

Dlamini-Zuma: A decolonisation of the mind must start in the deliberate dissemination of African culture

*Ahead of the **Steve Biko Memorial Lecture Europe at LSE** on Thursday 24 October 2013, LSE alumna Delphine Pedeboy recaps the Steve Biko 14th Annual Lecture at the University of Cape Town.*

The mood in the University of Cape Town's Jameson Hall was electric on October 2 as guests filed in to attend the 14th Annual Steve Biko Memorial Lecture.

The speaker, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, was introduced by the Head of the Biko Foundation and Steve Biko's son, Nkosinathi Biko. A prominent politician in South Africa, Dlamini-Zuma was elected as the first woman Chairperson of the African Union Commission, which this year celebrates 50 years since its creation.



Dlamini-Zuma focussed her address on the concept of Pan-Africanism. She began by urging Africans to celebrate their unique culture, emphasising the important contributions by Africans to science, social issues, and global culture.

"Africa's renaissance draws on the continent's diversity, and reclaiming indigenous knowledge, while acknowledging the diaspora's contribution," she said. "A decolonisation of the mind", she argued, must start in the "deliberate dissemination of African culture", in a celebration of the continent's history, arts and industry.

She warned however of the danger of the "single story", an idea pioneered by Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, whereby one story about Africa becomes "the" story, and negative stereotypes come to represent a sort of permanent African condition. In this case, the idea that Africa is a poverty-ridden, hopeless continent is simply not true. Recent history abounds with examples that testify to the contrary: Gabon was the fastest growing economy in the world in the 1970s, and 30 years ago, China was poorer than Malawi. Nowadays, with growth rates soaring in most sub-Saharan African countries and a huge boom in the working-age population, things are looking up.

The question is, how does Africa move away from this stereotype? Promoting a strong culture of African leadership and greater responsibility for its development, as well as recognising women's contribution to African development are crucial steps. Dlamini-Zuma said, "Women constitute half

the population, and of course give birth to the other half”. Dlamini-Zuma has used her unique power as the first woman chair of the AU to promote gender issues through her speech.

Her recommendation for the region was to invest in human capital — through education and a “skills revolution”. She placed special emphasis on cooperation and peace as necessary background conditions for economic and social empowerment in Africa.

On integration in South Africa, Dlamini-Zuma said that diversity should not be seen as a weakness, but as a strength; that unity in South Africa and more generally throughout Africa can be achieved in spite of its great diversity. South Africa’s unique strength within the SADC region should help consolidate development initiatives, and it should not be an “island of success”. Cooperation is integral to Pan-Africanism.

Following the talk, an audience member questioned the speaker about the direction Africa is taking in developing its own identity in the world.

Responding, Dlamini-Zuma mentioned Mandela’s speech at the UN in 1994, where he recognised that South Africa is part of the global village; it had finally joined the “family of nations”. The same can be said for Africa as it related to the world. Integration, both among African countries, but also as Africa relates to the rest of the world, is a necessary step in moving away from the single story, and creating new positive ones.

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