***SIKHUMBULA U NOKUTHELA***

JL DUBE Memorial Lecture

11th September 2014, UKZN, Pietermaritzburg

Nkosi Sikelela iAfrika

If you wake up very early in the morning and listen to the cool breeze at dawn,

You are sure to hear special messages that are meant just for you

All you have to do is take the time and just listen.

The door is round, it is open, some people stand up, go across the threshold and go back to sleep.

But please, do not go back to sleep.

The orange eastern sky has golden threads that that magically weave their way straight into your heart.

All you have to do is just listen and let the purpose of the day reveal itself to you.

Today the ancestral spirits are commanding us to remember a pioneer African leader who was almost forgotten in the land of her birth.

I speak of the Nokuthela, the daughter of

MDIMA, SHANGE, oDUMAKUDE,

NOJOBO KASINGXI, oMABELE MADE ANCELISA NAPHESHEYA KOMFULA !!!

Bathi abamaziyo wayeyintombi enobuhle nesizotha esithi sondela, woza ngeneno ngiku xoxele ngezwe lakithi nomcebo walo. Ngiboleke indlebe mina ngize nengoma. Ingani phela thina maAfrika aseNingizimu sazalwa nengoma, silala sivuke ngayo. Sicula kumamatheke nezinyoni zezulu uma seneme. Sihuba kwenanele namawa nezintaba, yebo ngisho sesithukuthele sigan’unwabu, noma sidangele izinhliziyo zidandatheka ngezikhathi ezinzima. Kodwa umculo wona usegazini kithina.

UNokuthela intombi kaMdima, iziphiwo ayeziphiwe nguMdali wazisebenzisa zaze zathela nezithelo. Namuhla siyafisa sengathi sasikhona nathi lapho esebuyile kwelase Melika esekhwishizela ehla enyuka noMafukuzela betshala imbewu yentuthuko. Imbewu yemfundo nenqubekela phambili, belungiselela ukwakhiwa kwesikole Ohlange lapho abaholi bangomuso babeyokhuliswa khona!

Oh Hee! Uyadela owangizwela iphimbo lakhe esecula kuze kugiye nezingelosi zezulu.

Those who knew her tell us that she has an infectious smile, a regal understated kind of beauty and grace that made you wish to get to know her. They talk of her angelic voice that raised the horn of Africa for many nationalities to listen in awe. Yes indeed it is the truth that we people of Africa South were born with song in our hearts. We sing when we rejoice, we sing too when we are troubled and even with breaking hearts at the worst of times. Song has carried us throughout history.

All the years of struggle we used all forms of artistic expression to fight for freedom. That is exactly what she was doing when she carried the composition of Enoch Sontonga “Nkosi Sikelela iAfrika” to the world stages, letting them know about the plight of the indigenous peoples of South Africa. The land we lost, how we were made to feel like refugees in the land of our birth. The passion for education and her unyielding faith in the Almighty God, whom we praise in a specially African way with so many poetic names like Nkulunkulu, Mvelinqangi, Somandla, Qamata, Thixo Omkhulu!

In her must have lived the spirits of the great Ntsikana kaGaba who needed to praise God in a uniquely African way. Into eyayicula ingqungqe kunyakaze umhlaba.

The Spirit of Crotoa Eva, the San woman who was banised to Robben Island even before the first male political prisoner ever set foot on that Island University of future presidents. The spirits of Queen Amanitare of the Kingdom of Kush in Sudan, a warrior queen whose mother and grandmother had ruled before her. Yes, we Nguni people came from there!

Nokuthela must have had the spirit of many more women leaders who natured and inspired countless freedom fighters but their names are not often mentioned.

More recently, how many people talk about the very first black woman to acquire a university degree? uMama Charleotte Maxeke!

How many times do you hear the name of the great lawyer uVictoria Mxenge in the free South Africa!

Think back to the day when our African Empress of song , Miriam Makeba bravely addressed world leaders at the United Nations! A voice that cared your ears and made your heart dance, but fire in those eyes proving that she was a fighter and cultural ambassador from the first day she set foot on those foreign shores.

Mama Nokuthela was of the same stock as the phenomenal woman Princess Magogo who played uMakhweyana like it was invented just for her.

Almost 100 years after her death, very few people even know that she existed; a woman who worked hand in hand with the great Rev John Langalibalele Dube. She was a scholar, an educator, a leader of women’s groups! She worked tirelessly to fulfil the dream of building the OHLANGE Industrial Christian School in Inanda. Not being blessed with children of her own, she became mother to many more children than in is humanly possible to give birth to in one, two or three life times. All the love she had inside her, she showered on her students. Nokuthela taught Domestic science. As an accomplished musician she cherished the opportunity to teach music at Ohlange. She plaide piano and created a choir that was known and respected all over. She cofounded the isiZulu Newspaper and co-authored the first isiZulu songbook!

She quietly preached the Gospel of Christ as well as the importance of self-reliance to all she came into contact with.

Now tell me, why on earth did our history choose to forget this Diamond of a woman? Or would it have been better if she had been a man?

History needs to sometimes be called “HERSTORY” too. Otherwise many more women who fought for a better South Africa will be forgotten.

When journalist author Bessie Head was interviewed in 1972, she was asked,

“How do you think the revolution will come one day in South Africa?” Her response was;

“It is impossible to guess how the revolution will come one day in South Africa but in a world where all ordinary people are fighting for their rights. It is inevitable. But it to be hope that great leaders will arise there, who will remember the many years of human suffering, out of that formulate new laws that will treat everybody with common dignity and respect. It is also to be hoped that Southern Africa will one day become the home of the Storyteller and Dreamer who did not hurt others but only introduce new dreams that fill the heart with wonder.”

Today I stand here to raise my voice in praise of the path finders who led the way and showed all of us that mothers are the first teachers. So it is up to you and me, to tell the stories that fill the heart with wonder. Stories of remarkable women like Crotoa Eva, Charlotte Maxeke, Anette Makhanya, Nokukhanya Luthuli, Mkabayi kaJama, Mbuya Nehanda the spirit medium of Zimbabwe, Queen Modjaji, Queen Mmantatise, Lilian Ngoyi, Francis Baard, Hele Josephe, Fatima Meer, Phylis Naidoo, Lindiwe Mabuza, Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, Victoria Mxenge, Lauretta Ngcobo, Nomvo Booi, Brigalia Baam,Mathabo Kunene, Ruth First, Miriam Makeba , and many others… help me please call out more names, names that YOU feel should never be forgotten.

Her grave was unmarked for many years, but the day has come for us to say HERSTORY must be rewritten. So many people were impacted by Nokutela’s work. Time has come for us to finally shine a spotlight on her name so many more will stand up and find ways to celebrate her life. In different artistic expressions we need to relearn how not to be intimidated by sexism, racism, patriarchy and other chains that continue to tie down African women to this day.

Woman’s month is great indeed, but we are horrified by the record numbers of women and children who are brutally murdered in the free South Africa, and August 2014 has been so bad the mind boggles, the heart bleeds, the soul shrinks in shame.

The missionaries of old, who strove together with our great leaders for the dignity of the African people, did not foresee any of this. The countless freedom fighters who laid their lives for us, must have dreamt of a more balanced and caring nation than this.

When Mama Nokuthela Dube taught at Ohlange, she wanted to inspire leaders who would carry themselves with the same sense of self respect that many of our pioneers lived by. As we remember her name today, we must also remember the importance of quality education.

My biggest lesson from her must be the crystal clear understanding that Arts and Education are twins that should never be separated. Our nation would be better off with more focus being given to Creative Spirits like Nokuthela joining hands with Educationists who take Education as a calling, to build South Africa of young people who have a sense of worth that will leave no room for them to be fumbling and imitating foreign cultures in the hope that they will become rich and successful much faster than one can count to ten.

“UBUDE ABUPHANGWA; there is no elevator to success, one must take the steps” that is why our great leaders worked tirelessly to groom self-reliant and confident students. For everything we want, we have to work, work, work !!

My mantra to myself, “UNTILL WE SEE A BRIGHTER FUTURE IN OUR CHILDREN’s EYES, NOT MUCH OF WHAT WE DO TODAY HAS ANY VALUE.” , as I work in many educational institutions, I sometimes get so tired physically, from all the travelling and performances and workshops. Some days it is hard to get out of bed, but then I remind myself that we have not yet seen that brighter future in our children’s eyes. Out of bed I get!

My father Thomas would have said, AYIKHO INKPOMO YOBUTHONGO, “you can never earn a cow, through sleeping.” Truer words were never spoken.

Let us commend to efforts of committee led by Rev Simangaliso Khumalo, Dr Sibusiso Masondo, Rev Zwane of UJAAMA Centre, co-hosts of the JL Dube memorial lecture, who decided to pay tribute to this remarkable National Treasure.

The name of this shining light must not be forgotten ever again. A statement like this one must be a thing of the past:-

“We just knew vaguely that my mother has some connection with the Dube family, but we did not know how she was connected!” says Joyce Siwani, descendant of Nokuthela Dube.

How much more then for those who are not even related? Let us all be related to her from this day forth. Yes, 11th September 2014 is the day I, NOKUGCINA MHLOPHE, ZINDELA, THUMBEZA KA MYENI, OPHUTHAZA ABAPHUTHAZA IZULU ABANYE BELESABA, this is the day I also call myself a relative and great, great grandchild of Mama NOKUTHELA DUBE, UMAMDIMA !

HALALA QHAWEKAZI LESIZWE! HALALA !

Kahlil Gibran was right in saying: “A job well done, is love made visible.”

THE DEAD ARE NOT GONE

(paraphrasing “BREATHS”, by Birago Diop, Sengal )

The dead are not dead unless we choose to forget them

The dead are not beneath the ground

They are with us every day

Listen more often to things than to human beings

Those who have died have never, never left

They are with us in the home

They are with us in the crowds

Listen more often to things than to human beings

And you will hear them every single hour

They are in child’s first cry

They are in the woman’s breast

They are in the quickening shadows

They are in twinkling stars of the night sky

They are in rising sun

The dead are not beneath the ground

They are in the burning amber

They are in the leaping flame

They are in the flowing river

They are in the grinding stone

Hear them in the birds’ ancient song

Hear them in the driving wind

See their unstoppable dance

In the waves on the ocean

See them in the rustling leaves

See them in Spring’s first flowers

The dead are not dead

Unless we choose to forget them

They are in my heart, they are in your heart

Listen, you’ll hear them

They are in our gentle breath, every second

Just listen… listen … listen

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