

Preface

The deliberative, collective, interactive and integrative interdisciplinary and intellectualising study of past icons like Gandhi, Mandela and King is incumbent on all scholars and educationists. Scholar-activists, organic intellectuals, public intellectuals and especially Peace and Justice activist scholars, educationists, and intellectuals, of all ages may benefit by engaging these icons' own intellectualising of life and society, politics, and economics, in intellectualising ways. As the Mahatma's impact, globally has proven, he has drawn on and benefitted from ancient Indian religious, philosophical and educational traditions in the Middle East and India, with his own intellectual significance, impacting inter-generationally, globally. Madiba drew on his own traditional African and Christian roots, his upbringing, and organic education and training and public intellectual activism, and Martin Luther King Jr., from his Black activist familial and church and education and training communities. They are three of the most significant iconic figures of the twentieth century, not least because of the experiential and evidence-based analyses and conceptualising of their, and our own, humanity and being and knowing.

So, in view of the specific local, regional and geopolitical challenges global community face in the 21st century, and so that we may critically and constructively and integratively engage their respective and intertwined legacies, we titled our international conference *Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, and Martin Luther King Jr., Peace and Justice for All, Mobilising for Nonviolent Change (Ahimsa)*. We also said in our CfP, that we attach for reference at the end of this book volume:

In view of the thought, values, practices and histories, of these icons, and leader-intellectuals of the 20th century, the call is to critically and constructively reflect, conceptualise, and mobilise for nonviolent peaceful change in a violent world. For this purpose, the conference will bring together world-renowned academics, intellectuals, activists, and critical scholars. The conference also serves to commemorate the 130th year of Gandhi's eviction from a train at the Pietermaritzburg station, on 07 June 1893, as a result of the British colonising policies and racist laws then in place in South Africa, and his resultant conceptualising of *satyagraha* (truth force) (GMK2023 Call for Papers).

About the conference focus, we said,

In an era where populist politics and ideologies have taken centre stage in

Preface

many countries, this international congress brings to the fore three of the world's leader-intellectual historical *icons*, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, and Martin Luther King Jr.

Semiotically speaking, the term icon signifies a meaning or meaning system that transcends real time, space, reference, and causality. All three, Gandhi, Mandela, and King, in various ways, have been icons in their own lifetime, but also beyond. The congress seeks to recognise the worldwide *iconic status* of these three leaders by bringing them into an interdisciplinary intellectual space in which their legacy can be analysed and interpreted for the world today.

Each of these historical icons has in their own lifetime, context, and approach been and continues to be a towering *intellectual and strategist* of nonviolent action, and political resistance (e.g. Gandhi's '*satyagraha*' – truth force; and '*ahimsa*' – nonviolence).

Each in his own way, has through their ideas, historically analysed their empirical circumstances, and taken on the colonising forces of their day – Gandhi, the British Empire; Mandela, the internal racist colonising ideology and system of apartheid; and King, that of American racist ideology and capitalism.

Central aspects of the values they espoused were their struggles for *non-racial* equal recognition, freedom, social justice, economic equity, and the franchise.

Each icon developed their ideas, leadership styles, and intellectual legacy, in *practice*, within the midst of the most stringent forms of surveillance, physical and mental abuse, and threats of violence to their own persons.

And, concerning the historical legacies as well as the historicities of Gandhi, Mandela, and King, we also said,

Historically, of the three, Gandhi and King were assassinated, and Mandela spent 27 years in a South African apartheid prison. The latter, for his launching of *Umkhonto we Sizwe* as resistance to the racist apartheid regime then enforced on South Africans, and purported treason, in defence of the people of South Africa, and for the purpose of setting South Africa free of the racist apartheid ideology and rule.

Centrally significant, on all these five focuses (*icons, intellectuals, values, practices, and histories*), is the continuing relevance of the intellectual, analytical, philosophical, ethical, practical, and incisive

historico-political contributions that Gandhi, Mandela and King have made to the history of thought, praxes, and values.

Each has been a world-wide respected icon, and nearly untouchable intellectual of high moral standing, in their own time and contexts, with continuing relevance for the 21st century.

Each icon also functioned as an organic intellectual, developed, propagated, and left a very significant intellectual legacy and influence, rooted within their own continuously developing commitments and practices.

Each intellectualised their world in the midst of major international transformations and developments through their socially challenging and transformative speeches, writings, reports, and interviews.

Mobilisation for contextually-relevant transformative justice in their own era, they lead from the front in nonviolent mobilisation, action for peace, and justice. And, in his own way, each also forms part of their collective international legacy, articulated with the achieving of freedom, equity and social justice through peaceful and nonviolent means.

The study and reflection on historical events and figures are always challenging. We are not part of our icons' time and space frame, and the operative conditions, forces, options, choices, thinking, speech, writing, activities, behaviour, and actions taken or not taken. These are not ours. They belong to the past's successes and victories, setbacks, but we can learn from them, with regard to the opportunities and challenges of our own continent and century.

So, for us, as we move into the 21st century, it is also incumbent to take up our responsibilities, to mobilise for peace and justice today for future intergenerational impacts.

On this score, we are extremely grateful for all the participants in GMK2023, from all over the world, inter-disciplinary academics and researchers, academic and student scholar-activists, as well as civil society peace and justice nonviolent change activists, and youth.

We are also extremely appreciative of the fact that conference participants, both presenters as well as attendees across the age groups, and especially from our youth and student groups, engaged with the presentations both affirmatively and critically.

Integrative research and scholarship are indicative of, and consonant with both inter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary research and scholarly deliberations and communication.

In order to spread the reach and impact wider than with the inaugural Gandhi-King International Conference at Stanford University in the USA, in

Preface

2019, we hope that GMK2023 has not only added to the deserved escalating scholarship on Gandhi, Mandela and King, but also to the capacity and capabilities development, and intellectualisation of the global Peace and Justice through Nonviolent Change movement, and its epistemics.

It is our hope – as all the presentations and deliberations and knowledge generated are shared at conference, now culminate in the papers’ publication – that the publications will add to the even more firmly grounding of our epistemically founded peace and justice for nonviolent change movement.



The conference took place under the auspices of the conference presidents, viz.,

- Hon. Dr. Ela Gandhi, Gandhi Development Trust, South Africa;
- Prof. Clayborne Carson, Centennial Professor Emeritus of History, Freeman Spogly Institute for International Studies, Stanford University, USA; and
- Prof. and Honorary Dr. Verne Harris, Acting CEO, Nelson Mandela Foundation, Johannesburg, South Africa.

Internationally, the GMK2023 International Conference, was collaboratively organized by,

- Professor Johannes A. Smit, Chair: Humanities Institute, UKZN, South Africa (smitj@ukzn.ac.za);
- Mr. David Gengan, Chairperson Pietermaritzburg Gandhi Foundation, South Africa (david.gengan@gandhifoundation.co.za);
- Mrs. Razia Saleh, Nelson Mandela Foundation, South Africa. (RaziaS@nelsonmandela.org)
- Professor Prasad Gollanapalli, Managing Trustee, Gandhi King Foundation, India (gvsds@gmail.com); and
- Dr. Sriram Sonty, Vice-President, Gandhi Memorial Foundation, Chicago, USA (srisonty@gmail.com).

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