

NELSON MANDELA UNIVERSITY

Celebrating African Women's Intellectual Histories:

Inyathi ibuzwa kwabaPhambili

Colloquium 28 - 29 August 2020

Opening: Friday 28, 11:30

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Professor Sibongile Muthwa

Vice-Chancellor, Nelson Mandela University

Good day colleagues, friends of the university, students, staff, community members, participants watching via different online platforms

It gives me great pleasure to welcome:

The Chancellor of the Nelson Mandela University, Dr Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi

The Chairperson of Council, Ambassador Nozipho January-Bardill

Members of the Nelson Mandela Council

University management and leadership: Deputy Vice-chancellors, Deans of Faculties, and Heads of Entities

Participants, staff and students from different universities

Members of the our university publics and communities

I particularly wish to welcome our key note speakers Dr Brigalia Bam and Professor Shireen Hassim, who will be introduced officially during the course of the Program.

I also wish to acknowledge the collaborative organisers of the colloquium from our sister institutions, Dr Siphokazi Magadla (Rhodes University) and Athambile Masola (University of Pretoria), as well as Dr Babalwa Magoqwana, the interim Director of the Centre for Women and Gender Studies at Nelson Mandela University, together with the staff and students of the Centre.

I am grateful to be able to welcome you all today from different countries and places, as we face these difficult times as one world. Geographical boundaries melt as we connect across the globe, using our sharpened digital agility that we are learning and improving on a daily basis.

We remember with great sadness the significant loss of life over the past few months, and wish strength to the many who are still grappling with the illness this pandemic foists upon us. For you to be here today, we are grateful for your health.

When I read the theme for this colloquium, I was captivated by “inyathi ibuzwa kwaBaphambili”. This is a Xhosa proverb which means wisdom is learnt/sought from the elders. This theme is extremely significant, as it deliberately and directly seeks to recognise the generational continuities and discontinuities of the struggle and achievements by women today. Our discussions over the next two days are a contribution to righting the wrongs of excluding women’s historiographies that have fundamentally shaped ideas of personhood, liberation and leadership, yet are largely left out of history and how our common journey as human beings is told.

Inyathi ibuzwa kwaBaphambili” is a call to action for us to look back while we are building and moving forward, learning from our elders - our grandmothers - those who have built the institutions before us; those who have sacrificed so much for so many of us, and for those who are yet to be born. This connection and recognition of the linkages of the history and future of women enables us to recognise the continuities within the challenges faced by women today. It is through these intergenerational conversations in spaces like this, that we must begin to transmit, share and archive the struggles, celebrations, and achievements by women from different generations.

In South Africa, 9 August is Women’s Day, which commemorates the 1956 Women’s March when women rose up to reject the carrying of a racially discriminatory identity document known as a “pass book”. This anti-pass campaign saw more than 22 000 women across race and class unite against the harassment and onslaught by the apartheid state, in its brutal attempt to enforce racial segregation. Whilst we celebrate, we must not forget the 1913 Free State Anti-Pass campaigns to defy the Union of South African State by not carrying passes and refusing to buy permits. Reflect for a minute and imagine the abilities of women like Katie Louw who managed to gather 5 000 signatures against the pass laws at a time when there was no social media or an effective transport system?

When we talk about intergenerational linkages, we also need to remember women like Nokuthela Dube who studied music in Brooklyn, New York as early as 1896. Through

her international music performances she would later help to pay for the establishment (together with her husband John Langalibalele Dube) of the Ohlange Institute - the first education institution for Africans, established by Africans. She was also one of the co-founders of "Ilanga Lase Natal" in 1903, the first isiZulu newspaper. This colloquium is encouraging us to revisit histories such as these, to learn from different generations' skills, tactics, and leadership in how to fight injustice of any type in our society while we build long lasting institutions.

I wish to challenge us that, as we learn from the elders, we deliberately position the everyday struggles of ordinary women at the centre of the conversation, allowing recognition as intellectuals in their own right. There is also an urgent need for theorising models that recognise women's socio-economic contributions. The economic daily survival strategies of the women and young people of this continent must be recognised for the complex eco-systems that they are, fundamental to both the social fabric and real needs such as the education for the young people paid for through organic economic systems of stokvels (imigalelo) and burial societies (masingcwabane). We also cannot forget the crushing continuing violence in our society which is central to the intergenerational traumas that are faced by many women of all ages today. It is critical that we centre these daily struggles while we are forging new ways that will protect the future generations from this crippling violence.

This colloquium takes seriously the threads of knowledge which have been largely marginalised in both public culture and in the academy. Over the next two days, we will add to a broader feminist archival project which seeks to re-member women and fight the continued colonial and post-colonial erasure of women's intellectual contributions in the political and cultural imaginations in Southern Africa. The proceedings will contribute to a publication which is potentially the first of its kind. Material will be written by women, centring the lives and ideas of the women whose ideas, actions and creativity is not often located within the broader contestations of their time as it is done with their male counterparts, with whom many shared spaces and ideas. The publication is an offering in re-reading history and knowledge that flows from 'our mothers' seeking to destabilise the gender inequalities in the world

knowledge production globally. It hopes to inspire future publications which will further develop and excavate how women have been shaped, fashioned and contested in various African intellectual traditions. It aims to show the threads and the continued struggles which were established in the 1600s and continue into the 2000s. This work is being undertaken by academics at Nelson Mandela University, Rhodes university and the University of Pretoria, in conversations with feminists. I wish to acknowledge this ground-breaking initiative. I wish to recognise and thank colleagues who are at the fore-front of this.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this colloquium. It is interactions such as these which are also playing a vital role in our intentions at Nelson Mandela university to revitalise the Humanities and in-so-doing centre the greater humanity in our academic enterprise through our engagement, learning and teaching, and research. Your wisdoms will contribute greatly to this endeavour.

Again, colleagues, friends, students, and members of the public, welcome to this colloquium, a centre-piece of our inter-institutional celebrations of South African women's month.