

## **Nelson Mandela University hosts Second biennial Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe Institutional Public Lecture**

The 27<sup>th</sup> of February marked a momentous occasion in South Africa's remembrance of one of its struggle heroes, as Mandela University hosted its second Robert Sobukwe Institutional Public Lecture.

Considering Sobukwe was a teacher, the lecture was fittingly situated in the institution's Faculty of Education in what marks 100 years of Sobukwe.

Sobukwe was a global African who understood the connection between ourselves and (anti) imperial struggles. 'African' is not only in name, but also in the context of viewing us as people of humanity, the keynote speaker, Lebohang Liepollo Pheko said.

Pheko is an activist scholar and political economist whose address was entitled: 'Defying the Undefiable: A Meditation on Reparative Memory'.

Attendees included the Sobukwe family, the University's staff and students, high school students, Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO) representatives, as well as members of Sobukwe's political home, the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC).

Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sibongile Muthwa, praised the youth for attending what would be a teaching moment for everyone in the celebration of a douance in South Africa's struggle for freedom, which we now enjoy.

Now, 100 years since the birth of Sobukwe in 1924, Prof Muthwa said "the lecture speaks to our commitment to being an engaged and transformative university".

"Through this lecture, we can reflect on the teachings and meanings of Robert Sobukwe and the promise these still hold today for a just and fairer world to which he dedicated all of his life".

Prof Muthwa concluded by saying catalysing such platforms for engagement, strikes at the heart of what universities are for.

Imbued in Afrocentric visuals and music, the lecture featured a performance by the Faculty of Education's student choir, led by acting Dean, Prof Heloise Sathorar.

Keynote speaker Lebohang Pheko explained that since so little has been recorded vocally on Robert Sobukwe, we are forced to piece together what we imagined influenced him and his ideals.

The recognition of one's humanity lies in many African languages, such as Sesotho and Zulu, whose greeting possess a dual meaning, she said.

She used the example of 'le kae', a Sotho greeting, which means 'how are you?' as well as 'where are you'. In the same context, Pheko explained that 'sanibona' is a Zulu greeting, which also serves to recognise a person's humanity.

Pheko linked this back to Sobukwe and asked if we will continue to allow Sobukwe to be part of the erasure of our memory.

"So, beyond the challenge of finding his voice, it falls upon us and occasions like this to try and situate him.

"Memory is an account of things remembered from the past, and history being the study of that past. The convergence of memory and history is then a politicised one" said Pheko.

To address the suppression of Sobukwe, Pheko highlighted the need for visibility.

"Visibility is part of repairing our memory, to see the unseen, is key to decoloniality and the necessary repair, as visibility comes with remembrance".

"Memory makes the past present, it makes it possible for the past to be addressed" said Pheko.

Pheko's point of reparative memory was then responded to by former Mandela Uni lecturer, Prof Simphiwe Sesante.

"Sobukwe said to us that Africa does not forget, so it is appropriate that we marry memory and forgetfulness together because it was Mangaliso himself who instructed us to remember", said Prof Sesante.

Prof Sesante, however, cautioned that we are ailing in this regard, probing whether we have learnt more from Sobukwe or the former colonial masters.

Prof Sesante added to this by highlighting the number of women who have fallen victim to men, and how women continue to be marginalised in political and communal spaces.

He then quoted Sobukwe who said, 'it is meek that we speak the truth while we are still alive'.

Prof Sesante concluded by addressing the issue of community, and the disdain that South Africans have for fellow Africans.

"Robert Sobukwe taught us that the liberation creed is African nationalism, which is then called Pan African basis".

"He taught us that South Africa is no exception to the African continent and that all our people are one nation, an African cannot be a foreigner in Africa" said Prof Sesante.

During the questions and answers session, Pheko emphasised a need to problematise undetectable issues, such as language.

"Language matters, it is ontological, it triggers something within us. Until we undo that colonial language, we will continue to struggle" warned Pheko.

Pheko also noted the numerous ongoing international conflicts in places, such as Palestine and Afghanistan, stating that the continuity in these anti-imperialist struggles.

The vote of thanks was delivered by the President of the PAC, Mzwanele Nyhonso.

Nyhonso expressed his gratitude to the University for inviting the PAC to the lecture, and also recognising them.

Remarking on the founder of the PAC, affectionally known as the 'father of Pan-Africanism', Nyhonso highlighted Sobukwe's selflessness.

"Sobukwe taught us to be selflessness, disciplined, to love our African people".

"He also taught us good governance, and had we followed his teachings, we would be enjoying true liberation in the true sense of the word" said Nyhonso.