Welcome to Dinokeng *tsa* TUT - Place of Rivers.

Prof Tinyiko Maluleke
15 November 2022, Unveiling of new name for Building 21, Dinokeng

A place to call Home

Fifteen years into our young democracy, Njabulo Ndebele[1] penned a brief essay in which he suggested that when South Africans entered into the democratic milieu in 1994, they might as well have been approaching home, *khumbul'ekhaya* style[2], as it were.

But Ndebele was not so sure about several things. He was not sure that the home we were arriving into in 1994 was really the home we 'left behind' in 1913 when the Land Act was promulgated and in 1948 when Apartheid became government policy. Nor could he be sure that the persons returning home in 1994 were the same as those who left it thirty, fifty or eighty-five or more years before. Was the Nelson Mandela who went to jail in 1964 the exact same man who walked out of prison in 1990? More importantly, Ndebele was not sure if the new South Africa, led by the new and democratic government, had the wherewithal, the backbone and the 'liver' to become and keep becoming a home to all of us.

Without getting into the precise details of the Ndebele thesis - parts of whose details I do not agree with – he saw at least three "resilient factors"[3] to the new South Africa becoming a true Khayalami (my home) - home to Gogo Dlamini, Boy Masaka, Ousie Kedibone, Mme Maspikiri, Mrs Smith and Meneer Kobus van der Hof. The first obstacle was according to Ndebele called "the resilience of inherited Apartheid landscape[4]", the second was "the capacity of our human skill base to reproduce successful, high-yield, high-scale change initiatives"[5] and the third and final factor was, what Ndebele called "a continuing sense of alienation[6]" especially among sections of the black society.

As I step aside from the Ndebele thesis, let me point out that his homecoming metaphor may equally apply to universities. When the children of the masses marched into the previously inaccessible universities, as they swarmed into those universities that were hastily if also untidily put together; and as they swelled the ranks of a higher education system that was previously unreachable, were they coming home or were they moving into a strange place?

In fact, five years after the Ndebele essay, a group of South African academics, put together a book titled: *Being at Home. Race Institutional Culture and Transformation at South African*

---

[1] Njabulo Ndebele, "Arriving Home? South Africa Beyond transition and reconciliation", in Fanie du Toit and Erik Doxtader (eds) *In the Balance. South Africans Debate Reconciliation*. Sunnyside: Jacana, 2010. pp55-73
[2] *Khumbul'ekhaya* is a long-running popular reality TV show on SABC, portraying estranged parents, children, prodigal sons and wayward daughters, aunts and uncles who finally find their way home.
[3] Njabulo Ndebele, "Arriving Home?, p.58
[4] Njabulo Ndebele, "Arriving Home?, p.58
[5] Njabulo Ndebele, "Arriving Home?, p.62
[6] Njabulo Ndebele, "Arriving Home?, p.64

Higher Education Institutions[7]. The central problem tackled in the book is the extent to which the South African university has yet to fully attain the *khayalami* status. Put it differently, this book and several others since[8], chronicle the extent to which South African students and academics have not yet transformed themselves into citizens worthy of 'homing up' to their own universities.

At some point we have to stop wagging fingers and shaking fists at inanimate buildings and inherited premises. Taking our own agency more seriously, we have to reimagine our places and reorder our spaces – materially, aesthetically, and intellectually. This is what transformation is all about.

The renaming and thereby the rehumanising of premises, facilities and infrastructure may not be the sum total of transformation, but it is a key dimension of both the national and the institutional transformation project.

What is in a Name!

We must not let the rhetorical question of Shakespeare's Juliet mislead us completely when, in that famous soliloquy, she asked Romeo the rhetorical question: "What's in a name? Juliet's problem was that she had fallen in love with the wrong guy, who came from the wrong race and the wrong place. She wished he was not called by the lowly name he bore, so she could love him openly, and not have to deal with the disapproval of family and society. This is how Juliet put it:

O, be some other name!
What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet;
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd,
Retain that dear perfection which he owes
Without that title.
Romeo, doff thy name,
And for that name which is no part of thee
Take all myself.

So, what's in name? But sorry Juliet, we understand your predicament, but hell no, there is a lot in a name! Everything and more. The names we bear, inherit, or earn, just like those we bestow on objects and subjects alike; these names are always significant and always meaningful. Some names are reflective. Others are eclectic. Some are intended to distract; others are simply destructive. Some are tokens of gratitude; others are pieces of hope. Some names are subjunctive, others are cast in the imperative. Some announce while others denounce. Some pronounce, others renounce. Some are meant to cover, others are intended to discover.

---

[7] Pedro Tabensky and Sally Matthews (eds) *Being at Home. Race Institutional Culture and Transformation at South African Higher Education Institutions.* Pietermaritzburg: KZN Press, 2015.

[8] Khunou, Phaswana, Khoza-Shangase and Canham (eds), *Black Academic Voices. The South African Experience,* Pretoria: HSRC, 2019.

Even when names are imposed, harmful, violent, or disadvantageous, they remain meaningful, if only in the warped ways in which they play havoc with the lives of their bearers.

For this reason, we can never shirk our responsibility for naming and renaming. We can never outsource our obligation for self-naming.

Names that Injure

Sick and tired of being named by others – one of the most pervasive colonial experiences of Africans – poet Sipho Sepamla penned a poem titled, *My name is*. Encouraging his readers to churchy names and opt for indigenous names, Sepamla rejects such imposed names as 'native', 'bantu' and others and goes on to say:

> *Ke (nna) Modidi waSeshego*
> *Qaba lase Comfivaba*
> Say my name is *Makhonatsihle*
> or
> *Mayenzwintandoyakhonkosi*
> Let them know the name
> Its been gone for too long
> …*Thixo*! We want to rejoice
> Celebrating the birth of a new age
> For gone is *Kleinbooi*
> No more *Sixpence*
> John is neither here nor there
> Mary lives no more for tea only
> …*Xoxo elixhaphisa*
> *Amaxhwili ase rawutini*[9]

In his biography of the maverick musical genius and saxophonist, Fela Anikulapo Kuti, Carlos Moore records Fela's angry memory of the 'violent' manner in which he was initially named. At birth, his father, asked a local German missionary to name his new born son, and guess what name was given to Fela Kuti at birth – Hildegart. Hildegart Kuti doesn't quite sound like Fela Kuti. And this is how Fela reacted: "Oh man. I felt that name like a wound" [10]. Yes, Fela Kuti was right. Names can be so violent that they leave wounds and scars on the bodies and the souls of their bearers.

Consider for example, how a proud choir of 16 young South Africans from Kimberly with the beautiful name of Jubilee Choir - went on tour to Britain in 1891. They captivated their British audiences, none more so than the 72-year-old Queen Victoria, before whom they also sang. But just before they sang for the Queen, a nasty surprise awaited them. Their host, an English gentleman called Mr Howell, suddenly informed them that they would be

[9] Sipho Sepamla, "Selected Poems", Johannesburg: Donker, 1984, p.41-42
[10] Carlos Moore, Fela. *This Bitch of a Life. The Authorized Biography of Africa's Musical Genius*, Grant Park: African Perspectives, 2016, p.2

introduced on stage, not as the Jubilee Choir from Kimberly, South Africa, but by a different name.

Their name had been unilaterally and summarily changed[11]. Members of the Jubilee Choir protested vehemently. But the English gentleman would have none of it.

And so, when the time came, the announcer strutted onto the stage and announced: "Your Majesty, ladies and gentlemen, I present to you, "The K*ffir Choir, from South Africa!".

Among the members of the choir were two sisters, Katie and Charlotte Maxeke – the same Charlotte Maxeke who was soon to become the first South African to earn a science degree at Wilberforce University, USA. She, who, apart from the makers of tea and wipers of tables and dusters of walls, was probably the only woman delegate at the founding conference of the ANC in 2012.

Imagine how the members of the choir felt on being so shockingly and so deliberately misnamed just before one of the most important performances in their careers ever. Misnaming can be wounding. It can maim.

Names that Heal

But it need not be.

Consider how, through our power of naming, we have turned the Apartheid dormitories called townships and the squatter camps into humanised spaces for community building. Check out some of the beautiful names we have given to some of the poorest places: Khayelitsha (new home). Khayamandi (sweet home). Kagiso (place of peace). Zonkizizwe (place for all nations). Thokoza (place of joy). Thembalethu (our place of hope). Masiphumelele (we must succeed). Kanana (Canan).

Consider also, the beautiful, backhanded tribute which the great Nelson Mandela pays to his father, in the very first sentence of his biography:

"Apart from life, a strong constitution and an abiding connection to the Thembu royal house, the only thing my father bestowed upon me at birth, was a name, Rolihlahla"[12].

How beautiful is that for a book opener! And then Mandela goes on to define the meaning and significance of his name:

> In Xhosa, Rolihlahla literally means 'pulling the branch of a tree', but its colloquial meaning more accurately would be "troublemaker". I do not believe that names are destiny or that my father somehow divined my future, but in later years, friends and relatives would ascribe to my birthname the many storms I have both caused and weathered".

[11] Zubeida Jaffer*, Beauty of the Heart. The Life and Times of Charlotte Mannya Maxeke.* Bloemfontein: University of Free State, 2016.
[12] Nelson Mandela, *Long walk to Freedom*, London: Little Brown Company, 1993, p.3

Names may not be destiny, but they play a crucial role in helping us to navigate the many storms of our lives, and in helping us shape our own destinies.

Rivers of Hope

And so here we are, the Tshwane University of Technology, cognisant of this history of pain, and determined to reimagine itself and reinvent its future; has resolved to move away from our faceless, comfort-zone and fence-sitting name of Building Number 21, and to rename this building, Dinokeng - place of rivers.

Dinokeng speaks of a place overflowing with life. It is place of life and buoyancy. In naming this place Dinokeng, we have marked it as a place that will bubble with fresh ideas intended to build the people's university.

To call our building Dinokeng is to suggest that the place will sparkle with the energy we need to nurture and to incubate future ready graduates. In naming it as Dinokeng we are clothing the place in effervescence, injecting it a sense of vitality, the same vitality we wish to see in all our staff members and in our curricula. Dinokeng symbolises a constellation and a confluence, where great ideas from a diversity of origins, persons and communities, will come together, in the service of TUT staff and students.

There is something about rivers that is both exhilarating and calming. My hope is that this building with inspire a bit of both, but more the former rather than the latter. When eighteen-year-old Langstone Hughes – later to become one of the most influential poets of the Haarlem renaissance – wrote his very first poem, he chose the subject of rivers – I've known rivers.

> **I've known rivers**
>
> I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.
>
> My soul has grown deep like the rivers.
>
> I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
> I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
> I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
> I heard the singing of the Mississippi
> when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans,
> and
> I've seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.
>
> I've known rivers:
> Ancient, dusky rivers.
>
> My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

May the swirling waters of Dinokeng refresh and revitalise the dozens and hundreds who enter and exit these building, daily. May the dazzling waterfalls of Dinokeng sweep all our graduates towards the future that beckons, the future of work, the future of technology. May the leaping waters of Dinokeng, inspire the Tshwane University of Technology, to keep moving from good to great in every way and at every level.

Ladies and gentlemen welcome to Dinokeng *tsa* TUT!