

STELLENBOSCH HERITAGE PROJECT
PRESTIGE LECTURE 2015

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP: MOULDING OUR HERITAGE

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Ladies and Gentlemen

Comrades and Friends

Community of Stellenbosch

I am humbled by the invitation to address you here this evening. In reflecting on the issue of heritage, I'd like to start by looking outside of South Africa, to Italy. Italy was united as a country in the 1860's, and when the Treaty was signed, Massimo d'Azeglio said, "We have made Italy. Now we must make Italians."

On 08 May 1996, we adopted the Constitution that effectively made the democratic South Africa. On that occasion, one of our Deputy Presidents, Thabo Mbeki, in the same spirit as d'Azeglio, made that outstanding "I am an African" speech. It includes one of the most incredible recollections of who we are as South Africans, in all its complexity. Among other, very many things he said,

A human presence among all these, a feature on the face of our native land thus defined, I know that none dare challenge me when I say - I am an African!

I owe my being to the Khoi and the San whose desolate souls haunt the great expanses of the beautiful Cape - they who fell victim to the most merciless genocide our native land has ever seen, they who were the first to lose their lives in the struggle to defend our freedom and dependence and they who, as a people, perished in the result.

Today, as a country, we keep an audible silence about these ancestors of the generations that live, fearful to admit the horror of a former deed, seeking to obliterate from our memories a cruel occurrence which, in its remembering, should teach us not and never to be inhuman again.

I am formed of the migrants who left Europe to find a new home on our native land. Whatever their own actions, they remain still, part of me.

In my veins courses the blood of the Malay slaves who came from the East. Their proud dignity informs my bearing, their culture a part of my essence. The stripes they bore on their bodies from the lash of the slave master are a reminder embossed on my consciousness of what should not be done.

I am the grandchild of the warrior men and women that Hintsa and Sekhukhune led, the patriots that Cetshwayo and Mphephu took to battle, the soldiers Moshoeshe and Ngungunyane taught never to dishonour the cause of freedom.

That moment when we adopted our Constitution in May 1996, was truly the inflection point [buigpunt] in our history. It marked the shift from the struggle against the apartheid regime to the struggle for a new humanism in a democratic order. We have to understand that this was the ‘turning point’ and not the end point in struggle. We have to ask ourselves why we adopted the Constitution. The answer, contained in the Preamble is, a single word in isiXhosa, “KANJALO”, it is two short words in Afrikaans, “TEN EINDE”, and three even shorter words in English “SO AS TO”. What follows are the commitments made in the Preamble to future generations in order to:

- *Heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights;*
- *Lay the foundations for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people and every citizen is equally protected by law;*
- *Improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person;*
and
- *Build a united and democratic South Africa able to take its rightful place as a sovereign state in the family of nations.*

These constitutional commitments are all continuous and on a rising floor. Together, they describe what your late Vice-Chancellor, Prof Russell Bothma, described as the “Pedagogy of Hope”. Simply put, it means that people all have a stake in the future, they know that tomorrow will be better than today, because today is already better than yesterday.

All of this remains as incomplete, and as a commitment yet to be realised by ourselves. It is only in appreciating this commitment that we might begin to understand what it means to be a South African. We come from all of the strands, as articulated in that wonderful “I am an African” speech, by which we are bound to a common future by virtue of that commitment.

Our generation has much to answer for, including the fact that we have not sought to explain this part of our history to the next generation. Already, in less than twenty years, this profoundly important historic moment has faded. Walk around this, or any campus of bright, young students and ask them about this, and we will all be shocked by how little is known of the moment. And, if the value of the turning point is negated, then the history prior to it, may just as well not occurred.

One little fact about our Constitution, for example, is that it was signed and certified by the Constitutional Court in Afrikaans. The language was specifically selected by President Mandela, with the fullest support of the ANC, to illustrate that it too had been liberated from its history to become part of our heritage.

I am sure that if we were to do a simple test here this evening, and ask people to recite either the Preamble to our Constitution, or the “Oath of Allegiance” from the USA, more people may know the latter. People tend to recall what they have read, or seen in the movies - we don’t write in order to claim our history, hence we have the discontinuity that we are all conscious of. Yet, when we talk of heritage, we can only do so in the context of a single nation where we are bound by commitments that transcend race, language and ethnicity. All that we have to hold us together as a nation is our commitment to each other.

The challenge that we constructed for ourselves in the Constitution, especially in its Founding Provisions, Preamble and Bill of Rights still requires much work. It is not as though we have not made any progress in the 19 years since its adoption, but we are probably guilty of not marking the route we have traversed, articulating our successes

along the way, and being brutally honest about what remains to be done. This omission means that each subsequent generation may believe that they are starting afresh.

The sense of a nationhood that unites us is the context for the discussion of why youth employment is so important a challenge. The commitment in our Constitution that binds all of us, and not merely government or lawmakers, is that we will, among other responsibilities presumably, make a determined effort to “Improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person.”

What happens to our young people in South Africa is, therefore, fundamentally important because we know that both poverty and inequality have huge intergenerational dimensions. So, the children of the poor are very likely to remain poor; just as the children of those who have never been able to hold a stable job are very likely to have limited opportunities. Equally, those children from better off homes are more likely to succeed. For this reason, we have to pay close attention to the data about the lives of young people. We cannot rely on guesswork - if we cannot measure the change, we will never manage the change and if we cannot manage the change, the results will be patchy because they will not be the consequence of considered actions.

Statistics South Africa released a special report in June this year on the Youth Labour Market¹. According to this report, the total unemployment rate for the country was 26.4%, with the trend among adults (35 -64 years) being 17.0% unemployment, and among youth (aged 15 -34) being 36.9%. So young people obviously bear the burden of unemployment. According to the same release, the Western Cape has the lowest youth unemployment rate of 29.9%, against a national average of 36.9% but even this is substantially higher than almost any other country with similar levels of development as South Africa. This very detailed report also hones in on matters such as the numbers of discouraged workers and, very importantly, the educational levels of the unemployed. Of the unemployed young people (the 36.9% referred to above), 55% have below matric, 36.4% have completed grade 12, and 8.3% have some tertiary qualification. So obviously, in understanding who is left behind and whose children are likely to inherit poverty, those who have not completed Grade 12, are at the greatest risk,

¹ “National and Provincial Labour Market: Youth”, 29 June 2015 (Q1 2008 - Q1 2015)

We need to understand how large the category of people who do not complete Grade 12 is. Earlier this week the Department of Basic Education confirmed in a press release that about 50% of learners would have dropped out of school before reaching Grade 12. (The report indicates that 1 303 016 learners started Grade 1 in 2004, of whom about 674 232 are expected to write the Grade 12 examinations this year.) That is an aggregate figure. A principal at a school in Mitchells Plain once told me that he enrolls about 300 Grade 8's each year and has about 100 Grade 12's - that is a drop-out rate of 2 in 3 who start. The truth is that the dropout rate is hardly uniform across schools and communities. It is exceedingly important to analyse these trends - what causes the drop-outs - is it poverty (as suggested by the DBE release)? Is it contributed to by teenage pregnancy (that was 176 000 in 2014, according to the Sunday Times)²? Might it be that the returns on Grade 12 appears to be so low, that the attitude develops that there is little point in struggling through to Grade 12 only to be unemployed like others in the neighbourhood? Or could it be that the teaching is so abysmal that learners leave rather than be tortured by bad teachers? My suggestion is that whatever attempts are made to address the challenge, understanding the reasons will be very significant.

It is also important to try and understand what happens to young people who make it through Grade 12, and then disappear because they do not enter universities. Let me share the results of schools whose names might be familiar to the community of Stellenbosch. I refer only the Grade 12 pass rates from 2014, counting the percentage of candidates who secured a Bachelors entrance.³

- Bloemhof Girls - 98.5%
- Cloeteville High - 22.1%
- Kayamandi Sec - 12.7%
- Luckhoff Sec - 33.9%
- Makupula Sec - 22.8%
- Paul Roos Gym - 88.5%
- Rhenish Girls - 100%

² Sunday Times 28 June 2015

³ WCED Grade 12 Results, Winelands District 2014.

- Stellingzicht High - 13.0%

Without knowing the precise details of each of these schools, it is apparent that race and class matter a great deal in determining education outcomes. If we examined this list a bit more closely we are compelled to ask how it is possible to have a range of results as large as the difference between Rhenish Girls and Kayamandi High School. It is surely not in the remuneration of teachers. So, it has to be in the extent of parent or community oversight of what actually happens in the schools and in the quality of preparation provided by the feeder primary and pre-primary schools, as these exist. In many of the 8 schools in the Winelands district referred to, the overall pass rate is reasonable, for example, Makupula at 81%, and Luckhoff at 83.9%, however, with low Bachelors passes, which frequently suggest that Mathematical Literacy is preferred over Mathematics, the disparities increase. It cannot simply be a problem that we tackle in the final year of secondary schooling - these issues must be addressed earlier in the system. Understanding these matters is important, because it is in addressing them that we seek to forge a common heritage, which will be shaped by the commitment to free the potential of each person.

However, even where instruments, such as the Annual National Assessments (ANAs), are developed to act as an early warning system, their implementation is resisted. The ANAs were suspended just this week after pressure from the three teachers' trade unions. Of course, having the ANA's would never be enough, the results would have to be translated into measurable improvements, including massive skills upgrades of teachers. And so, in the absence of real transformation of education, we repeat what apartheid did, namely to prepare the majority of young people for low-skilled employment in areas such as agriculture and mining, which, unfortunately, have also been the sectors that shed the most jobs in the past twenty years.

One of the most extensively researched areas across the globe is what core skills are required for what kinds of jobs. It seems self-evident that our education system ill-equips our young people for the sorts of jobs demanded by a modern, transforming economy. It appears that we have not made South Africans who are determined to drive a hard bargain to gain the necessary skills to take our economy forward.

The basic proposition that there will be limited opportunities for employment in low-skills sectors into the future is undeniable. Increasingly though, even jobs that were previously thought to be safe are now susceptible to takeover by changes in technology - think of sectors such as financial analysts, advisors and stock-brokers, or think of lawyers whose routine contracts are increasingly being derived from pre-drafted precedents, or anaesthetists and surgeons, or financial and sports reporters - all of these high-end job categories are being taken over by computer-based instruments.

Now, I have avoided the part of the topic that deals with entrepreneurship, simply because I am still not convinced that it is possible to merely be an entrepreneur, because you had a subject called “entrepreneurship” at school.. Most successful entrepreneurs have some core skills. The skills of entrepreneurs include the ability to measure, to count, to read, to write and to envision - nobody is born with these skills, we acquire them in varying degrees by being exposed. Some entrepreneurs are IT specialists, who become IT entrepreneurs, yet others are financial advisers who branch out on their own, or, for example, they are carpenters, plumbers and mechanics who find new applications for their skills, provided that these skills can be overlaid with the necessary skills to establish and maintain a business. I am not excluding the rare opportunities of people who set out on their own without much training, but evidence suggests that these are exceptions to the rule. So in accepting a developing trend that increasing numbers of people will be self-employed, many of them in new industries in the future, I am not convinced that we should glorify this without recognising the importance of the undergirding skills upon which such entrepreneurship must be built.

Of the many people who secure Grade 12 passes with bachelors entrance, fewer and fewer are going to find places in universities. Even when they do and graduate, their opportunities for employment will frequently depend on the precision of their training and their ability to think strategically and solve problems. To continue doing whatever we have done before is becoming increasingly inadequate.

The employment of young people is a global issue. It was youth unemployment that triggered what became known as the Arab Spring, it is the risk of youth unemployment that drives jingoistic nationalist movements that oppose immigrants in Europe, it is the risk of youth unemployment that keeps political leaders in countries such as China awake at night. A report on China’s future that advises that on existing trends indicates

that China will have over 200 million college graduates by 2030 and that they will have to create sufficient jobs for college graduates progressively, or face huge social unrest. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) reports that there will be approximately 2014 million unemployed people by the end of this year, and that a further 280 million jobs must be created by 2019 to merely absorb new entrants to labour markets. The ILO report also expresses concern that income inequalities are widening across the globe with the richest 10% earning 30 - 40% of all income. This growing inequality is, of course, also a huge part of the challenges we need to be confronting.

Whatever we seek to do, must take account of all of the global competitive pressures that will present in labour markets. We simply have to be better, faster, fitter and more appropriate with the skills that we produce. Our constitutional imperatives do not give us any option but to understand that 'improving the quality of life and freeing the potential of each person' is what an appreciation of the responsibilities of our heritage demands.

So, what are the options to drive the change? The first of these has to be to change the outcomes of education. This means tackling the shadow of history, using the differential between Kayamandi High and Rhenish Girls as an indicator and focusing on appropriate subjects and the quality of teaching. Secondly, it means tackling the vast differentials of the throughputs of primary schools in a similar, and more determined fashion, because we know that waiting until the Grade 12 results are released is waiting much too long. Thirdly, it means building community organisations to give voice to people and empower parents to take a keener interest in what transpires at schools. Fourthly, it demands that we analyse what parts of the education system retards our development. This work must include the reappraisal of the new pathways, especially into a ramped-up vocational education system. Fifthly, it requires that we re-establish or reinvigorate the necessary social compact to convene the various social partners - business, labour, government and communities - to rebuild the trust to hold the project together. We obviously pay too little attention to the operation of this great compact that must hold us together. It needs to operate at a national level, but will work best when every part of each community takes responsibility. It cannot function without the devotedness of active citizens that the National Development Plan speaks of.

We must recognise that as important as periodic elections are in a democracy, the outcomes of these elections are insufficient as indicators of democracy. We will never live out our constitutional responsibility towards each other if we are not engaged in constant conversation and action about the issues that truly matter. Left unattended, the pot of anger boils over. This is not to suggest that leadership in society is unimportant or that leaders must be prevented from acting. On the contrary, we need rapid responses, as well as good anticipation of risk. But this is what the functioning of the compact is about. It is the contact point for living out our collective spirit of *Ubuntu*, which is truly our collective heritage, regardless of the particular strands of our origin.

But, in order for this spirit of collective responsibility to function, our minds must also be focused on the persuasion of the necessary compromises. No progress will be attained without discussion of the trade-offs.

In a recently released book⁴, Joel Netshitenzhe wrote, “For South Africans to succeed in painting our future in harmonious colours requires an appreciation of the dynamics of race as an expression of power relations. At the core of these relations are socio-economic issues. But the realm of ideas, attitudes and conduct is capable of stubbornly defying even changes in material conditions. As such, attending to matters spiritual and ideological is as critical as the effort at socio-economic transformation.”

We have a huge volume of unfinished business, and a great part of this is about playing catch-up to ensure so that successive generations appreciate the debt that we owe to each other - linked both backwards and forwards; that they appreciate that there was no sell-out of our birth-right because our Constitution is itself the fruits of struggle and not a gift from a retreating colonialist. Most importantly, we owe our children a commitment that we have sufficient energy to continue to tackle the remaining remnants of the apartheid past still evident as the injustices of the present, and that this is our Heritage Project. The onus is not ours solely or that of our children, but what we are determined to do together that will demonstrate that the adoption of our Constitution was not the end of struggle, but merely an exceedingly important turning point.

Thank you.

⁴ “The Colour of our Future”, edited by Xolela Mangcu, p131

