

## **SONNET SPOTLIGHT**

### **TRANSCRIPT: INTERVIEW WITH NOZIZWE MADLALA-ROUTLEDGE**

#### **Black Leaders Awareness Day, World International Day of Justice and Mandela Day**

##### **Kirsten Hopkins**

Well, hi, everybody. I'm Kirsten Hopkins from Sonnet Advisory & Impact. We're going to do a brief overview of the organisation before we go into the interview that I'm very, very excited about today. Sonnet Advisory & Impact is an organisation that passionately celebrates inspiring individuals who change in the world regardless of the scale of their impact.

So, from visionary entrepreneurs to compassionate activists, we try to recognise and uplift the remarkable efforts of change makers that are both big and small, and we firmly believe that every positive action has the power to create a ripple effect that transforms communities and society at large. By shining a spotlight on these exceptional individuals, we want to not only honour their accomplishments but also inspire others to walk in their footsteps and make a difference too.

And today I have the honour and absolute privilege of interviewing Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge, who is a leader who's shown unwavering commitment to the fight for human rights. I had the privilege of meeting Nozizwe nearly two years ago, and to say I was a little 'starstruck' was an understatement.

She stood out for me in my formative years as a role model in South African politics because she was one of the few black female leaders in the country that I saw that had the courage to 'speak truth to power'.

Nozizwe has proven time and time again how the power of an individual action can serve as a catalyst for a collective movement towards a better and more inclusive and just future. So, a little bit about Nozizwe before we start - and the list is endless - so we've chosen a few key points to talk about.

Nozizwe has a very long and distinguished history of campaigning for human rights, as I said before, and for supporting civil society organisations that deepen and advance democratic participation.

Nozizwe was a noticeable figure who supported the transition from apartheid to democracy in South Africa and was integral...in her involvement in drafting the new constitution, which we have today, in South Africa.

She's set up and served initiatives that have fought for the rights of women and inclusion and integration of women's perspectives on important issues. And she's also the recipient of the Tanenbaum Award for Interreligious Understanding for her work on gender equality. She served as a member of the South African Parliament from 1994 to 2009 - very, very important years for South Africa - during which time she was promoted to deputy Speaker, Deputy Minister of Defence and Deputy Minister of Health (probably for which she is most well known for her challenges to peers on the approach to tackling the HIV/ AIDS crisis in South Africa).

She's also the founder and executive director of *Embrace Dignity*, which is a non-profit campaigning for legal reform, to abolish the exploitative system of prostitution and to support women wanting to leave the sex industry, as well as *Democracy From Below*, which is a grassroots movement to strengthen participation in our democracy.

Nozizwe has also served as a non-executive director on the *Coalition against Trafficking Women* as well as a *Right to Care* and *Right to Care Health Services* that provide treatments and care for people living with HIV / AIDS.

So with all of that said, and as I said before, I could go on and on; I'm absolutely delighted to introduce Nozizwe.

Nozizwe, thank you so much for your willingness to be interviewed by Sonnet and especially this week, as we celebrate Black Leaders Awareness Day and the World International Day of Justice, but also for us as South Africans (and I guess for most of the world) - Mandela Day. We'll jump into the interview if that's okay with you.

So, welcome.

### **Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge**

Thank you.

### **Kirsten Hopkins**

You often speak about your first entry into party politics in South Africa, which occurred when you're at University. And this was to the black consciousness movement, led by Steve Biko. What was it about Steve Biko's and the movement's leadership that and what he was saying, particularly that appealed to you? Were there any lessons that you took from this that played a role in which you view and enact your leadership today?

### **Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge**

Good morning and thank you so much for inviting me to be with you on this interview and also for your focus on celebrating black leaders. We are meeting immediately after Mandela Day, which was on Monday the 18th of July.

And for me, I'm reminded as we talk about black leaders, I'm reminded of Stephen Bantu Biko and many others who are listed at the end who were very much a part of my formative years in terms of my political career, my social awareness. I was fortunate to go to a school in Inanda Seminary, a girls' school established by American board missionaries. This school is just outside Durban.

And even though I was undergoing Bantu education, which as you know as part of the system of apartheid, this particular school encouraged us as learners to be broad-minded and one of the things they did was to invite leaders like Steve Biko to our school. So when I was 16, I had the opportunity to go to a summer school organised by university students. And Steve Biko as one of those who organised the summer school which took place at the Mahatma Gandhi settlement, which is in Phoenix, just outside Durban.

This was my very first act of social awareness and social action because during this time we went into the village (to Inanda Village) and interviewed the local people about their conditions and what it is they would like to see changed. So for me this was a very important part in my development. As you know, I was born and raised in apartheid in South Africa, where racism was enforced by law from 1948 until the 1990s.

We lived under the system of apartheid, the brutal system of repression of the majority and denial of basic human rights by a white minority regime. So I was growing up already believing that the black people are inferior; white people are superior. This was forced into my consciousness as a child, and the people around me had accepted our condition. It was like 'This was not possible to change'. The regime had sent Mandela to prison had sent Tambo into exile, and there was a lull. You couldn't say anything to change your situation. So, when I met Steve Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement, this was a very important time in my life, because what they were doing was liberating the mind of the minds, the minds of black people. And it's very important to do this as a first step in regaining your dignity or self.

When you focus on identity and self-pride - and this included reclaiming our names - I was born and given the name Nozizwe by my mother. But when I started school, I was forced to use my colonial name, 'Charlotte'. Steve did a very important act for me.

He said to me. "What is your name?"

I said "Charlotte".

He said again, what is your name? I said "Charlotte".

He said to me again, "what is your name?"

I wondered what was going on here and then he said, "what does your mother call you?"

I said "she calls me Nozizwe" and he said "*that's* your name".

### **Kirsten Hopkins**

Wow...That's powerful

### **Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge**

"*That's* your name".

So to be among these young people, students, (they were all very young still), still Biko was killed, I think we was 27, so they were all very young and very much involved in this movement. There are many leaders and what *really* inspired me about this movement, was that it was uniting black people. I liked the spirit of black solidarity. I liked the slogan. 'Say it loud, I'm black and I'm proud'. This was a very important part of liberating ourselves.

### **Kirsten Hopkins**

Yeah. Thank you, Nozizwe. Well, that that's really powerful and what you said about your name, you know, your identity and taking you back to who you actually are, that's really, really powerful. Thank you for that.

Ohh, I'm trying not to get emotional, but anyway, let's just move on! (laughs)

**Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge**

...And I believe we can all do this because once we start to believe in our own power and the power of solidarity, change begins.

**Kirsten Hopkins**

Yes, yes, absolutely. Thank. Thank you for that.

So talking about power, you've always recognised what a powerful resource women can be in resolving conflict. So as a black female leader, what, in your experience and in your opinion, I guess, are the struggles and the challenges and the barriers for female leaders (and particularly leaders of colour) that are faced today.

...I've a couple of follow up questions, but maybe start with that. So we're also thinking about how do we see this changing and evolving in the future?

**Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge**

Thank you. I had the privilege to be raised by women, my mother and my grandmother, my teachers, at Inanda Seminary, which I said already, was a girls' school.

**Kirsten Hopkins**

Yes.

**Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge**

Um, that uh gave me direct experience of how women are able to lead and how they are able to resolve conflicts, because conflicts happen in the community, they happen in the home. My own mother who was a single parent and a teacher, was a great example for me because the community really respected her. They used to come to her with their problems and she was helping to solve these problems.

But she faced many obstacles to start with, she wasn't really fully recognised as a full human being in that, for example, she could not buy land in her own right as a black woman, and being a Zulu woman, she was also subjected to the 'Zulu code'. The 'Zulu code of law' was a law, a code in law that treated black women as inferior. So as I said, we couldn't sign any documents in our own right.

So these were the beginnings of the obstacles that black women had to had to jump over, and yet they had demonstrated their ability to contribute to resolving problems. And my old school, led by women, was this example, because a lot of the girls that came out with Inanda Seminary became leaders. They are still everywhere - in business, in politics and in different professions - again showing that if you give women a chance, they can add to the solving of problems.

I think the richness of diversity that women bring, in how we look at issues - and I'm not essentializing women, I don't say all women are the same - but if you exclude women altogether from major decision making, then you are losing half of the world's population in trying to help you and help the world with the problems we face.

**Kirsten Hopkins**

Yes, yes, agreed. And so how do you think, with that being said, how do you think other leaders can authentically show allyship to black women leaders?

**Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge**

Okay so having come to Geneva, I'm very proud to say that I've been invited to join the International Gender Champions, which is a network of global leaders who use their influence in their positions of leadership, to address the obstacles faced by women. It's a network to promote gender inclusion, gender equality and gender justice.

So, if you are in a position of power, you can use that position to support other women, whether you are black or white. In particular for black women, because knowing racism is global - I know I come from a country where racism was legal - but I've experienced that racism is global and it is structural. It therefore means that all of us, first and foremost, should raise our own understanding and awareness of how racism manifests itself.

So in particular when it comes to black women, you can imagine that when women, black women are in leadership, they find themselves in a situation where their abilities doubted to start with. So as a leader, I think it would be important for you to support black women and authenticate their leadership and allow them to - I mean, by addressing the obstacles that you are aware they might face - allow them to show their potential.

**Kirsten Hopkins**

Yes, yes, I agree with that. OK, thank you for that.

In the Salter Lecture of 2021, which you gave it, the British Quakers annual meeting, you said that you considered your role as an activist to be as "somebody who stands up for others, as somebody who's willing to sacrifice his or her own freedom to help others gain theirs". And you said at that time you thought of Mandela, who said "we are not free until all are free". So do you think or feel that in this day and age, black leaders should inherently be 'activists', using your definition.

**Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge**

Indeed, I think wherever we are, we have the ability to identify areas where we could provide our own, play our own role in addressing those issues. I do totally agree with Mandela's idea that 'I'm not free until everyone around me is free'. So that, then, puts me in the role of an 'activist'. Meaning even though I see myself in... even though I'm in a position of leadership, I'm also an 'activist' for change for social justice.

This is an identity I adopted for myself, even as a Member of Parliament, and I remember some people would say to me, "but you can't be an activist, you are now a Member of Parliament" and I would say to them, "yes, within this area, this space where I am as a Member of Parliament and using the power that I have, I see a need for me to *continue* to be an activist so that I can bring about a total change and total emancipation".

**Kirsten Hopkins**

Yeah. Yeah, that's really important. Thank you for that. And I think on many occasions from

what I understand, you've quite firmly and really, really wisely, I might add, held that space and tension between faith and values and beliefs, and then with the practical ways of living those out in the world and the demands of the world on you as an individual. And I know the Quaker testimonies to peace, sort of, alongside justice, equality, simplicity, integrity and community and stewardship of the earth, I think, have had a tremendous influence on the decisions you've taken in life. So I want to talk a little bit about those tensions, I guess, that you've held, in terms of aligning some of these things.

And I think a couple of examples, if I may. You know, your alignment with pacifism, but also then your position of being Deputy Minister of Defence in the South African Government. Then the other example, is the debate on whether to support the ANC in the struggle to end apartheid, which I think this caused intense debate among Quakers globally because of the ANC's strategy moving from a totally non-violent struggle to one that incorporated violence.

So, you know, we know leadership brings these dichotomies. But I wondered if you could share with everybody, how you manage these tensions, I guess, and what you can share with some of the leaders and emerging leaders about how to manage that.

### **Nozizwe Madlala Routledge**

So thank you so much for that question. I became a Quaker at a time when I was in a very violent struggle in South Africa to end apartheid, so the Quaker testimonies that you've just listed became a grounding for me. For my work. I've found myself able to make decisions when confronted by challenging situations such as how do you go on out to talk to people who are armed and how do you convince them that violence is not the solution. And I was thrust into this situation and our trust in the into this situation when I became, I was appointed Deputy Minister of Defence. Because as you can see they that that was a potential clash of values and ideas.

But I was fortunate to have been given this opportunity at a time in South Africa when our policy had changed, of how we use the military. So I saw this as the opportunity for me to help transform our defence policy along the lines of our foreign policy, where we decided that our military would not be used to attack other nations, but would be used to support peace keeping and peace-making and humanitarian assistance, so, but even then I was challenged everyday thinking about this.

I'm a pacifist, a radical pacifist. I'm going into an organisation that believes in using violence as a solution. I'm saying this because the military are trained to use maximum force. So in being present among them and being a woman, I think I was able to bring back their humanity. I remember one of them, a Brigadier, telling me *that I'm allowing them to be human again*. And that was from my being a Quaker.

### **Kirsten Hopkins**

Wow, my goodness.

### **Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge**

So when it came to the issue of denial of South Africans who needed lifesaving treatments

when they had HIV and AIDS. Again, I drew on my Quaker faith, my Quaker testimonies, and in particular, the integrity testimony where we are called upon to be examples to lead by example and to actually stand for the truth.

So one of the first examples that I did was to test for HIV because I wanted to encourage others to do the same, because I think there's power in knowledge. And then the second thing was to challenge my political leadership, my president, at a time when I felt the president was denying the link between HIV and AIDS and therefore denying people life-saving drugs.

### **Kirsten Hopkins**

Yes, yes.

That was incredible. And you know, and as you say, 'speaking truth to power' that's I think that's gone down in history as an example of somebody, really, like you say, being an activist but standing up for others and speaking, you know, being the voice for others when they can't speak for themselves, you know, so thank you for that Nozizwe where, you know, on behalf of all of South Africa, thank you for what you did there. Cause I think it was very, very brave and courageous.

So finally, I've been reading a lot about regenerative practise and restorative economics recently, and it's very interesting, because it aligns very closely to the value that that we as Africans place on 'Ubuntu' and that's very difficult to translate into Western language, I guess. But it does imply that constant awareness that your reactions as an individual today are both a reflection of your past, but will also have far reaching consequences into the future.

And I guess underpins all of those virtues about maintaining harmony and in the spirit of sharing amongst members of society, and also gives priority to the wellbeing of the community as a whole. And I know you also place a lot of value on that.

So with all of this in mind and in closing what are the lessons that you can share with some of our emerging leaders of colour today from your journey about how they can lead and how they can achieve this vision.

### **Nozizwe Madlala Routledge**

Thank you. I actually translate 'Ubuntu' as our common humanity, and I believe that the spirit is in all of us. There is a seed in all of us to be in solidarity with others in their situation of suffering and this in Africa was called is called 'Ubuntu', but I think it exists all over the world. Unfortunately, this spirit and value have been replaced by materialism and consumption, so it is important to remind ourselves that 'we are because of others', and that's exactly what it says '*I am because you are*'.

Just to go back to the issue of the actions I took in South Africa, I don't claim to be a hero. I actually believe very much in Mandela's statement that 'courage is not the absence of fear. It is their ability to overcome it'. So even when I'm afraid - because I think fear is a normal, it's a normal feeling - it's important to learn to tell yourself that it's possible to overcome fear, so

that is what actually supported me all those years when I had to confront what was a very difficult situation where I had to differ with the man who had appointed me, who had given me the power (and he took it away). But when he took it away, I think he gave me more power, because I then was acknowledged by the ordinary people that I really felt as a leader to.

### **Kirsten Hopkins**

Yes, I'm very, very wise words and I think they're there's a great words to leave with, you know, with the people that are listening to this, but also, you know, like I said, our emerging leaders to think about that. So thank you very much.

And Nozizwe, I don't know if there's anything else that you want to add or say, but this has been a really, really great and I really value your time that you've given to us to talk about this and you know, shine a spotlights on some of these things and also, help us think about, you know, how we can be allies, how we can use some of your wisdom and others' wisdom from around us, how we can share in our humanity together as we go forward into the future.

### **Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge**

Oh, I can say in the end is too thank you for putting a spotlight on how people in my generation can actually inspire people who are coming up, because I think my I was inspired by leaders who were there before me and I have a responsibility to encourage and support a young leaders, particularly because I see a lot of hope when I see them unite and even take up the struggles around us. Some as young as 16 are already, for example, are addressing the issues of climate change, issues of inequality, and this is important. So thank you for the role you play in supporting them.

### **Kirsten Hopkins**

Yes, thank you very much. I've one final question, and I think, you know, the work of Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) is not often seen and is not often publicised, but is doing some amazing and incredible work across the globe. And I wondered if you wouldn't mind just sparing a couple of minutes to talk to us about QUNO and the work that QUNO does.

### **Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge**

This is a very important year for us at QUNO (The Quaker United Nations Office). We were established in 1948. So yeah, 75 years old, just like the declaration of Human Rights is 75 years this year. So we commemorate 75 years of being a trusted partner at the United Nations because we've been there since 1948 and working with the UN to make real its primary goal of establishing peace in the world - a just peace.

So Quakers in 1947, having been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, went on to establish the two keynotes. We have an office in New York (QUNO New York) and then office in Geneva. These two offices are led by very talented and committed young and, well, not always young, but leaders who are very committed to the issues of the human rights and migration issues, of the human impacts of climate of climate change, peace and disarmament, and sustainable and just economic systems - just to name some of our programmes.



What we do at the multilateral level is to set the international standards and norms, but for those international standards and norms to work, the ordinary citizen has to play their part, holding their governments to account, ensuring that these rights become real in the people's lives, just like our own Constitution. South Africa has a very, very good constitution, but it will take all of us working together to make those rights really in people's lives.

We've just come out of a two-week summer school. The summer school brings together to QUNO Geneva, 25 young people at the prime of their lives - when they've just left, some of them have just left school and the starting university, others already at university - to learn about the UN and how to be global citizens. This programme has been running since 1955, so I'm very proud to be leading this organisation that this time and looking at the next 25 years and what we can achieve.

**Kirsten Hopkins**

That's very exciting. And it's an amazing organisation. So anybody that wants to know more, please go look them up online ([www.quno.org.uk](http://www.quno.org.uk)) and read about what they doing and understand how QUNO operates and also how it's trying to change the world. They have some very, very interesting programmes and things going on there.

So thank you, Nozizwe, where it was lovely to chat to you again!

**Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge**

Thank you too!