



(RE)ASSESSING MANDELA Webinar

Thursday 9 July, 15:00 -17:00

Opening Remarks
Professor Sibongile Muthwa
Vice-Chancellor, Nelson Mandela University

Good afternoon and it is a pleasure to have you all joining us for this webinar today.

As Nelson Mandela University, a cornerstone of our knowledge project and intellectual endeavours is to purposefully create space to advance the work of Mandela, to excavate his legacies and to invite coming generations to continue to explore and critically examine how this relates to being students at the university that bears his name. To advance this quest, we have established the Transdisciplinary Institute for Mandela Studies (TIMS) which is anchored in an institutional partnership between the University and the Nelson Mandela Foundation. As the University we are very pleased to be partnering with the Nelson Mandela Foundation in this undertaking.

The purpose of today's webinar is to engage with current Mandela-related scholarship, identify and explore fresh lines of enquiry, and distil critical questions which would be helpful for the process of giving content to the work of TIMS.

Towards the end of 2019, the *Journal of Southern African Studies (JSAS)* published a special issue with the theme 'Reassessing Mandela', which included ten articles by prominent scholars on Nelson Mandela historiography. This issue is currently being turned into a book, due for publication by Jacana Media towards the end of this year.

We are honoured that the editors of this special issue, Professors Colin Bundy and William Beinart, as well as their fellow colleague from Oxford University, Professor Elleke Boehmer, who also contributed to this journal edition, are attending the webinar today.

Two of the collective of contributors to the *JSAS* special issue are our speakers for today, Professors Shireen Hassim and Xolela Mangcu. They will speak to their own contributions to the special issue and offer provocations to initiate the webinar deliberations.

In the editorial of the special edition, entitled "The Challenge of Rethinking Mandela", Professor Bundy comments on the often-oversimplified duality of Madiba's image as either the sell-out who "sold out the liberation struggle to white interests" (as Zakes

Mda phrased it in his obituary of Mandela¹) or the person who “single-handedly achieved democracy”.

He also notes that (2019:998):

For this special issue, [...] the question arises: does this recalibration of Mandela in the public imagination have any bearing on what we do as scholars? If so, in what way? How has scholarly work on Mandela reflected, or prefigured, the kind of *volte face* evident in popular discourses?

Today we also reference the *Dalibhunga: This Time? That Mandela?* colloquium held in March last year, as part of the university’s year-long Mandela Centenary Celebrations. This was a seminal colloquium hosted at Nelson Mandela University as a collaboration between the university, the Nelson Mandela Foundation (NMF) and the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC). I also wish to acknowledge Professor Crain Soudien from the HSRC is in attendance today.

This colloquium explored the figure of Mandela in relation to a number of key issues facing the academy and potential avenues for a Critical Mandela Studies programme, which we hope to advance from within TIMS, together with our partners. For us, far from being about Mandela, the scholarly formulation of *Mandela* is the endless, relentless pursuit to bring intellectual dimensions to this figure of justice to generate new praxes for engaging social injustices and inequalities.

To engage with *Mandela* the social figure is not just to understand the history of the person, but to consider some of the most profound questions of our time; an age in which social, political, economic and environmental challenges are accompanied by a general (local and global) mistrust in democratic institutions, the neoliberal attrition of human rights, and the way these are knitted together with the status, quality and agency of citizenship, civic service and public leadership. These challenges include the systemic anchoring of socio-economic inequalities; the escalation and deepening

¹ Zakes Mda, ‘The Contradictions of Mandela’, *New York Times*, 5 December 2013.

of war and organised political violence; the intensified mooring of discrimination and the spread and amplification of global racism, sexism, fundamentalisms, every-day fascism, and so on; environmental degradation and climate change; poverty and unemployment; the growth of the precariat; and the wanton expansion in human vulnerability and psycho-social, cultural and economic disaffiliation.

These are some of the issues that I hope will be surfaced in the webinar today, for interpretive engagement.

In Joel Netshitenze's obituary of Mandela, there is a striking phrase: '*[h]e is the archetypal symbol of unfinished business*'.² I think that this provides an apt paradigm for our discussions today, because scholarly work on Mandela is far from finished.

Thank you for joining us today in this webinar, which I am looking forward to with anticipation.

² Joel Netshitenze, 'A Legacy Transcending Centuries'.

Aide Memoir: Webinar
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Concept Note:

Towards the end of 2019 the *Journal of Southern African Studies (JSAS)* published a special issue with the theme 'Reassessing Mandela', which included ten articles by scholars. This issue is currently being turned into a book, due for publication towards the end of 2020.

CriSHET is hosting a virtual seminar using the *JSAS* content as a point of departure. Participants will be provided with access to the content and encouraged to read it ahead of the seminar.

Two of the contributors to the *JSAS* special issue are invited to offer provocations to initiate the seminar deliberations:

Professor Shireen Hassim, Canada 150 Research Chair in Gender and African Politics at Carleton University; and

Professor Xolela Mangcu, Professor of Sociology and History, and Director of Africana Studies at George Washington University and a Visiting Professor at Nelson Mandela University (currently writing a biography on Nelson Mandela).

Both will be asked to speak to their own contributions to the special issue and critically reflect on the publication as a whole.

The purpose of the seminar is to engage with current Mandela-related scholarship, identify and explore fresh lines of enquiry, and distil critical questions which would be helpful for the process currently underway towards the establishment of the Transdisciplinary Institute for Mandela Studies (TIMS).

The format is a two-hour session led by Prof Verne Harris, a seasoned facilitator conversant with Mandela-related scholarship. In the first half there would be the two presentations and

followed Panel discussion with facilitator and thereafter an open conversation with all participants. The webinar will close with reflections by Patronella Nqaba (NMF) on the discussion, who will also give the vote of thanks.

Programme:

- Welcome: Prof Keet André [5 min]
- Opening: Prof Muthwa [5 min]
- Prof Keet thanks Prof Muthwa and introduces facilitator Prof Harris [5 min]
- Introduction of speakers: Prof Harris introduces the speakers, [5 min]
- Prof Shireen Hassim presentation [15 min]
- Prof Xolela Mangcu presentation [15 min]
- Panel discussion with facilitator (key questions) [25 min]
- Open discussion / Q & A session [30 min]
- Prof Harris introduces Patronella Nqaba [5 min]
- Patronella Nqaba reflections [10 min]
- Patronella Nqaba vote of thanks [5 min]

Audience:

The webinar guestlist is quite impressive with several Mandela scholars attending:

University of Oxford: the editors of the special edition of JSAS, Colin Bundy and William Beinart; Elleke Boehmer (also has an article in this journal edition) and Jonny Steinberg (novelist/journalist/academic, working on a book about Mandela).

University of Pennsylvania: Rita Barnard (editor of The Cambridge Companion to Nelson Mandela)

Then there are colleagues from other African countries, universities in SA, the Nelson Mandela Foundation and even a publisher from Jacana Media (they are going to publish the special edition on “Reassessing Mandela” as a book later this year). It is a wonderful mix of emerging and established scholars, staff and students.

It is also exciting that the organisers of the Mandela colloquium will be in attendance (or part of the programme): Crain Soudien (HSRC), Verne Harris (NMF) and André Keet.