

NELSON MANDELA UNIVERSITY

05 June 2021

Opening: 15:00 (**CAT**)

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

**LAUNCH OF THE:
Nelson Mandela University-DSI-NRF SARCHI Chair in African
Feminist Imagination**

Good afternoon colleagues, friends of the university, staff, students, community members, watching via different online platforms

It gives me great pleasure to welcome:

The Chancellor of the Nelson Mandela University, Dr Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi

The Chairperson of Council, Ambassador Nozipho January-Bardill

Members of the Nelson Mandela Council

University management and leadership: Deputy Vice-chancellors, Deans of Faculties, the Professoriate, Heads of Entities, and colleagues

Participants, staff and students from sister universities

Members of our university publics and communities

I particularly wish to welcome our Chair in African Feminist Imagination, Professor Pumla Dineo Gqola, her colleagues from Wits University, Professor Grace Musila and Professor Barbara Boswell from UCT. I know both will be introduced officially during the Programme.

Whilst we collectively battled the ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is encouraging that we have continued to see how gender-embedded questions have continued to be infused within everyday conversations as we have faced this onslaught on global humanity as one world. Gender issues are everywhere. It is not an exaggeration to speak of the crisis of violence in South Africa and the rest of the global South given what we know about rape, femicide, and homophobic violence. Currently, we have seen the debates about what an “appropriate family looks like” resulting in tensions on issues of “tradition and legalism” around polygamy. While all these problems and tensions are not straightforward, they require much more rigorous engagement in a manner that enhances the dignity of all of us.

At Nelson Mandela University, we have a vision of changing the world, and deliberately improving the one we inherit through innovative research (Vision 2030). This requires confronting the challenges of inequality, gender power, violence, and discrimination in different sectors of our society (Vision 2030). To do so we must ask the right, difficult and sometimes even counterintuitive questions that not only help us better understand what we are confronting, but also enable us to imagine the freer society and world we want to create and live in.

This must be the first intervention of the Chair in African Feminist Imagination, to contribute to existing knowledge and to generate new ways of thinking about gender, freedom, masculinities, femininities, and indeed institutional cultures.

This Chair aims to shine a light on and illuminate existing archives of African feminist thought and creative traditions. We need clearer education on this existing archive and amplification of the insights this body of work may reveal when applied innovatively to enduring questions. This also involves expanding African feminist vocabularies. Perhaps this dual process – revisiting old, obscured knowledge while generating theory – is part of what we mean when we speak of African approaches for our contexts. Yet, such knowledge is just as useful and crucial for reading and interpreting the world.

Integrally linked to creating safer, more enabling, transformed cultures of excellence, is producing graduates who will expand this project. Graduates and scholars who will, in turn, create innovative, gender progressive, excellent and sustainable institutional cultures wherever their life journeys may take them. The Chair in African Feminist Imagination joins the Centre for Women and Gender Studies to play a fundamental role in helping us ground gender transformation in the broader transformation project of the university. Within this is a deliberate intention to bring change in attitudes and cultures of scholarship and ensure our daily life experiences on campus are free from gendered hinderances.

The Chair we are launching today is part of our university-wide investment in the revitalisation of the Humanities. Our collective purpose is generating new forms of thinking and teaching, whilst producing generations of scholars of the future who are unafraid of asking difficult questions about the very essence of the knowledge project.

Accordingly, the Chair's mandate will focus on the study of creative genres. We are confident that the ways in which the Chair will provide the type of role-model leadership that will have an indelible impact in ways that both enriches and transgresses disciplines. Our vision is that, working collectively, this will shape the very kinds of critical conversations and vocabularies we produce about the disciplines at the heart of this Chair including literature, visual art, film, music, and popular culture. We look forward to understanding deeply what it means to speak of African feminist intellectual and artistic traditions. How can they illustrate power limitations and widen possibilities?

I wish to congratulate the relevant entities and people who have contributed to making this possible for our university: the Research, Innovation, and Internationalisation Portfolio under Deputy Vice-Chancellor Dr Mgwebi; the Engagement and Transformation Portfolio under Deputy Vice-Chancellor Professor Keet; and colleagues within the Centre for Women and Gender Studies. I wish also to acknowledge and thank the National Research Foundation for trusting Nelson Mandela University with this bold academic project.

As the university, we have full confidence in the Chair under the leadership of Professor Pumla Dineo Gqola. We know that the scholarly project of this Chair will benefit the country, the continent, and the rest of the world. We wish you well, Pumla, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and your team as you change the world.

I thank you.