

Convocation Address presented at the Spring 2010 Convocation of the University of Alberta, in acceptance of the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Laws, by Helen Kay Raseroka, Director of the Department of Library Services, University of Botswana on the 30th May and June 7th 2010.

Eminent Chancellor, Madame President, Representative on the Board of Governors, Colleagues, Honored Graduates of the University of Alberta, friends, family, students Ladies and Gentlemen.

As the daughter of the Xaba clan from the ama Zulu and a mother of the Raseroka clan of the baKgatla of Southern Africa, it is with great honor that I stand here, representing the collective spirit of my African Elders and Ancestors, and with humility, to present their greetings to the spirit of the First People, and subsequent sojourners of these vast lands of Canada.

Eminent Chancellor, Madame President, Representative on the Board of Governors, permit me to express my deep and sincere gratitude for the honor that the University of Alberta, one of the world's top research universities, has bestowed upon me. Through me, this award brings honor to my family and my university, the University of Botswana, and last, but not least, the global profession of librarians.

As the graduating class of 2010, you join thousands who embrace the motto: "Dare to Discover" and "Dare to Deliver" by "serving through knowledge" <http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/fats> accessed: 1/7/2010. I congratulate you on the hard work that has earned you your diplomas today. You are about to embark on a journey of life and adventure. The hours of solitary

contemplation, and review invested in the search for understanding and the development of knowledge, is worth nurturing into life-long learning. As you begin a new chapter in your life, you will be faced with challenges and opportunities, each of which presents options. The choices you make require information skills competency: knowing when you need information and being adept at selecting the sources with the best fit to your needs. These may be people--based sources or embedded in various information resources carried by other media. All have to be critically analyzed and swiftly used to assist you in making informed decisions, sometimes with the additional guidance of your own intuition. This is the art of creating your own unique life story and making your contribution to the universe.

Allow me to briefly share with you my journey of life which, in retrospect and when compared to the millions of my fellow African rural and urban peoples, has been privileged. The fundamental difference between my life and theirs comes from my fortune to have had access to education. I therefore stand before you today, on the shoulders of generations of African leaders who understood the significance of Western education in changing Africa's future. Western education enhanced indigenous ways of knowing and broadened our worldview, facilitating the survival of our peoples through struggle and resistance during the colonial era. Missionary education, in spite of its negative aspects, gave our forbearers access to control of their own destiny resulting in our freedom and success today. Western education was introduced by colonial governments and became a double-edged sword. It was both a tool for subjugation and control, as well as a means of African survival and coping mechanism in an environment that was forcibly

undergoing rapid change in terms of values, belief systems, language and the overall way of life.

The first generations of educated Africans sustained the values embedded in the African philosophy of *Ubuntu* (Zulu) *Botho* (Tswana), which may be translated as humaneness, compassion and selflessness.

The establishment of higher education institutions in Africa from the colonial period facilitated the process of developing a generation of African leaders who inspired the liberation struggle and, eventually, the development of African intellectuals, and statesmen such as Leopold Senghor of Senegal, Mwalimu Nyerere of Tanzania, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, John Dube of South Africa and Seretse Khama of Botswana. The quest for a free and just society in South Africa was also inspired by young learners, such as Steve Biko, who today are remembered and immortalized in their writings.

Mr Nelson Mandela and other great giants continue to inspire us with their learned stature in addressing global challenges, thanks to such institutions as the then University College of Fort Hare, a key institution of higher education for black Africans from 1916 to 1959, now a public university. Leaders such as Wangari Maathai of Kenya, the political activist who calls for sustainable development democracy and peace; Thabo Mbeki's call for an African renaissance exemplified by the Timbuktu Manuscripts Project which aims to preserve some 700,000 scholarly manuscripts, some dating back to the 12th century located in Mali, West Africa.

The University of Botswana (UB), inaugurated as a University in 1982, has its roots in the affirmation of the principles of botho and kagisano (humanness and tolerance). These values are demonstrated in the founding of the University which was built through funding based on donations from the people of Botswana to a national fundraising project: the Botswana University Campus Appeal (BUCA). There is a significant tapestry in the UB Library that honors the people of Botswana crossing the land with the cattle that would serve as their donations; cattle are the symbol of wealth in Botswana and the ultimate financial gift. Allow me to draw parallels of communal involvement in education, with the contributions of the community of Augustana at Camrose towards the construction of this newly opened Augustana library: It is an example of the affirmation of the integrity of human experience, mirrored in communities that are a world apart in various ways.

As an educator librarian, I am today humbled by the honor of this degree as it bestows on me the vigour to continue the struggle for a better and fairer African society. The fight for liberation may have been won across the continent, but the right to decent livelihoods for the majority is yet to be won. In Africa, the consequences of not starting with others are serious in the formal education sector and significant in the democratization of many of our nations. They are serious for social relations between governments and the people; and between educator and learner because the result is the imposition of everything the dominant figures possess on the educated and the ordinary citizens. This brings in the notion of a starting point being a shared feeling of education as a key strategy for liberating learners or citizens and enabling them to get centred and self-directed in their respective engagements.

To this end, serving as a librarian in an academic institution, I have come to appreciate and cherish the role we play in facilitating opportunities for quality livelihood for many citizens through access to information and knowledge, and as far as is possible, supporting a meaning making process.

No library in the world is self sufficient in supporting learning, teaching and research based on reliance on its own collections. This is particularly true of libraries in the developing world. The University of Botswana, as the only university in the country, has an extra burden in providing for adequate variety and quality of materials to support learning, teaching and research, especially in the digital era. Without the philosophy of resource sharing that is the bedrock of the library and information profession, the academic community at the University of Botswana would have been unable to uphold the expected academic standards. The development of the Internet and access to digital resources has brought about both ease and speed of access to information and knowledge. Experience has informed tactical ways through which great libraries may fruitfully share resources. These are inclusive of physical resource building in the face of dynamic changes in the information world, demand for innovative approaches to information service to clientele, and maximization of financial resources in unstable financial environments that face all libraries. We build library consortia with the help of various national, regional and global professional associations, such as the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), we create to collectively address challenges to information service and knowledge management issues, with the goal of assuring sustainability of quality service to clientele.

One of the most pernicious legacies of the colonial experience has been the ingraining of a deep seated and inferiority complex in the African psyche that is still a trap even for the most educated Africans. This almost schizophrenic identity has caused the failure to merge our dual lives – western and traditional/indigenous. We live in different, often competing cultural spaces (F. Fanon): the Western side permits us to exploit the scientific ways of knowing embedded in the print literate world through which we earn our living, while the other side, our membership in African clans and communities, permits us to share and transmit our indigenous knowledge from person to person, from community to community and from generation to generation by word of mouth. Our indigenous life nurtures our spiritual identity and connectivity. Our duality of lives contributes to pressing challenges and opportunities that compete for the attention of an African librarian today: the exploitation of information communication technologies for facilitating the strengthening of the role of libraries in facilitating free access to information and freedom of expression to diverse communities.

I therefore find myself caught between these often competing values of celebrating orality and the intangible, that richly adorn my heritage and protecting my profession as a provider of information resources whilst championing the cause for literacy and documenting things in writing. I cannot deny my pleasure in knowing that some knowledge will remain sacred, undocumented and privileged to its owners, whilst pursuing the quest for documenting the oral histories of our communities, and securing its communal intellectual protection. I am deeply excited and awed by possibilities brought about by digital technologies that enable us to view and experience ancestral knowledge as recorded by diverse civilizations, through

various media, over centuries. These whet our appetites to seek a shared understanding to help us recognize and appreciate our shared humanity. Amidst all these experiences, I look back to my career with a lingering question of whether, and how I could have done my work differently.

I paraphrase Paulo Freire and reminiscence on the role of educational institutions: *what kind of educational institution is not moved by the impulse that makes students search, honestly, for convincing arguments, and for knowledge frameworks, in defense of the dreams that society aspires for?*

I am driven to confront questions such as:

What is value, except for those for whom it is valuable?

What is knowledge, except for those for whom it is meaningful?

What is truth, except for those for whom it is true?

These questions bring me to look to the University of Alberta with humility and respect. Ladies and gentlemen, join me in honouring the values and principles upon which this august institution rests; an institution that has its stars providing direction in all corners of this world, a university with a growing community of trusting clients.

I want to end with a Southern African idiom:

Motho ke motho ka Batho (seTswana)

Umuntu ngumuntu ngaBantu (siZulu)

Mhono e mhono ebvano (siVenda)

This means: **"I am, because we are"** (www.freedompark.co.za)

Formatted: Spanish (Spain-Modern Sort)

I am one grateful African who salutes and congratulates each one of you today as you start out on the next chapter of your lives.

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA!!! QUAECUMQUE VERA!!!

THANK YOU!!