population that felt indifferent to Nelson Mandela. Ms Collett probed the possible origins of this indifference and reasoned that it may arise from the repetition of one-dimensional narratives about Mandela and from ignorance. Reflection on these origins and ‘the visual’ as an accretor provokes critical evaluation of everyday imagery – of symbolism, iconography, meanings lost, and obsolescence. Lastly, we were challenged to consider how such rich engagement and scholarship make their way into everyday life.

Response from Professor Nomalanga Mkhize

Prof Mkhize's input introduced the audience to a book, *'Culture Eats Strategy for Breakfast'*, and shared her observations around projects, praxis, and culture. This is what Prof Mkhize believes sharing the appropriate culture ought to be at the heart of the TIMS project; not the survey or language –

³ See *Mandela Identity in the Context of University Transformation Report* (February 2022)

regardless of how well-designed a strategic plan is, it will fall flat unless the team shares the appropriate culture.

Expanding on this theme, Prof Mkhize related a friend's experience of retaining a black self amongst liberal-funded work in the NGO sector. The friend, a young black female from a Cape Town NGO, was engaged in a coffee shop meeting with a white donor. Unbeknownst to them, they were being closely observed by a black American seated at a nearby table. At some point, this stranger approached them and said to the white donor; "Don't you ever think we can't see what you are doing to her". Prof Mkhize noted that this experience was an eye-opener for her friend and changed her life. The interaction with the unknown black man forever broke the idea that she was only in the world as a particular kind of free independent person; rather that there is a whole black surveillance network observing and asking; to check in to see "Is this child still fine?".



Professor Nomalanga Mkhize

Prof Mkhize expressed that this story demonstrates one of the difficult things about dealing with a project such as the Mandela project at hand. For black people, it is difficult to share the story of Mandela with those who did not accept him. Prof Mkhize proposed that the current generation may call Mandela a "sell-out" because they do not want to share Mandela with white people. Not because they don't think he should be shared, but because they don't want to share their 'grandfather' in a way that disrespects his very deep legacy; it is legitimate for black people across the continent to not want to share Mandela with people who never understood what Mandela meant to them. To deal with the Mandela project, for her, the University needs to consider this issue; come to terms with the psychology of black people trying to understand why he must be *Tata Madiba* for everyone. In working on this, and furthering the effort of making sense of a person who came to his own statesmanship. The apex of his global leadership was to find a way for trust to be engendered, such that we can continue to build a living community.

"And what did Mandela do? Did Mandela not have to tell the young men to throw their AK-47s into the sea after Chris Hani was killed? Mandela had to do that. Right? So, we all know the stories where Mandela had to do that, [...] and it's deeply painful for black South Africans to have to deal with white South Africans who can't understand what that means to us – even the child not born at the time inherits that memory."

Thus, Prof Mkhize explained that we need to come to terms with the question of culture, from all sides. At a practical level, in dealing with the Mandela project, and trying to intellectualise it – when we are sitting here at an institution that was historically right-wing; and today 80% of students are black – we see lots of changes, but how do we really dream the dream that says to the black child “I am not disrespecting your ownership of the grandfather, or of Mandela the fighter”. Instead, we are going to have to build a place in which the concept of sustaining a dream can be enacted. All around us, we see failure and the inability to really deal with the legacies that are passed down to us. Prof Mkhize highlighted several questions to help guide the TIMS projects: i) what are the practices of using power?; ii) how do we practice institutional relationship cultivation?; iii) how do we practice building communities?; and iv) how do we practice building trust? In essence, we are wanting to figure out how to cultivate these cultures.

In closing, Prof Mkhize noted the reason why she began her input with the coffee shop story, is because it has been her experience that black students are highly sceptical, for good reasons, of whether current ways of running things, in fact, achieve anything for black people at the end of the day. She believes that we have to find ways to engender real trust to build a culture that says, “yes, this thing we are doing here is going to benefit you; it’s going to create the conditions in which we can create a sustainable dream.”

Response from Professor Xolela Mangcu



Professor Xolela Mangcu

Prof Mangcu’s opening attempted to reveal his relation to Mandela, going back to the 1980s when Prof Mangcu was a radical leader of the black consciousness movement at Wits University, and a critic of Mandela both then, and now. According to him, it matters not whether one is a critique of Mandela, but rather what are the terms of the criticisms. As a scholar, Prof Mangcu believes those terms ought to be scholarly. In as much as one brings politics into it, and as much as one might disagree with Mandela politically, what would one’s intellectual engagement with this figure look like? Beyond intellectual engagement of the person themselves, to their symbolic figuring.

Over the past eight (8) years, Prof Mangcu has been writing a book about Mandela from the perspective of living outside of South Africa. He recalls that in 1997 he had visited India at the behest of the Barefoot College, situated in one of the poorest parts of the country. As the host showed him around, they passed a group of elderly people – they did not speak English which made

conversation quite difficult. However, Prof Mangcu decided to ask them a question in English, “Do you know Nelson Mandela?” and all of them nodded in agreement. A year later, in 1998, he was at Harvard University, which had at the time decided to give Mandela a special honorary doctorate, a specially convened gathering of the university. The university had not done this in over two hundred (200) years. To date, the only people to have received this award were George Washington in 1776, Winston Churchill in 1945, and now Mandela. We are thus faced with a paradox; a global recognition of Mandela versus the dismissal of Mandela in our own land.

This is not unique to Mandela, Prof Mangcu argued. George Washington had been rejected by a large number of the American public, who saw him as a wannabe royal; he had a dangerous monarchical demeanour and wanted to impose himself as a king of sorts of a democratic republic. Further, Charles de Gaulle, the celebrated French leader, was at one time considered the most revered figure in French history, but also the most disliked. And Mikhail Gorbachev was regarded as the greatest statesman in the history of 20th-century Russia but was also widely despised. There is thus nothing new in paradox, and we are challenged to ask, ‘what leads societies to do this?’ According to Prof Mangcu, there is a difference between the immediacy of the moment, and how the person is viewed over time, and there is no single Mandela for a particular time. So, while some may call Mandela a sell-out today, fifty (50) years from now, another generation may look at this situation differently, as generations have always done around the world. He links this to the process of national self-identity building.

Several paradoxes and ironies arise around the name Mandela, and Prof Mangcu suggests that engagement with these contradictions may be of value to TIMS. He illustrated the intellectual ignorance often at play when discussions around Mandela arise. One such paradox reveals that Mandela, the revered leader and radical revolutionary, comes from a family which was allied, to some degree, with the colonial government. Such information is not evident in any of the biographies written about Mandela, nor anywhere else. His family fought alongside the colonialists to defeat the amaXhosa. This shows the importance of not confusing the Tembu and the Xhosa in that history. Further, Mandela became part of an African elite – mission-educated, and trained at Fort Hare – a very small group of people in the African community at that time. And in the Cape, such groups had the right to what was called a *qualified franchise*; it was a non-racial qualified franchise. The African elites in the Cape had voting rights from 1853 until 1936. These two things suggest, to Prof Mangcu, a certain ambiguity about the political struggle, which illustrates it as one stream of revolutionary upheaval with no room for compromise. This is not true. Even during the resistance wars, African communities allied themselves with colonial governments to gain advantages against other

communities. Again, this is not peculiar to South Africa but has happened all over the world amongst colonised people.

What Prof Mangcu attempted to illustrate with these accounts, and what he hopes the institute will do, is to bring to light the ambiguities, the paradoxes, and the contradictions of the struggle. He noted to have read letters written by a number of African resistance leaders calling for compromise with the British. They did this so that they could safely return to their farmlands for planting season without the risk of being exposed to attack. African people have always been *pragmatic*, but it was always a radical pragmatism – not the vacuous manner in which the term might otherwise be used. Even as we like to think of ourselves as revolutionaries, as putting ourselves within this revolutionary history, we may have to appreciate what that history was like before we place ourselves in it, which he argues is vital to our understanding of leadership.

The next point of ambiguity is what Prof Mangcu calls the *tragedy* of Mandela. If one were to go back five thousand (5 000) years – long before the onset of Western modernity – and consider the Greek concept of tragedy, one can look at Mandela's life through a different lens. A scholar, Northrop Frye, wrote a book about how history is written. He divided it into four broad categories: i) *romance*; ii) *comedy* (as in reconciliation); iii) *satire* (as in the sense of irony or cynicism); and iv) *tragedy*. Mandela has been written against the former two categories.

In closing, Prof Mangcu advocated that if we want to look at Mandela through the African lens, we should do what other African leaders and writers have been doing, such as the likes of Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Ola Rotimi, and so on. African folks outside South Africa have been using tragedy to study their own condition, and it is a sign of our own displacement, of our own distance from the African political, cultural, and literary imagination that we have not used tragedy to look at Mandela. It is when we perceive through the lens of tragedy that we begin to appreciate suffering, not triumph – suffering as a basis for what it means to be human. And when we look at Mandela this way, perhaps we can develop some empathy for his suffering. Maybe it is the common romantic framework that lends him to be called a sell-out, but perhaps a tragic framework may help us look at him more empathetically, even as we do so critically.

Group discussion / Question & answer

The group discussion segment was replaced with a shorter Q&A item due to time constraints. The questions reflect as follows:

- i. Do you pre-suppose that the generation of 1990-1994 saw Mandela as progressive even though we achieved political democracy and not economic democracy; what then does TIMS have to say about that in respect of rebranding Mandela going forward?
- ii. On the use of 'transdisciplinary' as a heuristic term or device as opposed to other terms such as inter-disciplinary, or multi-disciplinary, what does 'transdisciplinary' speak to, or hope to achieve, especially when it comes to understanding Mandela critically?
- iii. When we try to define society or a space (e.g. Nelson Mandela University against the name Nelson Mandela), in considering the singling out of individuals and considering their values, is that African, or the best approach? Should we single out certain individuals and build up around them, or should we be looking at the societal values without really singling out a particular individual and building from there instead?
- iv. On the question of Mandela being viewed as a sell-out, that discussion ought to be held in the correct political and historical discourse on the clear expectations of liberation and struggle objectives as rallied by Mandela's liberation movement – because as long as we detach the struggle objectives from the question of selling out or not, we will miss the point. And this does not even become a Mandela issue; building on the latter speaker, why is it that we single out Mandela outside his collective colleagues whom he struggled with such that the victories or the failures of that struggle would befall that collective? This is the trap that we put the Mandela name on, that it takes the form of a collective.
- v. How do we address the humanising approach and primacy of relationality that Mandela used, and how this was, and continues to be, taken advantage of by those that do not identify with the African culture? [Phrased against the backdrop of massive inequalities and who owns the economy]

The panellists' responses are as follows:

- i. Nomalanga Mkhize: In relation to the comment by Prof Mangcu on radical pragmatism and being conservative (but not *really*): this is the point precisely – there is no black struggle that is scorched-earth only; otherwise, one will die in one's own struggle. This is what the liberal movement has taught black students for the past thirty (30) years; that you can scorched-earth your own society and still survive. And this is why this comment is important, because

at some point, in looking at the history, we have to say, 'well, it was not actually Mandela; it was Oliver Tambo, and further, not even just Oliver Tambo but a constellation of political ancestors'. The belief that one could be so much brighter than them is arrogant for any of us. Radical pragmatism is the inheritance of real African struggle across the world; not speaking of the collaborationist aspect, but rather 'struggle so that we can live'. Further, on Mandela as the military leader, André Odendaal emphasised this point as well: it takes political intelligence to hold back your military wing to say 'now is the time for politics, not war'. In the end, for us to build trust, we have to take African intelligence seriously.

- ii. Rachel Collett: In responding to the question of the forms of memorial and why an individual is singled out, it made me think about how across Africa, after independence, there are these bronze sculptures of leaders that are erected – usually of one particular man – a particular form of memorialisation. Not particularly a Western form of memorialisation, but you can see it. There are other ways of remembering, even visually – considering *forms* of monuments – such as memorial houses in Rwanda that can be visited, and in Germany where the names of people who died on a certain street can be seen. There are also cases where whole communities go out and clean monuments. There are more participatory and broader forms of memorial out there. So, why do we not utilise those forms more?
- iii. Xolela Mangcu: There should be no one position on Mandela. In fact, for me, TIMS should be a basis for all kinds of intellectual scholarly engagement with Mandela. I should be able to disagree with Mandela, and I do, especially on questions of race. The Nelson Mandela Foundation has a paper that I wrote in which I criticised him. What I disagree with are the insults, and that I really find objectionable. Second, what were we fighting for? There's no one answer to that: "What were the struggle objectives?" It depends on where the negotiations take place, and at the time of the negotiations, the objectives were really about racial freedom – there had been within the ANC a contestation about whether this was a class struggle or a racial struggle. Mandela, Kathrada, and others wrote an essay, called *Marxism and Nqindi*, which expresses that neither Marxism nor communism, are the policy of the organisation and that the communist party is not the leading agent of the organisation. This is a struggle for racial freedom. Thus, we must look at the archive itself. Finally, nobody in their right mind would elevate Mandela above other people, and that's not what biography is about. So, in considering *tragedy*, if you look at Greek tragedy, there is a hero – but the hero is always part of the action so that when the hero dies, the action continues. This is what Raymond Williams teaches us. So, it is not that we should not talk about individual heroes, but how we talk about them in relation to their comrades and their communities. Also, Mandela was, in negotiations,

the least compromising of his comrades. For instance, when De Klerk and others refused to release Robert McBride, Mandela demanded that McBride be released, or there would be no further negotiation.

- iv. Keneilwe Natu: I think that the important question should be whether the University is able to keep up with the name of Mandela, whether it is able to sustain the expectations that come with the name Mandela, and also considering that we place him in a significant place in history. The academic space must, in a sense, pay reparations to this particular debate by appreciating African scholarship.

Concluding remarks by Prof Crain Soudien

The initial provocation was, 'does TIMS offer up a possible site for the practice of critical university studies'. The way in which the discussion has gone, with no excuse of coming to focus on the individual here, is how this particular subject is constituted. What we are starting to do here is open up the absolute availability of a conversation like this for the University to model a different practice. To begin to think about a practice that is completely different from the way in which most of history is managed and taught. It is how we think about a subject methodologically – a crucial thing to do. The multiple perspectives and multiplicities provide the opportunity for new public spaces for conversation and are the basis for us to bring trust into it. We need to model a different way to understand inquiry beyond objectivity.

The session was closed by Professor André Keet.

ACUSAFRICA

ADVANCING CRITICAL UNIVERSITY STUDIES ACROSS AFRICA

COLLOQUIUM

**Reflexive Solidarities in
Techno-Rational Times¹**

ANNOUNCEMENT

*2-4 November 2022
Nelson Mandela University
South Africa*

The ACUSAfrica network aims to advance Critical University Studies across Africa in dialogue with scholarship from the global South. Underpinning our work is the endeavour to find 'other' ways to study universities that are capable of thinking plural forms of emancipatory higher education imaginations and futures.

The 2022 Colloquium will locate the network's formative questions within the context of building reflexive solidarities within the higher education sector on the African continent and beyond. Against this backdrop and considering the speed at which the notions of digital governance and techno-rationality are achieving hegemony in the sector, the colloquium will focus on how these kinds of solidarities may be advanced.

The colloquium invites provocations in various formats for the network to engage with these challenges, whilst at the same time developing the network as a community of practice.

For any queries, please email:
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¹ - The initial ideas for focusing on higher education in techno-rational times were developed with Aslam Fataar, Shireen Motala and André Keet, 2021.



CRITICAL
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Concept Note

The ACUSAfrica network was founded during the 2019 *Emancipatory Imaginations* Winter School ([report](#) and [website](#) accessible here). Since the initial Winter School and the growth of the network, two further gatherings were held, in 2020 (see [event](#)) and 2021 (see [report](#)). These events aimed at deepening discussions on growing the network and its interpretive schemes. In addition, seminars have been held to inform various debates (see the ACUSAfrica [website](#)).

The 2022 Colloquium will further explore the initial questions ACUSAfrica has been grappling with, and locate them within the context of building reflexive solidarities across the higher education sector on our Continent and elsewhere. This kind of reflexivity should be commensurate with the ideals of the radical study of the university and distance itself from the dominant trend of 'reflection studies' in higher education that is associated with innocence-making frameworks of thought.

We are also at a point where the ideal purposes of the 'common good' of the university are slowly receding from our horizon of possibilities, against the speed at which the notions of digital governance and techno-rationality are achieving hegemony in the sector; furthering the de-politicisation of the university.

The de-politicisation of the university as a function of techno-rationality, so we argue, emerges as an interplay of technological, economic, affective, and socio-cultural forces behind the veil of the present crisis. There is a need to generate fresh questions around the following: the enduring colonial/modern/capitalist imaginary of higher education²; persistent inequality and the ongoing search for social justice (ecological, cognitive, affective, relational, and economic); the complexity of subject re/formations and transfigurations associated with students, staff, and institutional cultures; the relationship between university and society; and knowledge, curriculum, and learning and teaching.

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2 - See Sharon Stein and Vanessa de Oliveira Andreotti, 2016.

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