

Chapter 1: Editorial

Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, & Martin Luther King Jr., Peace and Justice for All: Mobilizing for Nonviolent Change (*Ahimsa*)

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David Gengan

From 06 – 09 June 2023, the University of KwaZulu-Natal, College of Humanities Institute, and the Pietermaritzburg Gandhi Foundation co-hosted the Gandhi, Mandela, King, International Conference in Pietermaritzburg.

At the inaugural Gandhi-King International Conference at Stanford University in the USA, to Commemorate the 150th anniversary of Gandhi's birth, on October 2019, it was proposed that the next conference be held in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, focusing on the legacies of Gandhi, Mandela and King. Please see: <https://vimeo.com/466397940>

Amongst others, this was in the wake of the Seventieth Year Memorial lecture by the world-renowned Prof. Judith Brown, Oxford University, at the annual conference of the Association for the Study of Religion in Southern Africa (ASRSA), in August 2018. Please see the paper here: 'Mahatma Gandhi, 1869 - 1948: Interrogating the Practice of Politics'.

<https://alternation.ukzn.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/02i-brown-min.pdf>

The first response to the paper, was by the Honorary Dr. Ela Gandhi, titled, 'Gandhi's Holistic Philosophy, Liberation and Village Life'.

<https://alternation.ukzn.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/02ii-gandhi-min.pdf>

The second response was from Prof. Kalpana Hiralal, Professor of History, and Dr. Betty Govinden, Education, UKZN, and was titled, 'Response to Judith Brown's "Mahatma Gandhi, 1869 - 1948: Interrogating the Practice of Politics"'. <https://alternation.ukzn.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/02iii-hiralal-min.pdf>

Subsequently, with our international partners, we organised the GMK2023 international conference, from 06 – 09 June 2023, in Pietermaritzburg, under the theme: *Peace and Justice for All – Mobilizing for Nonviolent Change (Ahimsa)*. The week started with a Youth Symposium on 06 June, then, the commemoration of the historically significant eviction of Mahtam Gandhi from the train in Pietermaritzburg, on 07 June, with the official opening in the evening, with a gala dinner, and then with the main academic conference starting on the Thursday morning and continuing up to Friday afternoon.

The conference also coincided with the 130th year anniversary of the now historical eviction of the young lawyer, Mohandas K. Gandhi on 07 June 1893 at the Pietermaritzburg Railway Station, as well as the 30th year anniversary of diplomatic relations between South Africa and India.

With its international collaborative nature, the conference saw in excess of 100 Youth and 100 delegates from around the globe, converge in Pietermaritzburg, for the Youth Symposium as well as the Academic conference, including senior officials from India and South Africa, as including eminent scholars from Africa, the USA, India and Europe.

While the conference sought to offer a scholarly platform for critical reflection on the legacies of these three world icons, it aimed to contribute towards meaningful and constructive outcomes around the issues of global peace and justice, and the role of nonviolent action and mobilization in a violent world. The main academic conference had 5 keynote plenaries and 6 roundtables, addressing topical issues closely related to the theme, and centrally relevant for the 21st century's Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences agenda.

In this current volume, we have assembled the conference keynote addresses and are extremely grateful for the excellent academic and intellectual contributions from each of the keynote speakers, the conference academic panels, as well as all conference participants who read papers and attended and interacted with each other on the topics addressed and discussed too. We are aware that some lasting bonds were established, networks extended nationally and internationally, in addition to innovative practices and insights shared on both our generic conference theme as well as panel focuses.

As usual, we provide brief abstracts of the keynote papers. We follow the papers as they were read, in the sequence of the different consecutive conference events. Abstracts of the peer reviewed papers will be provided in subsequent publications.



Barwendé Sané titled his keynote address for the Youth Symposium, ‘**Live Together or Perish Together in an Uncertain World: How does Dr. King, Gandhi, and Mandela’s Legacy of Hope Speak to Us Today?**’ His analysis reflects on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s 1964 Nobel Peace Prize speech, emphasizing his call for global unity and addressing societal issues. Connecting King’s ideals to the contemporary era, it explores persistent challenges, including racial injustice, poverty, and war. The chapter then delves into Mahatma Gandhi’s *Satyagraha* and *Ahimsa*, emphasizing personal discipline and truth in social change. The final section highlights Nelson Mandela’s anti-apartheid leadership, a timeless inspiration for freedom fighters. Urging spiritual transformation and the pursuit of justice, this examination underscores the enduring legacies of these figures as beacons of hope, advocating for a collective commitment to peace, justice, and unity on Earth.

In his ‘**The 130th Anniversary of the Eviction of M.K. Gandhi from a Train at Pietermaritzburg Railway Station on 7th June 1893**’, **David Gengan** provides a few brief historical perspectives on the significance of the event. From Gandhi’s biography, he points to Gandhi’s conceptualisation of *satyagraha*, related to truth-force, and his mobilisation of the people for nonviolent resistance and action. Many in the world have claimed to be impacted by the life and teachings of Gandhi, not least such eminent persons as the late Albert Einstein and Nelson Mandela, and Martin Luther King Jr.

‘**Turning Evictions into Benedictions: Did Gandhi Know?**’, was **Allan Aubrey Boesak**’s keynote address at the Commemoration of the 07 June 1893 Mohandas K. Gandhi Eviction from a British Empire Train on the Pietermaritzburg Railway Station. Gandhi’s eviction is a turning point in history. Boesak’s main point is that there are similar turning points in history, such as happened to Ida Bell Wells ten years earlier, in Tennessee, and the Youth of the 1976 and UDF revolutions, and Claudette Colvin and Rosa Parks in 1955, in the United States. Similar events in history, where individuals resisted repression and oppression, and struggled for justice, explicitly serve later generations as benedictions.

Ela Gandhi, on behalf of the conference presidents, did the **Welcoming Address**, to the conference. Her address made three main points: 1) that anger and resentment in the face of oppressive power must be overcome through

creative and constructive action; 2) that this requires the moving away from self-centredness to community centredness to developing and fostering forms of relationality; and 3) that following John Ruskin's points, all people are implicitly good, that all work must be carried out with dignity and that all need to work the land, with your hands.

Referencing Martin Luther King's 'Where do We Go from Here?' speech on 16 August 1967, Atlanta, Georgia, **Clayborne Carson's Conference Keynote Opening Address**, was titled, **"Where do we Go from Here?" Gandhi, Mandela and King's still Unanswered Question**. As answer to King's question, and even though brief, his insightful and helpful Conference Opening Address identified the focus of the struggle for peace and justice through nonviolent mobilisation, as struggle for human rights. As said, globally, in his views, and coming from and representing a life of civil rights struggle in the USA, the world's primary focus has moved from the struggles of civil rights to human rights. The civil rights struggle emerged since the earliest forms of anti-colonial defence and resistances and had to be taken up again in the mid-1900s, following the partial settlements in the post-North-South US civil war in the late 1860s. The outcome of the mid-20th century struggle was equal civil rights, the objective of the continuing struggle for peace and justice through nonviolent action, and mobilisation, is to achieve equal human rights, for all, globally.

Judith M. Brown titled her Academic Keynote Conference Opening Address, **'Gandhi: A Global Icon for the 21st Century?'** She interrogates the word, 'Icon' and then asks if Gandhi is in any sense a global icon for the 21st century, particularly in the light of the way modern India has departed fundamentally from his vision for the post-independence future of the nation. It does this by asking and attempting to answer two key questions.

- How did Gandhi become a global figure rather than just a local religious leader?
- What is Gandhi's core message for the 21st century: In what sense might he be 'an icon'?

Elizabeth Williams's 'Gandhi, King, Mandela: Legacies and African Women of the 21st Century', calls for a drive for *'Peace and Justice for All, and Nonviolent Change'*, especially by Black women and girls for and by themselves. She says that the call remains as potent in 2023 as it did during the

lifespan of Gandhi, Mandela and King. Many of the challenges of today, would certainly have challenged these men, to speak ‘truth to power’, e.g. many issues of regional, national and global ramifications which impact people, groups, related to animal rights, environmental guardianship and sustainability. Even though questions might be raised about their own consideration of their wives and women generally, the paper argues that Black women and girls must speak out for themselves. For their own mental health and wellbeing, Black women and girls must rise to meet their own challenges. So, the paper provides a brief overview of a sample of the challenges and achievements of Black women and girls in the UK today. These stretch from their leadership in the highest echelons of power, to being university professors, leaders in business, and glamour, and the critical engagement of their under-representation in Higher Education, as well as forms of subjugation young black girls suffer at the hands of misogynists. Yet, the call remains to continue the nonviolent struggle for peace and justice.

The topic of *Johnny Mack’s* “**Where do We Go from Here?**” **A Revolution of Values**’ draws on Dr. Martin Luther King’s very well-known statement that the USA and the world needs a ‘revolution of values’. He made this insightful proposal at the Riverside Church in New York City on 04 April 1967, as a critique of militarism, and especially the United States’ upscaling of the Vietnam war that was in full swing at the time. In terms of Dr. King’s explanations, also drawing from his related points on view, a revolution of values needs to change the social edifice that we inherit from the past and uncritically practice, and hand on to the next generation, intergenerationally. So, we need to change the governance systems that support and enact forms of militarism; poverty, as caused by the uncritical intergenerational greed that characterises the market and business; and the cultural values that inculcate the curtailment of civil rights, and forms of racism, and exploitation. The paper argues, that in terms of these three legs of society, we need to inculcate, especially in the youth, the virtues of community, dignity and liberty. The youth is seminal, since it is the youth that needs to break and replace the intergenerational values of oppressive violence, greed, and racism.

In *Verne Harris’s* question, ‘**Spirit of Madiba, Where are You?**’, the question of ‘where’ in relation to Nelson Mandela is one that has been posed in different eras and different contexts since at least the early 1960s, when he went underground to initiate armed struggle against the apartheid regime. A decade

after his death, Harris poses the question again, in relation to Mandela as ancestor, as spirit, as ghost. He does so, referring in the first instance to the ancient indigenous knowledges to be found in southern Africa, and then, secondly, a certain deconstructive mode of thinking, as articulated in the work of Hélène Cixous and Jacques Derrida. For both Cixous and Derrida, recognising spectrality, working with it, thinking it, are of fundamental importance to knowledge construction. Then, having assessed how Mandela is remembered in different domains and discourses, Harris comes to the conclusion that the ghost(s) of Mandela reside *inside* those who love justice and are doing the work of making a just society. He insists on the plural, for there were many Nelson Mandelas. Mandela the revolutionary, leading an armed struggle while studying Marx and Mao. Mandela the global icon of peacemaking and reconciliation. The politician's politician playing and being played by global capital. The scion of an indigenous royal family. The voice of early twentieth century Eastern Cape modernism. The elder full of wisdom but losing a grip on a world accelerating away from him. Loving justice, Harris argues, forces one to listen to all these Mandela voices.

Jonathan Kuttab's 'Palestinian/ Israeli Conflict: Apartheid and the One State' explains a proposal for a one state solution to the Palestine – Israel conflict. The main points focus on the fact that a functional one state solution will have to deal with the fears and experiences of both Israelis and Palestinians. Israelis have historical experiences of exploitation and oppression, with integrated ingredients of Jewish persecution and anti-Semitism, and especially their history of the Holocaust. And Palestinians, they do not have access to their land and governance of themselves, in their historical national land. Jews in Palestine are very sensitive about security matters. So, the proposal of a one state solution has to take security and governance concerns into consideration, e.g. through a properly functioning democratic state, with a constitutional court. The suggestion is too, that the head of the military be Jewish and the deputy Palestinian. And that the head of police be a Palestinian and the deputy, Jewish. Kuttab argues that such a system will ensure a constitutional democracy, which is not based on 'trust', but how it functions according to the rule of law.

Keshav Gupta's paper is titled, '**Youth Reimagining Peace and Nonviolent in the 21st Century World**'. Speaking at the conclusion of the Youth Symposium, Gupta consecutively addresses, 5 main focuses. These range from the new challenges that have emerged for youth, at the beginning of the 21st

century world, with trending headlines like ‘inequality’, related to access to justice, human rights, and basic necessities; climate change, global conflicts and the COVID-19 pandemic, through main information age questions related to internet access, and the rise of digital media. His view about the future, is that youth will increasingly be called on to creatively engage the realities of facilitating and mobilising peace through nonviolent means in a violent world. As for the means to how, youth need to discern and apply principles of non-violence in governance, business, media, sports, arts, and technology. Ultimately, it requires youth to espouse and practice an inner as well as a social ‘revolution of values’, so as to realise the vision of the world house conceived by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and for the 21st century, choose community over chaos.

For the conference closing, *Allan Aubrey Boesak* titled his address, **‘Marching with the Shirtless and the Barefoot – Justice, Peace, and the Call for Revolutionary Reciprocity’**. In view of our experiences and celebrations at the GMK2023 conference, this week, and reflections on the work as well as the commemoration of the life, work and legacies of Gandhi, Mandela and King, the paper draws on some of their wisdom. These must be placed within the current global geo-political moment, of political crises, never-ending wars, and possible nuclear destruction. It calls for discernment, decision, and commitment, with nonviolent action. Within Christianity, it is a Kairos moment, within revolutionary times. We must look at the past, on its interconnected events, and selfless revolutionaries, who, like Gandhi, Mandela and King rose to the occasion through resistance, a revolutionary consciousness, an irrepressible longing for justice and freedom. Events include for instance, the Tulsa race massacre of 2021; the University of Western Cape student ‘walk-off’ from campus, in 1973, in defying the institution as an apartheid instrument; Martin Luther King’s 1967 ‘Beyond Vietnam’ speech; and his perception of revolution, as an ‘unfolding’ historical struggle, and ‘a revolution of values’; DuBois’s ‘politics of honesty, integrity, decency, courage and virtue’; Gandhi’s call for mass nonviolent resistance to race laws, on 11 September 1906; and the spirit of nonviolence as passed on by Henry Highland Garnet, Frederick Douglass, Martin Luther King Jr, Albert John Luthuli, and Nelson Mandela; the formation and activation of the United Democratic Front (UDF), in the wake of the Soweto 1976 student uprising; and the spiritual power of nonviolent revolution.

In South Africa, we saw and experienced the world of apartheid as those who suffered, and rose up in resistance, and yet, did this through lived lives of self-

sacrifice, and reciprocity. In the midst of current South Africa, being wrecked by racism, re-invited colonialism, re-embraced, and re-invented ethnic nationalisms, Boesak made a renewed call to nonviolent action, as seminal to our ongoing *Ubuntu* struggle, amidst both local and international geo-political struggles.

The 2023 Gandhi, Mandela, King Youth Symposium and Academic Conference Resolutions

Under the leadership of our South African Conference President, Hon. Dr. Ela Gandhi, we have decided to summarise the resolutions as they pertain to both seminal discussions and deliberations of the Youth Symposium, in its six Roundtables and panel, as well as the Academic Conference, in its six Roundtables and panels, as well as how these articulate with the keynote addresses.

Finally, we are extremely grateful to the South African National Research Foundation, that supported and contributed R 460 000.00 to the organising of the GMK2023 conference, and related running expenses related to pre-, and post-conference research and scholarly production of peer reviewed books.

We also wish to thank the NRF for its continued support of the continuing post-conference project in the form of the funding of postdoctoral scholars. The conference has laid the foundations for an upscaling of the **GMK2023 Peace and Justice through Nonviolent Action (*Ahimsa*) Scholarship** globally.

We are also very, very grateful to the University of KwaZulu-Natal for an international conference grant of R 700 000.00 which included the livestreaming of all the week's daily events to five continents; Professor Johannes Smit's R 200 000.00 research funds; Dr Clayborne Carson, R 184 706.00; Sri Annama Charity (Dr. Sriram Sonty), R 184 612.00; Government of India, R 181 598.00; and MCJ Engineering, R 75 000.00.

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