

Opening Remarks
Book Launch – *The Land is Ours: South Africa's First Black Lawyers and the Birth of Constitutionalism* by Advocate Tembeka Ngcukaitobi
16 May 2018

Prof Sibongile Muthwa

Programme director, ladies and gentlemen, it is my honour and privilege to make some brief remarks this afternoon at the book launch of Advocate Ngcukaitobi's seminal work: *The Land is Ours: South Africa's First Black Lawyers and the Birth of Constitutionalism*.

Let me start Advocate by disclosing that I have not finished reading the book.

However, based on the portion of the book that I have read already, I have to congratulate you on this courageous project. The force of this work and the eloquence of its prose demonstrates a mind-set of a restless scholar who, in his quest to tell the story authentically and comprehensively, has successfully transcended many disciplines.

Having not met Tembeka Ngcukaitobi personally previously, my impression of this work, is its demonstration of his commitment to the legal profession as a proposition that goes beyond its impact as a profession, but which delves into its possibility as a force for good. As we will all agree, this obligation to the legal profession is as, if not more relevant now, than it was at the time when the wheels of dispossession started to turn.

Ngcukaitobi's engagement with the Mandela University community at this juncture is particularly relevant given the university's recent name change. His work represents the best of the Black intellectual traditions of the Eastern Cape that produced thinkers, activists and leaders such as Nelson Mandela, SEK Mqhayi, Phyllis Ntantala, Thabo Mbeki and many other luminaries. As I have mentioned, this work brings together scholarship from across the disciplines of history, law and sociology, to carefully work through the painful meaning of the land question for past and present generations.

At the heart of his rigorous approach to the law and writing about the law, one can sense a strong African-rooted sensibility, informed by a rich grasp of history. Ngcukaitobi pays homage to the many elements of African people's resistance,

recognising the link between those who defended their lands with the spear and those Africans who later used their pens as 'spears'.

This kind of intellectualism represents the kind of graduate this university aspires to produce. We want our students to be as faithful to the discipline of scholarly rigour as they are to the militancy of student politics. If any work is a cogent demonstration of how the writing of an evolved activist-scholar feels and sounds like, then this work promises to be a masterclass.

Ngcukaitobi's work also serves as a model for the kind of "African-purposed" pedagogy we aim to pursue, particularly in the Humanities cluster at the university which include History, Sociology, Anthropology, Politics and Law, to name a few. Given that the university aims to train students to grapple with the problems of inequality, poverty and violence in our society, Ngcukaitobi's work serves as a template for the kind of bold, provocative and socially relevant work that we want our students to produce.

We thank the author for the generosity of bringing the launch of the book to our University at this time especially when we are grappling with the noble and gallant purpose of our University following our name change. As we seek to identify, *as well as to identify with*, platforms which will strengthen our resolve to reframe our academic purpose, the timing of this launch here could not have been better.

I also congratulate the humanities scholars (mainly Professor Mkhize) that have made it a point that this launch happens here, i.e. colleagues in History, Sociology, Anthropology and Law, together with the Chair for Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation, Professor André Keet.

Thank you ladies and gentlemen, enjoy the evening.