

HONORAY DOCTORATE ACCEPTANCE SPEECH
DELIVERD AT RHODES UNIVERSITY
BY Ms EN MBEKI
ON 13/04/2012

Master of Ceremony
The University Management
Ladies and Gentleman
Umlisa Nomthinjana

I welcome this occasion with much pleasure and humility, more so because Rhodes University has bestowed on me the honour I do not deserve.

With your permission may I take this opportunity to first introduce myself.

I am Sesotho speaking, umSuthu wakwa Mshweshwe; Iona utya inyama yehashi.

I was born 96 years ago in the district of Mt Fletcher which was then part of East Griqualand, which is now called Maluti. This areas lies at the foot of the Drakensburg Mountains - an area experiencing very cold snowy days in winter, where schools close because of winter and where livestock cannot be let out of their kraals since grass is covered in snow.

The bright idea of this is that as soon as snow melts, farmers till the fields and sow wheat which ripens in November leaving the fields ready for the planting of maize, peas, beans and sorghum (Kaffir corn as it was known at the time).

I received my primary education at a local school where English was the unofficial language of instruction and pupils were compelled to converse in English even after school hours. Religious instruction was included in the syllabus as well.

For annual examination some subjects were supervised by white examiners. From Standard 5 (now grade 7) onwards I schooled at a boarding school named Mariazell. This was a self-contained Roman Catholic Missionary Institution.

At this institution I completed a three year course in Native Primary Lower, later to be known as Primary Teacher Training Course. After this I enrolled for one year at Lovedale for Native Primary Higher to be changed later to Higher Primary Teacher Training course for the year.

In those days, even though there was segregation the system of education was universal. Education was the same for everyone until the introduction of Bantu Education which lowered the standard of African education.

During the following two years I studied for Senior Certificate in Amanzimtoti College. Here the attitude was liberal. That emanated from the Principal, the late Dr EH Brookes. He was non-racial though coming from an Afrikaner University.

Thereafter I was a teacher in Durban for two years and also acting as a night schoolteacher as well.

In Heilbron I was a teacher for one year. And there the public attitude was 100% racialistic. I remember on one occasions my friend and I had to stand in a queue for almost four hours unattended because we had expressed ourselves in English. We were only served when, on the advice of petrol attendant, we spoke Sesotho.

In 1940 I got married to Govan Mbeki and lived in Idutywa as now known as Dutywa.

Politically I ran a branch of the Communist Party which was later banned alongside other political formations in the country. Throughout my entire life I have been an active participant in various activities and projects designed to improve the lives of people. I was a member of the Transkei Women's Zenzele association. And I formed two Women's Projects Khanyisa and Masande and I am also running a home for the destitute children in Qumra (Komga).

I have lived through a number of political government types: The United Party; The Nationalist Party of Dr JH Verwoed; The United Transkei Territories General Council (UTTGC); The Native Representative Council (NRC); The Matanzima Era followed by the present Government.

It is a wonderful privilege to be awarded this honour by an institution whose contribution not only to human knowledge but also to the development of society is well documented; an institution that continues to make a profound impact on the development of human kind.

I share this day with many other graduates who have spent several hard years engaged in research and other academic activities, adding to our knowledge. I say to them this is your day too and I congratulate you on your achievements.

I also share this honour with many other people from whom I have drawn courage, strength and inspiration and I would like to thank them as well.

It's well known that South Africa has a serious shortage of skills. This poses a challenge to our government, and while I acknowledge efforts that are being made in this regard, our government needs to double its efforts and channel more resources to these areas to develop a new breed of citizenry that will be able to make a meaningful contribution in the development of our country.

Our youth needs skills and access to education. A skilled and educated youth holds the keys to a prosperous country where the divide between the haves and have not's is considerably narrowed. The future does not belong to us, it belongs to the youth.

Once again thanks
Rhodes University