

*POLITICS AND CULTURES OF NAMING VIRTUAL  
WORKSHOP*

Workshop Report

*Compiled by: Ms. Jane Ndungu*

*Engagement and Transformation Portfolio | Nelson Mandela University*

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**Virtual Seminar Programme**  
**27<sup>th</sup> August 2021 – 14h00 to 16h00**

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**Purpose:** To explore the ‘academic expression’ of Nelson Mandela and the broader question of how naming cultures work.

**Facilitator:** Prof Verne Harris, *Nelson Mandela Foundation*; *Adjunct Professor: Nelson Mandela University*

<b>TIME</b>	<b>ACTIVITY</b>	<b>LED BY:</b>
14:00 – 14:15	Welcome	Prof Sibongile Muthwa, <i>VC: Nelson Mandela University</i>
14:15 – 14:20	Introduction of the panel	Prof Verne Harris, <i>Adjunct Professor: Nelson Mandela University</i>
14:20 – 14:40	Provocation	Prof Crain Soudien, <i>Nelson Mandela University</i>
14:40 – 14:50	Response	Ms Judy Sikuza
14:50 – 15:00	Response	Mr Sello Hatang
15:00 – 15:40	Discussions	All participants
15:40 – 16:00	Closing / Way Forward	Prof André Keet, <i>DVC: Engagement and Transformation Portfolio, Nelson Mandela University</i>

## **Workshop proceedings**

### **Introduction**

The workshop was facilitated by Prof Verne Harris, an adjunct professor at the Nelson Mandela University. The Vice-Chancellor of the Nelson Mandela University, Prof Sibongile Muthwa, commenced the workshop by welcoming all who had attended: friends and intellectual co-travellers of the University from other academic institutions, in the broader South African space and beyond its borders; and colleagues from across the faculties, divisions, and entities of the university to the workshop. She thanked all for taking their time to join the workshop.

The Vice-Chancellor conveyed her anticipation that the workshop theme would provoke and stimulate excellent debate and interest. She reiterated the journey the University had been on since the renaming of the Institution in June 2017 and expressed that the University had been engaged in a deliberate and engaged introspection, on the meanings of *Mandela* for the University community. The VC explained that the University community continuously seeks the best ways to respond; to ensure the honour and responsibility of bearing the name of *Mandela* and all that it encompasses remains relevant within the University context. Programmes such as the Mandela colloquium, the Mandela Sentinary programme, various public lectures, and formalization of the relationship between the University and Nelson Mandela Foundation have been some of the ways in which the University is responding to this responsibility of bearing the name, *Mandela*.

The Vice-Chancellor thanked Ms Sikuza and Mr Hatang for their continued support and involvement in the University, and in the Transdisciplinary Institute of Mandela Studies (TIMS) programme. The Vice-Chancellor indicated that the support from the Nelson Mandela Foundation and Mandela Rhodes Foundation has provided the University with immeasurable gravitas to the University's efforts in this ongoing journey of understanding its position as an institution bearing the name of Mr Mandela.

The Vice-Chancellor went further to present the ongoing Mandela scholarship at the University, which focusses on (i) the essence of *Mandela* as it relates to his leadership, his notion of social justice and the value of education in changing the trajectory of the

marginalized and the vulnerable in society, (ii) the extent to which the University's foundation scholarly missions of teaching and learning, research as well as engagement are aligned to the distinct iconic brand of Madiba and more broadly to the vision and values of a free equal and democratic world that he stood for and fought so hard for all his life, (iii) the institutional culture, practices and the symbols that will define the institution and help to break with the legacy of the past, and (iv) to ensure that the governance ethos of the University council and related governance structures of the University that are charged with good cooperate governance as setting the ethical tone of the University and which represent the University's image in the public eye and which safeguard the reputation of the University. The scholarly programmes pursued therein include revitalising the humanities, the intellectual Mandela identity of the University, transdisciplinarity, African intellectual traditions, institutional research themes which run across all the University Science domains and connecting deeply with the African continent.

The Vice-Chancellor reiterated the University's commitment to advancing and recording Mandela scholarship both internally and externally and formally invited everyone to the seminar. This complete and powerful opening speech can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MuAm6qGgmXo>.

### **Provocation**

Prof Crain Soudien provided a provocation, setting the tone for the workshop. In this provocation, Prof Soudien explored how institutions named after persons work with the names they have and, using this, he opened up a discussion about the implications of the name *Mandela* for the Nelson Mandela University. To begin, Prof Soudien presented Professors Swartz and Muthwa, who argued that (i) the Nelson Mandela University should become the pre-eminent academic expression of Mandela; (ii) and that there was a need for clarity among role-players that the University would no longer be named after the metropolitan municipality, but after the resonant vision, values and commitments to a more equal, socially-just and democratic world order promoted by the global icon. Prof Soudien then went on to elaborate on the politics of naming institutions, and he began this by introducing the *toponomic* theory which analyses the ways in which regimes and movements use place names to claim territories, erase linguistic traces of original populations, gain

political legitimacy, delegitimise other political forces, naturalise certain versions of history, and silence dissent. He differentiated this from *anthroponymic*, which means naming institutions after historic figures. In South Africa, there are six anthroponymic institutions and 20 toponymic institutions. Additionally, over two-thirds of institutions in South Africa have had their names changed since the apartheid regime.

Prof Soudien also pointed out that the South African Higher Education Act does not give much guidance on determining the names of institutions. He also indicated that South African athroponymically-named institutions have found ways of marking and honouring their namesakes but, beyond this, have not appeared, in relation to their core mandates, to have made their names opportunities for developing distinct identities. The exceptions to this were provided: Marcus Garvey Pan African University in Ghana and Jawaharlal Nehru University in India have, in multiple ways, engaged with the name that their institutions have been given. However, neither of these two institutions are currently in good shape, indicating that such names do not guarantee inoculation of institutions from shortcomings.

In his provocation, Prof Soudien offered the following:

1. There is not a strong model with a set of practices and examples for how a university should work critically with its name.
2. There is little indication of how universities give 'academic expression' to the names they bear. In these terms, the names could be said to be, minimally, *denotive*. They are distinguishable by a mark. What that mark stands for is firstly, however, open to interpretation.
3. The gesture is primarily aimed at the person and offers no guidance to how the university thinks of its mandate to teaching, research, and social engagement.

In closing, Prof Soudien argued that the Nelson Mandela University is concerned with the question of working the name *Mandela* in ways that are, at a number of levels, far more like the MGPU and JNU than the denotatively anthroponymically named institutions and there remains, still, great opportunity.

### **Response from Ms Judy Sikuza**

In her response, Ms Sikuza indicated that the naming of institutions is indeed a deeply political practice and it is important to work critically with those names. She proposed a need for deep thinking of how an institution can be rooted within its contexts. She further posed to the attendees to clarify which Mandela outgoing students are being asked to be.

Ms Sikuza indicated that in their naming of the Mandela Rhodes Foundation there was significant intentionality around awareness that the *Mandela* name speaks to a broader part of Madiba's legacy. She presented the tension that did exist, and which Nelson Mandela was aware of; in the name of Mandela and what it stood for, as well as that of Cecil Rhodes'. Ms Sikuza clarified that Mr Mandela did in no way seek to sanitise the name of Cecil Rhodes nor to redeem him through juxtaposing their names. Mr Mandela was presenting a provocation to the citizens, asking "can we come together across the historical divide? Can we heal the wounds of the past? Can we create a future that is built on true systemic inclusion?" Thus, the provocative name of the Mandela Rhodes Foundation is an eternal call to all of the beneficiaries of colonialism to participate in, and contribute to, fixing the damage and helping to create a more humane world. The imperative for scholarship is to explore ways of working together to achieve social justice. Thus, the four key principles of the Mandela Rhodes scholarship programme are *reconciliation, education, entrepreneurship, and leadership*.

According to Ms Sikuza, the scholarship tries to equip scholars with an understanding of complexity and the limitations of binary thinking. The Foundation tries to help students to understand the injustices of the past, and the individual and societal healing that needs to happen as a result of that. So, the name Mandela Rhodes invites people to see the tremendous capacity to flourish, and to work together, when we transcend fear and division. She indicated the potential inherent in confronting the Rhodes and the Mandela within ourselves and between us as a society. The Mandela Rhodes name challenges us to do the brave inner work that Madiba had to do in prison, during the negotiations, and during his term as president and beyond. You are welcome to listen to the full thought-provoking response from Ms Sikuza here (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MuParam6qGgmXo>).

### **Response from Mr Sello Hatang**

Mr Sello Hatang, CEO of the Nelson Mandela Foundation, reflected on key lessons learnt by the Nelson Mandela foundation in the 20 years of carrying the name *Mandela* and being the custodians of a large part of the Mandela IP. He indicated that the Nelson Mandela Foundation does not believe that the legacy of Mandela belongs to any organisation, family, country, or movement. Mr Hatang explored how, for example, the Nelson Mandela Foundation and the ANC have at times made the mistake of thinking they own the name, *Mandela*. Instead, he argued, the name *Mandela* belongs to anyone who shares his vision of a just world and is committed to working for that world. The challenge is not to protect the name; rather it is how to most effectively mobilise it for the work that has to be done.

Mr Hatang also spoke of custodianship. He cautioned against thinking of who gets 'in' and who remains 'out'. Mr Hatang argued that there is space for everyone at the table. Closely linked is protectiveness in relation to Madiba. Mr Hatang indicated that Mr Mandela argued for protecting the record, the archive, and the space for interrogating them; as opposed to protecting him. Some of the benefits of protecting this archive emerged during the Fees Must Fall movement, when student leaders were enabled to interrogate the archive on the negotiation period and on the policies implemented by Madiba on issues such as land, education, et cetera.

Mr Hatang posited that there remains a lot to be done in terms of understanding the name *Mandela* and indicated that the Nelson Mandela Foundation does its best in trying to get it right. He concluded by challenging all those with a stake in the name *Mandela* to share it as widely as much as possible, and not to be territorial.

### **Discussion**

In the discussion that ensued, Prof Crain indicated that a university is all about complexity and that is what the Nelson Mandela University should be about. He posed to the University to come to a clear understanding about what it is they are about. To clarify the specific mandate that they are charged with and to interpret this mandate through the prism of Mandela. To think how this mandate impacts what and how the University teaches, conducts research, and engagement with external stakeholders. Prof Crain indicated that most

universities are mimicking each other's strategic plans and that it is a difficult task for an institution to set itself apart and find its own specificity. We invite you to listen to this profound discussion here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MuParam6qGgmXo>.

### **Closing and way forward**

In his closing, Prof André Keet noted that the proposition of the *Mandela* name is a question that is difficult to formulate. Thus, the twin imperatives are both complexity and complicity; additionally, there is value also in working with negative concepts such as guilt, et cetera, within these different sets of spaces that we will hold together. He indicated that, in essence, the University wants to side-step the impulse of honouring and branding, and rather delve into the substantive academic expression of what *Mandela* may mean. The question remains, where is that springboard? From where does one begin? Prof Keet highlighted that formulating a branding strategy is not the difficult task, the challenge remains in doing the substantive work behind that strategy and that is the key thing that the University needs to do. He reiterated that is not a bad thing to be scared of, and unsettled by, the big questions that need to be asked; to not have the answers is OK. It is important to know that we do not have the answers to those questions. He argued that even in cases where there is limited guidance on how to critically work with a name one takes for themselves, there is provision for a great framework for locating the debate rooted in scholarly engagement; and that the debate has a substantive rock from which different sets of complexities and complicities ensue. Prof Keet clarified that the University has given that complexity the idea of *Mandela* as an academic expression within the University space.

Prof Keet proposed the name *Mandela* as a reflective mirror within which the University views itself, as opposed to wearing it as a badge. In this way, the University should do continuous, perpetual, and critical work to work against the name, with the name, and then beyond the name. This pushes the limits to the social figure of Mandela.

Prof Keet challenged participants to think of ways in which one could use what already exists to push the idea of the *Mandela* name, beyond the present horizons of Mandela at the limits of our academic imaginations over the edge. He called for a perpetual contestation of the name one takes on. Prof Keet acknowledged that the University is aware of the long road that



lies ahead for the University. He added that the University does not regard taking on the name *Mandela* as an event. Rather, the University seeks to bring an intellectual angle to the name of this social figure that is Mandela.

Prof Keet concluded by conveying that the University has a long journey to co-travel with the name it has, but one that the University is yet to earn with all its complexities, contradictions and complicities; and pushing those boundaries in different kinds of ways. He thanked Ms Sikuza, Mr Hatang, Prof Verne, the VC, and all the participants for making this an engaging, thought-provoking, and stimulating event.

The workshop ended at 15:59:34 pm.

## List of attendees

	<b>First Name</b>	<b>Last Name</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Organization</b>
1	<b>Abigail</b>	Branford	Oxford	University of Oxford
2	<b>Abigail</b>	McDougall	Cape Town	The Mandela Rhodes Foundation
3	<b>Akinyi</b>	Osanjo	Nairobi	The Asylum Project
4	<b>Amy</b>	de Raedt	Gqeberha	Nelson Mandela University
5	<b>André</b>	Keet	Gqeberha	Nelson Mandela University
6	<b>Anele</b>	Mngadi	Gqeberha	Nelson Mandela University
7	<b>Aslam</b>	Fataar	Cape Town	Stellenbosch University
8	<b>Ayanda</b>	Radebe	Capetown	Mandela Rhodes Foundation
9	<b>Azra</b>	Rajah	Gqeberha	Nelson Mandela University
10	<b>Bayanda</b>	Laqwela	Gqeberha	Nelson Mandela University
11	<b>Bruce</b>	Damons	Gqeberha	Nelson Mandela University
12	<b>Crain</b>	Soudien	Cape Town	Nelson Mandela University
13	<b>Emily</b>	Sommers	Toronto	University of Toronto
14	<b>Ernst</b>	Gerber	Cape Town	Mandela Rhodes Foundation
15	<b>George</b>	de Lange	Gqeberha	Nelson Mandela University
16	<b>Helen</b>	Joannides	Cape Town	Independent
17	<b>Izu</b>	Sichinga	Cape Town	University of Cape Town
18	<b>Jacqueline</b>	Luck	Gqeberha	Nelson Mandela University
19	<b>Jane</b>	Ndungu	Gqeberha	Nelson Mandela University
20	<b>Jenny</b>	Du Preez	Gqeberha	Nelson Mandela University
21	<b>Joe</b>	Bazirake	Kampala	Nelson Mandela University
22	<b>Judy</b>	Sikuza	Cape Town	The Mandela Rhodes Foundation
23	<b>Karin</b>	April	Johannesburg	HSF
24	<b>Ken</b>	Mulwa	Cape Town	The Mandela Rhodes Foundation
25	<b>Laura</b>	Best	Gqeberha	Nelson Mandela University
26	<b>Lesley</b>	Powell	Gqeberha	Nelson Mandela University
27	<b>Lunathi</b>	Ngwane	Johannesburg	The Mandela Rhodes Foundation
28	<b>Lwazi</b>	Ngwenyama	Mbabane	The Mandela Rhodes Foundation
29	<b>Marisa</b>	Pineau	Buenos Aires - Argentina	Universidad de Buenos Aires
30	<b>Nadia</b>	Mukadam	Gqeberha	Nelson Mandela University
31	<b>Ncumisa</b>	Vabaza	Gqeberha	Nelson Mandela University

32	<b>Nicki</b>	Rayepen	Gqeberha	Nelson Mandela University
33	<b>Olwam</b>	Mnqwazi	Gqeberha	Black Hat Group
34	<b>Oriole</b>	Friedemann	Gqeberha	Nelson Mandela University
35	<b>Paul</b>	Geswindt	Gqeberha	Nelson Mandela University
36	<b>Razia</b>	Saleh	Johannesburg	Nelson Mandela Foundation
37	<b>Rosemary</b>	Chimbala-Kalenga	Gqeberha	Nelson Mandela University
38	<b>Ryan</b>	Pillay	Gqeberha	Nelson Mandela University
39	<b>Sameera</b>	Patel	Gqeberha	Nelson Mandela University
40	<b>Sello</b>	Hatang	Gauteng	Nelson Mandela Foundation
41	<b>Sibongile</b>	Muthwa	Gqeberha	Nelson Mandela University
42	<b>Thobela</b>	Mfeti	Cape Town	PPS Investments
43	<b>Ulagh</b>	Williams	Gqeberha	Nelson Mandela University
44	<b>Valentia</b>	Mthembu	Groutville	Luthuli Museum
45	<b>Verne</b>	Harris	Johannesburg	Nelson Mandela Foundation
46	<b>Vuyani</b>	Matsha	Gqeberha	Nelson Mandela University
47	<b>Vuyo</b>	Bongela	Gqeberha	Nelson Mandela University
48	<b>Wonga</b>	Mabizela	Gqeberha	Nelson Mandela University