The Department of Transport and the Airports Company South Africa (ACSA) have been holding public meetings over changing the airport's name. The incident that was witnessed on 5 June 2018 at the Cape Town International Airport, when tempers flared between the members of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) – who want it be named after Winnie Madikizela Mandela - and the ethnically framed members of the Gatvol Capetonians – who hold a contrary view and cited that she had never been part of the province - during the name change consultation process, was an unfortunate and a sad moment. In the main it reflected the lasting effects of apartheid hegemony that separated us based on colour line, promoted divide and rule strategy with its long history, ‘us’ and ‘them’ discourse and setting us against each other.

Memorial complexes (including name change), as argued in the article, by their nature have historical specificity, and are used for social and political agenda - social cohesion, nation building, reconciliation and production of national identity. The use of memorial complexes and other aspects of public culture for nation building and the notion of a rainbow nation in South Africa, is arguably a kind of ‘cultural homogenisation order from above which has been the rule in many countries all over the world’ (Palmberg, 1999:8). In new nations like the post–apartheid South Africa, the history of the resistance against colonialism and the struggle against apartheid have become a focal point of reference in building the nation.

It provides symbols and responsiveness of what it means to be a national, a member of one nation, and gives an account of how the collective, the new nation, has through its efforts moved from one phase of its historical evolution into another. It details the transition from the majority of people being oppressed, segregated and subjugated to their becoming citizens with democratic rights. Further, the post-apartheid memorial complexes present struggles of domination, power and control over what history has to tell, what history is to become dominant, who is to be glorified or what historical event is to be glorified and overvalued, and who is to be vilified. Thus, the post-apartheid memorial complexes present a monolithic and hegemonic master historical narrative, and suppress the unwanted and unwelcome historical specificity.

In recent past, the human experiences in South African have been framed by the notion and concept of the four nation thesis. It would seem to me that the four nation theory continues to live with us in the present in how we interact, view each other, engage with the past and negotiating the manner of remembering the past in the present. The incident of the airport name change held in Cape Town is just one example.

The concept of four nation thesis first presented by the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) in its 1948 manifesto which highlighted the key nationalities/ nations – whites, blacks, coloureds and Indians - with three being the victims of oppression in South Africa. This theory had its own shortfalls that relates to the systematic oppression under apartheid, among others. Once viewed as one way to amplify the oppression in apartheid South Africa and conceptualising of the post-apartheid state by some, was later adopted by the African National Congress (ANC). However, with the adoption of the Freedom Charter in 1955, the four nation thesis became replaced by the concept of multi-racialism in the spirit of the Congress Alliance.

The National Party through its own interpretation of the concept of the four nations thesis, segmented it into ethnic groups and employed it for its own racialised agenda – separate development and the establishment of ‘homelands/Bantustans’.

The concept of the four nation theory has its own history and sociology. In South African historiography and amongst the politicians, there has been a long debate about the philosophical understanding and comprehension of the concept of the four nation thesis. Neville Alexandra (1986) and Jon Soske (2015) being amongst its opponents. Contrary to the use of the four nation thesis, Alexandra (1986) and Tsotsi (1982) advocated for the concept of ‘single Black nationality’ to refer to all those who ‘suffer[ed] from the same economic disabilities- landlessness and structured propertylessness’ (Alexandra, 1986: 64).

Any name change with historical framework is emotional and contested in South Africa. This is the case because naming of places is linked to a particular nation or group of people’s socio-cultural,
historical and political identities. This can be better understood in the context of heritage as a social construct than inheritance.

Beside the colonial and apartheid race conflict legacy, the other contributing factor to the present contestation is the monolithic and hegemonic historical master narrative padded by the ruling party and its administration and state agencies. This discourse, which is based on great man approach, mythological national consciousness, and the Mandela mythology – Mandelasation of the South African struggle against apartheid- and presentation of Mandela as the father of the democratic nation; excludes the unwanted and unwelcome historical facts in the populace's subconscious mind for sustainability of the Mandela mythology, as the latter challenge the former.

Victor-loser complex also characterises the production of the post-apartheid memorial landscapes. This is the case as in South Africa the party that wins the national elections controls the production of knowledge and memorialisation directly or indirectly for politics of transition and consolidation of power. This phenomenon has a particular history in South Africa which can be observed from the turn of the 20th century through to the present.

Furthermore, since the birth of democracy in South Africa, there has been a proliferation of the state driven memorialisation. The process of inscribing the national public memories through the craft of curating the nation by the state, invites more contestation than convergence of views. Because of the pitfalls of the mythological national consciousness that frames the craft of curating the nation by government, the state fails to nationalise history and historicise the nation.

The art of curating the nation by the state is also trapped in gender politics as is based on gendered approach that excludes women in the marathon of memorialisation. Thus individuals such as Winnie Mandela have been side-lined and disremembered in the national remembering discourse. The production of the post-apartheid memorial complexes in the country is trapped in politics of masculinity. Consequently, gender politics surfaces.

This phenomenon gives the misleading impression at two levels. Firstly, that it was only males who were involved in the struggle, which was not the case. Secondly, the authors of history are and have been man. In instances where there are women initiatives as Samuelson (2007) argued are presented through the domesticity and motherhood narrative. She explored this discourse by examining the manner in which Krotoa-Eva, Nongqawuse and Sarah Britmann have be recoated through an analytic framework for reading the past and presenting it in post-apartheid era as party of the nation building, reconciliation and rainbow nation projects. For her, these three women ‘have been mediated through the mists of time to take their symbolic place as mythic figures in our present’ (Samuelson, 2007:3).

The remembering of the nation in post-apartheid era, disremember women. This transitional cultural moment is a political window that provides a political, historical and cultural window between the past and present, and offers a moment to rethink ideologies of political identities, nation building and reconciliation in South Africa. Through the gendered approach of remembering the nation, the inscription of public memories on the memorial landscapes does not recover voices of the women. The approach does not move beyond the domesticity narrative of women and it compromises history and knowledge production.

The fallacy of inscribing the public memories on memorial complexes through the craft of curating the nation and the Mandela mythology, is also epitomised by a distant and recent past dichotomy. This is partly as a result of the production of the memorialisation that focuses on the 20th century, particularly from the second half. The question that begs to be asked is whether this is done intentionally or otherwise. Or there is an artificial demarcation that is created between the resistance to colonialism and conquest; and the struggle for liberation? Or it is because it is the recent past that they know and feel very much connected to? This demarcation does not neither presents the sequence of historical epochs nor a jointed and comprehensive storyline.

In this disjointed national discourse there is a hierarchy of representation and inclusion. But also even within the ANC amongst its leaders as there are some who do not feature or much in the marathon of the theatrical drama of memorialisation in post partied South Africa.

South Africa needs to dismantle the masters historical narrative splashed in the present and move toward a comprehensive and a ‘historical inclusive discourse’ (Therborn in Alexandra (1986:70). It is for this reason that the renaming of the four identified airports in – Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, East London and Kimberley- though I would like the Cape Town international airport be named after Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe or Winnie Madikizela Mandela – who are both excluded and marginalised in the post-apartheid memorial landscapes in South Africa; for inclusivity and representation, I submit that
the Cape Town International Airport be named after one of the Koi and San people such as Autshumato, amongst others.

I am certain that if Prof Sobukwe was still alive, based on his understanding of African history, historical consciousness, his collective approach and philosophy, servant leader, and his comprehension of African nationalism and the African cause, he would not object my submission. The same can be said about Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, who earned the tag of the ‘Mother of the Nation’ during the struggle against apartheid based on her contribution, and not seeing colour amongst those who fought against apartheid.

I further submit that the Port Elizabeth Airport be named after David Stuurman of the Koi people. The Kimberley Airport be named after Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe and the East London Airport after Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. Steve Biko and Nelson Mandela who are also amongst the suggested names, are over represented and mirrored in the public culture (including names of some buildings, schools, universities or their schools) and in other spheres of life.

The currently employed approach and methodologies of inscribing public memories on memorial landscapes framed by the craft of curating the nation by the state and the Mandela mythology are not fully representative of both political formations and previously oppressed communities. Borrowing from Gecau, in Palmberg (1999) a concept of the ‘imagined nation’, the latter are excluded from the ‘imagined nation’ of the ‘new’ South African nation. This disjointed national discourse and mythological national consciousness have their own matrix of affirmation which feed to the monolithic and hegemonic historical master narrative on the one hand, and the conflict of different ideologies and framing for the excluded, marginalise and underrepresented on the other. In order to have a historical inclusive discourse, there is a need for all-inclusive heritage discourse, post-apartheid memorialisation, knowledge production, nationalisation of history and historicising the nation. There inclusivity and move towards a path of a South African nation that will make all the excluded and marginalise feel member of the family not outsiders or reduced to stepchild of the broader family is off paramount importance.

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Reference

Author’s Image: