

# Zooming in on democracy, language and inclusive education in Africa



From left: Prof Mogomme Masoga, Dean of the Faculty of Arts; Prof Kweisi Kwaa Prah, author and professor of sociology; Prof Vuyokazi Nomlomo, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Teaching and Learning; and Dr Aghogho Akpome, lecturer in the Department of English.

NALEDI HLEFANE

THE University of Zululand (UNIZULU) recently hosted an exciting online public lecture in which sociology professor, author and public speaker, Professor Kweisi Kwaa Prah shared compelling views on democracy, language and inclusive education in the African context.

The lecture was the first of a series of online public lectures that have been earmarked by the office of UNIZULU Vice-Chancellor Professor Xoliswa Mtose, as part of its commitment to the university's intellectual project.

"These lectures will serve as a springboard to address some of the country's social, cultural and economic challenges," Prof Mtose said. "With the country celebrating 25 years of the adoption of the Constitution, it was timely to host a lecture focusing on issues of democracy, language and inclusive education. Equally fitting was extending an invitation to Prof Prah to dissect this particular topic.

"The lecture also coincides with the call for the transformation and decolonisation of our systems. Some 27 years into democracy, the focus has largely been on changing the structural arrangement of higher education systems, without paying enough attention to the colonial and

ideological architecture of the system. I am pleased that the university will not be found wanting in our efforts of giving expression to what post-apartheid higher education systems should entail," she said.

Prof Prah began his address by interrogating the meaning of democracy. In his view, democracy is more of "a principle, rather than a formally constituted and historically fixed formula of government". Its operationalisation and manifestation differs based on location, culture and society. The democratic make-up of countries therefore has a large bearing on the issue of inclusivity and language. He highlighted that Africa needs to universalise its culture in order to increase its global footprint. One of the mediums through which this can be achieved is language.

"When a language is not used, it begins to degrade. It is the most important issue that we are faced with in Africa. It is the key to our progress. We need to have an African university that uses African languages. The moment we reach the point where we can transact knowledge in our African languages, we shall lift society off the ground. The rural community would then be able to understand the latest knowledge available," he said.

In his response to the lecture, Dr Aghogho Akpome, a lecturer in the department of English concurred with Prof Prah's views – stressing that if we claim affiliation to democratic ideals, we must have cultural inclusivity. If we have cultural inclusivity, we must then have language inclusivity.

He also noted that Prof Prah's views present a fresh perspective on the problems of underdevelopment in Africa, all of which are often wrongly blamed on corruption. He argued that Prof Prah's ideas made it clear that the neglect of indigenous languages has serious negative effects on education, democracy and technological innovation in Africa.

He opted to conclude his presentation in this thought-provoking manner: "While democracy is imperative, it also poses a problem. When considering the development of languages such as Afrikaans, Modern Hebrew and Indonesian Bahasa, it is clear that the political circumstances that facilitated their ascendance are not available to indigenous African languages today. The contents of democracy are defined by the dominant classes. The dominant classes are sustained by the dominance of a foreign language. How can the system which sustains what we are fighting or working against work against it?"

## A day to celebrate Africa

PRECIOUS SHAMASE

IT was a day of jubilation in the Zululand region last week Friday, when the University of Zululand (UNIZULU) partnered with the City of uMhlatuze Municipality and others to host a special Africa Day event.

The function took place at the Empangeni Museum under the theme "Celebration of Diversity of African Cultures Through Social Cohesion". It was the first of a series of events the two partners plan to host alongside cohorts Empangeni Art and Cultural History Museum, Department of Tourism and the Department of Arts and Culture in the King Cetshwayo District Municipality.

Community members and stakeholders were invited to critically explore the broad and specific narrative and practice of diversity of African cultures through social cohesion.

The co-hosting of the event fits in with some of the long-term goals of the university to open pathways to what the community can contribute to the institution, and vice versa.

"Africa Day is worth celebrating to remind us of the diversity of our continent. It reminds us of where we come from. It is an expression of a commitment of a few people who gathered elsewhere and said Africa will be free and Africa

must unite. The university is also very pleased to be in partnership with the City of uMhlatuze," said UNIZULU Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor Siphoshe Sipho Seephe in his message of support.

He added that the partnership between UNIZULU and the City of uMhlatuze is an excellent example of the strong co-operation between the municipality and the education sector. In his view, the collaboration "will benefit both partners and allow us to continue developing our educational partnerships in the future".

Sindi Nyandeni, a delegate from the Office of the Premier, spoke about the office's intent to roll out programmes across all municipalities to heal wounds and rebuild community fibre. These programmes will include building partnership among social formations, especially government leaders. She clarified that the social cohesion and moral regeneration council would implement the programmes.

Nathi Nzimande from the City of uMhlatuze said they were excited about the partnership and looking forward to a fruitful working relationship with the university. "This is only the beginning. Through our presence in this partnership, we will share our business expertise and innovation to deliver the future business leaders of our city and beyond. Together, I can assure you that we can achieve a lot," he said.

## Shalo Mbatha: rewriting pages of history through her skills

NALEDI HLEFANE

THE name Shalo Mbatha triggers various memories for different individuals across many spheres of life.

While a certain group may associate her name with the translation and interpreting industry, others may link it to a byline they have seen in one of the mainstream newspaper titles. For others, it may simply bring back a memory of a recent television or radio news bulletin in which her name had been mentioned.

This is not an anomaly for someone who has travelled as much and lent her expertise to as many sectors as Mbatha has. From the SADC region to Australia and Europe, she has had a truly eventful journey with varied, yet intentional, destinations.

Born and bred in Dube, Soweto, Johannesburg, Mbatha started school at Sizanani Primary School in Dube. She then proceeded to Swaziland for her higher-primary school before completing her high school in Maseru, Lesotho, because her family did not want her to study under the inferior Bantu Education system. She took part in the Soweto Students Uprising in 1976, which led her to go to exile and live in a number of African countries such as Zimbabwe, where she obtained her British "A Levels". She then studied in Australia and Germany for her tertiary education.

Mbatha holds an interpreting and translation degree, majoring in German and Spanish, and a postgraduate diploma in education. She has completed her coursework for a Master's qualification in international communication, and holds many other postgraduate qualifications including a Public Relations Institute of South Africa (PRISA) accredited qualification.

After having practised as an interpreter and translator in Australia in the late 1980s, Mbatha returned to South Africa and joined Technikon SA as a lecturer in the Centre for Lifelong Learning. Thereafter, she decided to branch off into journalism, because she did not see the true reflection of a changing South Africa in the media. She made a lasting impact through her gripping hard news and feature writing skills. She worked for City Press before writing for Independent Media's Sunday Tribune and Sunday Independent. Because of their wide appeal,



many of her stories were syndicated. "I broke a number of stories, but those that stand out include one about a company that was distributing perforated condoms, with more than 5 million of those distributed on Durban trains.

"I broke the story about an asparagus farm in the Free State where workers were paid as little as R2,80 a month. When the farm was closed down by government, the farmer attempted to sue me for R12million but later withdrew.

"But my most dramatic story was when I found the remains of Andrew Zondo, who had been sentenced to death by Ambassador Toby Leon's father, Justice Ramon Leon, in 1985 for bombing Amanzimtoti Shopping Centre as part of the ANC armed struggle."

Like most areas of Mbatha's life story, the journalism chapter eventually drew to a close. She needed time out from the grueling media schedule, she explains – and joined various government departments as a communications and marketing specialist.

Her most recent career exploits have led her to the gates of the University of Zululand (UNIZULU), where she is completing her PhD in Zulu Feminism and now teaches undergraduate and postgraduate students in the Department of History.

In 2017, Mbatha published a book called *uZulu: Umlando Nobuhawe Bukazulu* – an in-depth focus on 800 years of history of the Zulu nation, using the royal family as the "golden thread of talking

about the amazing Zulu kingdom."

She explains that she began to write the book after her seven-year-old son asked her about the glaring socioeconomic differences across the racial spectrum in South Africa. "I had to go back to the beginning of apartheid, but he had more questions about why black South Africans were dominated by white people. I needed to give him a proper response, so I decided to do research. The deeper I dug, the more amazing things I found about Zulu people. So basically, the book is an answer to my son," she says.

The late His Majesty King Goodwill Zwelithini kaBhekuzulu wrote the foreword for the book, which Mbatha regards as a true blessing. Impressed by her thorough research and how she captured the history of the Zulu nation, the king once told Mbatha that she is like her great-great grandfather, Manyosi Mbatha, who once defended King Shaka and his troops during the first Ndwandwe War. Therefore, Mbatha had also defended the honour and heritage of the Zulu nation by documenting it – and in so doing, ensured the rich history of the nation would live on forever.

Mbatha is a mother of two and a grandmother to a loving grandson. Both her parents are deceased. Losing her father in 2020 awakened her to the reality of mortality. Because of this, she admits to no longer "sweating the small things" – and chooses to continue putting her best foot forward so that she leaves a lasting legacy.

## High hopes for new engineering students



The University of Zululand has high expectations for its first class of engineering students. During a recent meet-and-greet session at the Richards Bay Campus, students were given a warm welcome by the university's executive management.

SAMKELE SOKHELA

PROFESSOR Xoliswa Mtose, University of Zululand (UNIZULU) Vice-Chancellor, recently welcomed the first class to study towards the university's newly developed engineering programmes during an exclusive event held on the Richards Bay Campus.

The event took place in a meet-and-greet fashion and was attended by various members of the university management together with the 100 new students. Prof Mtose congratulated the aspiring engineers for being the first batch to study engineering in the history of the institution. She further warned that this privilege is accompanied by lots of pressure and responsibilities.

"I want you to be a (great) example to all the students of this university

because you are beginning history. Some (programmes) already existed at the university, but now we are building a new culture and chapter with you. (You must do well) at all levels," said Prof Mtose, adding that the students should always keep the fact that they are "a special group" at the back of their minds.

The Dean of the Faculty of Science, Agriculture and Engineering, Prof Nokuthula Kunene shared Prof Mtose's sentiments. She concluded by sharing on the expansion plan that the faculty and institution have drawn up for the engineering department. From the beginning of 2023, the university intends to add more engineering programmes, including the Bachelor of Engineering in Electrical Engineering and Computer Engineering, the Bachelor of Engineering in Mechatronics and five more related diploma

programmes.

Nokukhanya Nkosi, a Bachelor of Engineering in Electrical Engineering student who was among the attendees, was appreciative of the executive management's gesture in organising the event. Nkosi believes the event helped the students feel more welcomed and keen to begin their respective academic journeys at UNIZULU.

"First and foremost, I would like to thank the institution for providing me with the privilege of studying and being among the first batch of students to enrol for the engineering programmes. After the (event) with management, honestly, I feel more welcomed and excited. I am excited about my future at the university and I am going to work hard in my studies so that I finish my degree on time," said a zealous Nkosi.



UNIZULU Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor Siphoshe Seephe.

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