Letlhokwa George Mpedi
(Editor)

Women

Wise **O**ptimistic **M**otivating **E**mpowering **N**urturing


UNIVERSITY
OF
JOHANNESBURG

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Wise, Optimistic, Motivating, Empowering & Nurturing

Letlhokwa George Mpedi (Ed)

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Women: Wise, Optimistic, Motivating, Empowering & Nurturing

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'A luta continua, vitória é certa.'

'The struggle continues; victory is certain.'

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Letlhokwa George Mpedi
Johannesburg
July 2024

Word from the Chancellor

Although we are 30 years into democracy, the weight of significant milestones during the dark apartheid era remains palpable. Stark in this reflection is the Women's Day March of 1956, representing a reclamation of liberties against a tumultuous background. *"Wathint' abafazi, wathint' imbokodo,uza kufa"* which translates to "when you strike the women, you strike a rock, you will be crushed, you will die" reverberated around the Union Buildings that biting morning and incredibly, it spurred change. It marked a turning point in the fight for freedom. Almost 20,000 women from across the nation were led by Helen Joseph, Lillian Ngoyi, Rahima Moosa and Sophia Williams-De Bruyn to protest against the oppressive pass laws. Beyond a fight for racial equality, this day also represented women's visibility in the struggle. Although women had long played a crucial role, history all too often forgets this.

Reflecting on this march reminds us of the importance of telling stories about women. This not only centres the role of women in our history and in our lives but also represents a reclamation of narratives for women. The telling of these stories celebrates the role women play in society. This anthology highlights these narratives and reflects on important women in our lives. Through contributions from formidable players in the South African landscape, we are given insight into the women who have shaped their narratives. These stories are not merely accounts of individual heroism but powerful testimonies of resilience, strength, and unwavering determination. This theme profoundly resonates with the legacy of the women who played an instrumental role in the struggle. Their voices have echoed through the ages, calling for justice, equality, and human dignity. The need for an anthology such as this is more important now than it has ever been. Although strides have been made in the fight for equality, many women in South Africa and beyond our borders face immense struggles. From the gender pay gap to

underrepresentation in the industry to gender-based violence, there is a fundamental need to dismantle our systemic inequalities and create platforms such as this to elevate these kinds of narratives.

Through telling these stories, we are called to challenge the status quo that has prevailed for far too long. These stories inspire us to continue the fight for a world where every woman can live with freedom and dignity. This book project represents a reclamation for women – we have played a pivotal role and will continue to. As Albertina Sisulu once said of South African women, "We are the people who are going to bring change in this country".

Dr Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka
Chancellor
University of Johannesburg
July 2024

Part 1

Women Breaking Barriers

1

Selected Historical African Women of Enduring Inspiration: Kimpa Vita aka Dona Beatriz (c. 1684-1706) and Queen Abla Pokou (c. 1700-1760)

N'Dri Thérèse Assié-Lumumba

Introduction

My contribution is situated in a Pan-African framework, and thus, experiences from across the continent and the Diaspora are ontologically related to the South African experience. As such, the nature of the deeds of Africans everywhere constitutes grounds for the recognition and celebration of South African women. I am using this opportunity to acknowledge and pay tribute to a wider spectrum of African women in different historical moments and geographies to celebrate women in South Africa.

The history of the African people, from the continent since its earliest human settlements to its extensions by choice and/or by force (Ivan Van Sertima, 1976; Runoko Rashidi, 2017) in the global world is marked, in recent centuries by the clashes with the interference of external powers. This history is neither amorphous nor generic. Instead, it is defined by an African common denominator while espousing the specificities and contingencies of the different periods and geographies. The human agency then includes men and women in action. As African history is marginally or even not all taught deliberately in schools even today, learners of African descent may be unaware of the wealth of knowledge embedded in that history.

In the invisibility of African history and silencing of the voices of Africans in general, the social locations, contributions, and inspiring achievements of African women have been even more severely blurred with constant efforts by those who are "afraid of agency" (Omofolabo Ajayi-Soyinka, 2005) exercised by the African women, to render them even more uncelebrated for the longest time.

Thus, based on my observations and lived experiences from early childhood to various formal education experiences from my native Côte d'Ivoire to France, Canada and the United States, and as a professional, notably in the field of history, I have marvelled at and have been constantly humbled and inspired by women of African descent of all walks of life on the continent and the Diaspora. Their sharp intelligence, courage, presence, tenacity and daring stance, that has been pejoratively termed as stubbornness in many contexts, have been and continue to be outstanding.

In this reflective essay, I have pondered how to choose one woman or even a few women, as the most inspiring. The women of this country, South Africa, who have epitomised in real life the statement "Now You Have Touched the Women You Have Struck a Rock: You Have Dislodged a Boulder; You Will Be Crushed" with some emblematic figures such as Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, or Albertina Sisulu, or the present generation that includes the University of Johannesburg Chancellor Dr. Phumzile Mhlambo-Ngcuka and Vice-Chancellors, and other women in all the spheres of society who are engaged in the struggle to promote social progress.

Could it be Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, director-general of the World Trade Organization, and/or my former Cornell student, Nicole Mensa of Ghana, who has been her Special Assistant and Advisor on Women and Trade? More generally, how would it be possible to list numerous former students, including South Africans, during my four decades of teaching in different countries and who have inspired me on many fronts over the years? How about women in rural communities, market

women, and many ordinary women who deserve to be the focus in trying to critically examine the social systems and cultures that have given them the power to be daring and perseverant? Many historical figures, including Ethiopian Empress Taytu Betul, who was the most adamant in refusing to negotiate with the deceptive Italians in their colonial project, contributed to paving the way to the victorious battle that let Ethiopia be free of formal colonisation by any European imperialistic nation. So many more, Commander Yaa Asantewaa of Ghana and principled Nehanda Charwe Nyakasikana of Zimbabwe?

While throughout history, women have built, produced and played their part in the struggles, lived through setbacks, and made some triumphs, they have been generally obscured. There are still many women who can be sources of inspiration. For practical reasons, my goal in this chapter is to focus on two women who have inspired me in different stages of my life and can still inspire others and contribute towards social transformation. From my childhood through my formal education and into my professional life, I have been amazed by women's achievements, even as they faced being silenced. I have selected, with considerable difficulty, the following two women on the continent who were contemporaries without direct interaction: Princess Kimpa Vita (c. 1684-1706) of Kongo in central Africa, who was also known as Dona Beatriz from the Portuguese influence, and Queen Abla Pokou (c. 1700-1760) of the Ashanti in West Africa. Historically, both lived in the period of European informal colonisation marked by transatlantic enslavement. However, from all historical accounts, Queen Pokou did not come into direct contact with the Europeans' enslavement. Her people (at least at that time) were not involved in the "slave trade" at the time of her emergence and reign. In contrast, by her Portuguese adopted name and the focus of her intense and short life experience, Kimpa Vita clashed directly with the intensifying transatlantic enslavement and the European encroachment on the Western coasts of the continent before the Berlin Conference that opened the era of formal colonisation.

A legitimate question could be why these two women are seemingly and relatively removed from the issues and challenges of contemporary realities. Using historical analysis does not mean giving an account of chronological or event-focused history, but rather, social history that can help make sense and even provide some tools for understanding and managing social processes and developing strategies during any period.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section elaborates on the broader issues; the second section focuses on Kimpa Vita/Dona Beatriz, and the third section is on Queen Pokou, followed by a conclusion.

General Issues: Significance of History in the Present and Future

Considering current circumstances, social history, rather than event-counting or chronological history, is needed. It helps analyse and understand what happened and when, but why and who the actors were and the intended and unintended consequences for the immediate and long term. African education systems have been reset by external powers to create amnesia and confusion (Mazrui, 2013). However, even without this colonial situation, it would be helpful and even critical to undertake systematic efforts to unravel and critically assess and understand the messages of the past, giving the whole meaning of history to the Sankofa philosophy that urges us to look back for strategic position in the present to move into the future with a clear sense of direction in planning and executing deliberately designed programs. As John Henrik Clarke (1996) clarified the quintessential meaning and necessity of history:

> "History is a clock that people use to tell the political and cultural time of the day. It is also a compass that people use to find themselves on the map of human geography. History tells the people where they have been, what they have been, where they are, and what

> they are. Most important, history tells the people where they still must go and what they still must be."

Women have played critical roles in politics throughout African history. Some figures are better known and mentioned more often, out of the global pool of women who constitute the pillars of society. Since the European expansion in the 15th century, most of the African women who have been mentioned in the diaries of missionaries, reports of administrators and military officers, and historical and ethnographic books have generally been those who have been in situations of direct contact with the Europeans in the resistance against the oppressions associated with slavery and colonisation.

Amongst Africa's best-known women resistance leaders on the continent of the period of the Atlantic slave trade and informal colonisation, is Queen Ann Nzinga (c. 1581-1663), who ruled for four decades. During that time, she devoted her leadership to fighting the invading and slave-hungry Portuguese, as well as Kimpa Vita, who will be the focus of the next section. My argument and the reason for also selecting Queen Pokou is that the role of African women should not be acknowledged only when they challenge the European system. It is as if the presence and contact with the Europeans is the ultimate and sine qua non-validation for African history.

While focusing on two cases, the broader aim of the article is to make a case for a unifying thread that can be an important and essential guideline in research endeavours. Besides actions such as the one undertaken by Queen Abla Pokou regarding an internal situation, there are many more African women-initiated resistance actions and movements from the massive "slave trade" (Kimpa Vita) to colonisation, which is another barely hidden form of slavery. African women did not react simply in an instinctive manner to the various forms of oppression, from large-scale slavery to colonial domination that their people experienced. The nature of their resistance indicates a common cultural trait that prepared them for specific actions when faced with social oppression of

unprecedented magnitude. As the African American historian Rosalyn Terborg-Penn (1986) articulates:

> "The resistance activities found among African women on the continent, in the New World, (sic) and among their descendants reveal common patterns. These patterns reflect the heritage and world view of traditional African women, especially those from the western and central regions, and the adaptive behaviour of African women transplanted to the New World (sic) communities. For those who study the Diaspora, certain unifying conceptual issues can be applied to the study of African and African Diaspora women's resistance. One concept is that the study of African descendants abroad is an extension of African history. Another unifying concept is that there exists a tradition of identity with Africa among people of the Diaspora. Both conceptual issues negate the conventional Eurocentric interpretation of Africa as a recipient and not a donor of cultural heritage."

Reducing the African presence outside the continent to the displacement of Africans enslaved by the Europeans (and the Arabs) - no matter the magnitude and length of this bleak chapter in African history - with a little addendum on contemporary self-exiled Africans of various socio-economic categories, poses a very crucial epistemological question in the pursuit of knowledge about the historical process in Africa and its people, including women, as agents of history. The notion that migration can be reduced to the slave trade suggests and reinforces in open and subtle ways the idea spread by the Europeans that Africa was "static," "mysterious," "closed" to the world, and was asleep, waiting passively for the active, entrepreneur-minded people of Europe to "discover" the continent and set in motion her people. Furthermore, as the time and experiences related to this "entrance" of Africa into the so-called dynamic world are linked with slavery and later colonisation, the view of the experiences of the Africans as a people suggests that their movement and their culture have

depended on the will of the Europeans. This notion of passive Africa, which the dynamic world system, mostly through the Europeans, in turn reinforces the conception of a "cultural vacuum." The example of Queen Pokou serves to refute this false narrative. In this case, the migration of a large proportion of proud people is undertaken by a woman leader.

In the search for an assessment of the gender balance in the political process and other dimensions of social relations, looking into the legacies of the African Diaspora can also constitute a significant historical contribution.

Undoubtedly, millions of Africans were physically and demographically destabilised by the Europeans (and the Arabs). However, historical facts indicate that Africans with various objectives also decided to travel, explore other areas of the world, and interact with the people of those different places before the Atlantic slave trade. Recent research has made it possible to reveal the extended presence of African peoples away from the African continent.

Kimpa Vita, also known as Dona Beatriz (c. 1682-1706)

African communities throughout history, from the continent and across the Diaspora, often invested power in women in ways uncommon in the West. The colonial and "slave trading" periods offer many examples, such as Queen Nzinga of the Mbundu (c. 1581-1663), who fought the "slave trade", and Dona Beatriz of Kongo, who is the focus of this chapter, and Yaa Asantewaa (c. 1840/60-1921), mother of Ghana's Ashanti Empire, who led armed resistance against colonisation of Ghana by the British Empire.

"There is evidence…that the European white was confused and alarmed by the egalitarian system of these societies and did much to wreck it, creating wedges between the men and women." An example of this is the British Empire's refusal to acknowledge the political and spiritual power of Yaa Asantewaa, only recognising negotiations

with male members of the monarchy. The white people in Southern Africa duly underestimated the organising abilities and resistance to the colonisation of the Shona of Zimbabwe under the powerful guidance of a woman, their spiritual leader Nehanda (c. 1863-98), during the first occupation of Zimbabwe in the 1800s.

Kimpa Vita understood and conceptualised the complexity, magnitude, and nature of the struggle against the Portuguese, for whom she became a threat on political, military, religious, and moral fronts in her determination to rebuild her nation, devastated by the multiple effects of the "slave trade." During her shortened life punctuated by remarkable leadership, she articulated clear ideas about the "African personality." She articulated with clarity and fearlessness this concept in the context of an effort to reconstruct specific areas of global Africa amidst the devastation caused by European conquest and domination. Thus, she used a well-articulated philosophical and religious foundation of the different personalities of the black people (Africans) and the white people (Europeans) and the rights of the black people for self-governance.

Similar ideas were developed much later by many other thinkers of African descent. Such figures include Edward Blyden in the 19th century with James Johnson, who in the 19th century took the lead in what was referred to as the "Freetown debate." In this debate, they criticised the missionary education that they considered Eurocentric, limiting and detrimental to the development of African people. Instead, they advocated a classical liberal arts education that would link the Africa of their time with its ancient civilisation and the period in which African achievements loomed large on the world scale. The founders of the "Négritude" or black identity met in literary circles of Paris where they held discussions on Pan-Africanism. The leaders included Léopold Sédar Senghor of Sénégal, Aimé Césaire of Martinique, and Léon-Gontran Damas of French Guyana to create the journal named "l'Étudiant Noir" (The Black Student). However, their activities did not lead to political development and the journal

was discontinued. Nevertheless, Negritude contributed to the Black Power Movement on the continent and the Diaspora, especially in the United States.

The point being made here is that, without any doubt, Kimpa Vita was the precursor and thinker who refuted European supremacy and what she considered to be their Europeanised and racialised Christianity. Determined to rebuild her nation, devastated by the multiple effects of transatlantic enslavement, Dona Beatriz became a prominent historical figure and symbol for the African people in the struggle to regain their humanity, self-definition, and self-determination. Considered by the Portuguese as a danger for their project of looting human and material resources, she, together with her baby son, were burned to death at the stake in her fierce struggle against the Portuguese, to whom she became a threat on political, military, religious, and moral fronts.

Because of her nationalistic stand, power and authority that had the potential to undermine the transatlantic slave enterprise seriously, the Portuguese orchestrated a classical coup that led to her execution as she was burned at the stake with her son in her arms.

Queen Abla Pokou

Today, the Ashanti people in Ghana are part of the broader group called the Akan, who stretch to many countries, mostly in West Africa. The Akan people in general, and specifically the Ashanti, had a hierarchical and methodical power structure, from the family, local / village / town to the central authority of the confederation with the capital city in Kumasi. This pyramidal system was defined by a strict gendered dual governance guided by the principle of positive and empowering complementarity, from the population at the base of the pyramid to the highest level where the King and Queen shared power: The Ohene or Asantehene (paramount male leader of the Ashanti, the King) and Ohema or Asantehema (paramount female leader of the Ashanti, the Queen). Note

that there was parity between the King and the Queen in the language and the system and no difference in the qualification of the female side. They shared power with their respective duties and prerogatives, serving the Ashanti people. The term Queen-Mother was an invention of colonial rule and distortion of an African indigenous system that either they did not understand or wanted to bend to reflect their own experiences. One of the critical prerogatives of the Queen has been that if the King is confirmed incapacitated (mentally, physically, misconduct), then a nominated candidate is appointed King upon the confirmation by the ruling Council.

The Ashanti confederation was formally established in the 17th century. Upon the death of the first King, Osei Tutu, who died in the beginning of the 18th century (1712 or 1717), the process for succession started with two contenders. The Queen did not find the contender, Opoku Ware, capable of consolidating the federation, let alone creating stability and development. She thus refused to nominate him to allow the confirmation process to take place and fill the vacant position. But without that nomination, no formal replacement could take place. The specific role of the Queen could not be escaped to go to the next stage, so there was serious contention, and the people were divided, as some felt that the candidate Opoku Ware had to be confirmed, meaning that the Queen had to agree to nominate him. Despite the pressure, the Queen refused to either confirm the candidate or resign from her position so that a new Queen would be appointed, with the expectation that her successor would be more agreeable to nominating Opoku Ware.

The stalemate and passion from both sides had grown more dangerous and created a perfect storm for civil war. In the absence of compromise, as she was not ready to back down, she also judged the looming devastating danger of a nation divided and ready for self-destruction. With her resolve to hold on to her power and refusing to succumb under the pressure and nominate Opoku, she came up with a solution that she would leave the land with her title and make room for another Queen to proceed if she agreed with the nomination of Opoku

Ware. For the Queen, overseeing the bloodshed caused by civil war would not have been an act of good leadership, as such a conflict would have weakened the nation. She cared for her people so much that she did not want a leader with uncertain capabilities. She informed of her decision and initiated one of the major migrations of the 18th century in West Africa. A large group of the Ashanti Confederation agreed to leave instead of participating in a civil war. Those who agreed with her decision followed her under migration in search of another land and new opportunities. The account of this purposeful and massive migration has two components:

1. the history of a specific period with real actors that have been documented, legacies of social systems, political systems even in contemporary post-colonial politics, and cultural tradition, art such as the Kente / Baoulé cloth, the education system with the ideogram (gold weight) and talking drum and,
2. the legend that has led to many narratives, tales, and interpretations that have fed imagination and creative work in theatre such as plays, including one by the Ivorian scholar Bernard Dadié, the founder of Ivorian Francophone literature, who passed away on 9 March 2019, at the age of 103.

The Baoulé still maintain cultural and political affinities in the Ashanti. However, when Africa was partitioned at the Berlin Conference of 1884/85, the Baoulé found themselves in the territory that was granted to the French, which is now Côte d'Ivoire, while the Ashanti were in the territory that was granted to the British, the former Gold Coast, renamed Ghana at independence. Women in these Akan groups still play essential roles in society, although the European colonial policies led to their marginalisation.

In Côte d'Ivoire, elementary school is composed of six grades. When I was a schoolgirl in grade 5 (in 1962), there was a play in my school (Ananda, N'Zi-Comoé, Côte d'Ivoire) based on one of Bernard Dadié's dramas. For that play, I was selected to play Queen Pokou. I became curious about that

Queen, and later, I wrote a book inspired by her story while trying to understand what happened to the political space that women occupied then. Hence, I conducted my research for my master's in History and subsequently published a book in search of an understanding of the processes and factors of social change in the political sphere, amongst others, and women's location, from when an African society was autonomous and after massive displacement caused by external powers during colonisation. Indeed, I became curious about that story and the contradictions with the reality around me in the neocolonial context, which impacted my imagination. What would have happened if an external power had not interfered?

There are lessons and inspiration of Queen Abla Pokou's leadership, which have been referred to many times in more than two decades in the Ivorian politics marred by violent and destructive struggles for power. These lessons include principled leadership and avoidance of bloodshed. Obviously, the specific to migra migration may not be possible in the current context. The lessons are more in terms of a choice, not always a viable one or every time, but the idea is to exhaust all the possible ways of finding a solution to live together or apart to avoid bloodshed and avoid civil war. That is the lesson that Queen Pokou has given to the contemporary world, which is why she inspires me.

Concluding Reflections

The Queen who brought the original Ashanti, today's Baoulé people, from today's Ghana to today's Côte d'Ivoire did not succumb to pressure. She refused to resign, but as a leader, she did not want to preside over a self-destructive civil war. Kimpa Vita was an exemplary and admirable African leader who, in her early 20s in the Congo challenged one of the most formidable European colonial powers of the time, the Portuguese, and was eventually executed. They burned her at the stake with her baby in her arms. Her deliberate efforts to avoid bloodshed and the nation's weakening have

fed some of the discussion in the recent political turmoil in Côte d'Ivoire, although this time, external forces in the form of a neo-colonial power and its stooges have constituted a hindering factor.

Interestingly, in both cases of Queen Abla Pokou and Kimpa Vita, there are stories of motherhood that did not get in the way of or impede their political leadership. In both cases, the child dies. In the case of Queen Pokou, the baby died, but the loss of his life contributed to actualising the Queen's vision to avoid bloodshed and build a new nation. In the case of Kimpa Vita, the baby also died but in the hands of the Portuguese, who wanted to erase her memory in the flesh through the child and in ideology with the symbolism of burning her ashes.

Since then, throughout the formal colonial periods, the execution, exile, and imprisonment of African leaders were perceived by the colonial powers as the organisers of resistance to the "post-colonial" leaders who have been assassinated. Strong, principled and nationalistic African leaders, especially men in the contemporary period of predominantly male leadership, who defend the needs of the African people have been politically or physically eliminated. In contrast, the "leaders" who have promoted the interests of the global system have been protected as they play the roles of guardians of the global system.

In the continued search for models of caring governance that can secure social progress for the African people, beyond admiration, Queen Pokou and Kimpa Vita offer grounds for reflection and constructive actions for social transformation. They both demonstrated high integrity and took principled positions, with high risks, towards the collective interests of their people. Their respective standards as leaders remain a source of inspiration.

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2

Ahead of Every Great African Man is a Greater African Woman

Thebe Ikalafeng

The Invisible Force: Women's Impact on History

There is a popular idiom: 'Behind every great man is a woman.' This has always been interpreted to suggest that men's successes often depend on the support of their partners – women in particular. However, as the ancient Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu once aptly said, "a leader is best when people barely know 'he' exists. When 'his' work is done, 'his' aim fulfilled, they will say: we did it ourselves." Of course, given the patriarchal history of society, throughout history, women's contributions have always been relegated to a support role. When it mattered, women have always found a way to get the work done rather than worry about being recognised. The history of Africa - and indeed the world, is replete with evidence of the impact of women, who have often silently led from behind in the most critical moments in the continent's history. While sadly, the narrative about women is usually about their abuse by men through gender-based violence, rape and other societal ills, what's less celebrated is their impact in all spheres of life. Despite their different circumstances, the contributions of women are embedded in the fabric of the continent's history through slavery, the battle against colonialism and apartheid, and the fight for a more equitable, inclusive and genuinely accessible Africa post-colonialism.

Trailblazers and Pillars: The Unsung Heroines of Africa's History

Zwarte Maria (1663-1713)

Deep in the midst of slavery, Zwarte Maria (1663-1713), the daughter of two West Africans, Evert van Guinea and his life partner Hoena (Anna) van Guinea, demonstrated the resilient and pioneering spirit of women, securing land rights that were the exclusive domain of men, specifically, slave masters. Despite being born into slavery, she became the first free black land owner of the only erf in Camps Bay, in what's now the Western Cape in South Africa, owned the farms *de Mosselbank* at Klipheuwel and *Klawervlei* at Darling, and was granted grazing and hunting rights in the veld of Sonquasfonteyn and the Drooge Vallei outside of Groene Kloof. Her parents, who had been taken as slaves from what is now known as Guinea, Dahomey and Benin, landed in the Cape in 1658 in a contingent of 402 African slaves from Angola and Guinea. Upon securing his freedom, Jan van Riebeeck's father bought his partner, Anna and daughter, Zwarte Maria, and freed them from slavery.

How she secured the land and property rights was never established, and she died a very wealthy and respected woman. As former President Thabo Mbeki remarked about her at the opening of the Cape Town International Convention Centre in 2003, "This is surely a triumph for descendants of slaves who came in chains and yet epitomise the very role models, which we now seek in re-shaping and renewing our African continent." (Thabo Mbeki: Speech 2003)

Angélique Kidjo (1960-) and Miriam Makeba (1932-2008)

Long before Benin's Angélique Kidjo, the five-time Grammy winner (the most by an African), singer-songwriter, and activist realised the power of her voice and platform for social change - or for that matter, any male artist of African origin, South Africa's Miriam Makeba paved the way. The

first African artist to globally popularise African music and the first African to win a Grammy award, she used her status and access to influential institutions and American influencers to put South Africa's struggle against apartheid at the centre of the UN (United Nations)'s agenda. In a seminal speech before the United Nations General Assembly in 1963, she challenged world leaders to act: "I ask you and all the world leaders, would you act differently? Would you keep silent and do nothing if you were in our place? Would you not resist if you were allowed no rights in your own country because the colour of your skin is different from that of the rulers, and if you were punished for even asking for equality? I appeal to you and all the world's countries to do everything possible to stop the coming tragedy. I appeal to you to save the lives of our leaders, to empty the prisons of all those who should never have been there." (Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Photographs and Prints Division 1963). It may have taken another 30 years to achieve the goal of a free South Africa, but Makeba led the way in showing how artists can be a powerful champion of social justice.

Winnie Madikizela-Mandela (1936–2018)

It is widely accepted that a young, effectively 'widowed' bride, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela (1936–2018), the South African anti-apartheid activist, kept the 'Mandela' name alive while her husband Nelson was serving his 27-year incarceration. Although she later lamented that 'the name Mandela is an albatross around the neck of my family,' it's a name she used to good effect as a thorn in apartheid South Africa's side, enduring as long as 491 days in jail, harassment and banishment to house number 802 in the black township in Brandfort in Orange Free State between 1977 and 1985. Undeterred, she bravely took on the police and mobilised, mentored and inspired youth of the consequential 1976 and 1985 riots, which ultimately brought the apartheid government to its knees. Independent, defiant and brave,

she symbolised women's strength, courage and sacrifice and bravely led the struggle for independence.

Wangarĩ Maathai (1940-2011)

Wangari Maathai (1940-2011) was an environmental conservation champion, women's rights activist, 2004 Nobel Peace Prize laureate and pioneering founder of the Green Belt Movement. This environmental non-governmental organisation elevated the African conservation agenda. Until then, conservation was always led by Westerners - even in Africa. She understood what was at risk: "We owe it to ourselves and to the next generation to conserve the environment so that we can bequeath our children a sustainable world that benefits all." Kenya and the world listened - and acted positively.

Baroness Dambisa Moyo (1969-)

Until an African woman, Baroness Dambisa Moyo, put the argument on the table, all development agencies and agents had reduced Africa to a charity case. Moyo, Zambian economist, sitting as Baroness Moyo of Knightsbridge, and author of the provocative best-selling book, *Dead Aid*, challenged conventional thinking about the role of development aid and proposed an equitable investment approach to promoting economic growth and reducing poverty in Africa. Challenging the continent's collaboration, she remarked, "Africa is addicted to aid. For the past sixty years, it has been fed aid. Like any addict, it needs and depends on its regular fix, finding it hard, if not impossible, to contemplate existence in an aidless world. In Africa, the West has found its perfect client to deal with." (Moyo 2010). Articulate and confident with explicit opinions, she spoke the truth to Western power who dominated the aid industry in a forceful but palatable, effective style that made them listen – as women do so well.

Taytu Betul (c. 1851–1918)

It is generally known that Emperor Menilek II led the great Battle of Adwa, where a disciplined Ethiopian army defeated an invading Italian force and brought Italy's war and pursuit of conquest in Africa to a humiliating end. But what's less celebrated is the role of his partner, the queen and empress of Ethiopia Taytu Betul and the women who played a critical role during the battle and its aftermath. On the field, they mobilised troops, organised supplies and provisions, raised the morale of fighters, gathered intelligence, nursed the wounded, and joined the physical battle. Those who did not go to the battlefield carried the burden of the men's work at home.

The astute Empress Taytu bravely and strategically led the battle on both fronts. She famously scored a significant victory at the Italian-built fort in Mekelle, where she defeated the Italians by cutting off their water supply - and they perished from thirst (Zeleke 2022).

Queen Nzinga Mbande (c. 1583-1663)

Queen Nzinga Mbande, the 17th-century African ruler of the Ndongo and Matamba Kingdoms of the Mbundo people in what is now known as Angola, fought for the freedom and recognition of her kingdoms against the Portuguese. In taking on Portugal, she declared, "Sometimes force is able to exterminate the wicked customs of those that do not use reason and do not understand any argument without punishment." Ultimately, she built her kingdom into an independently thriving state that is reputed to have rivalled Angola's colonial ruler, Portugal, until her death.

Yaa Asantewaa I (1840-1921)

Ghana's Yaa Asantewaa I, the Queen Mother of Ejisu in the Ashanti Empire, in what's now known as Ghana, is reputed to be the official protector of the empire's most sacred object. This "Golden Stool" represented the royal and divine throne of the empire. Against all odds, she bravely battled the invading British troops in 1886, who demanded possession of the sacred

stool; she is reputed to have said, "We will fight the white men. We will fight until the last of us falls on the battlefield." While she was ultimately overwhelmed by their numbers and exiled to the Seychelles until she died in 1921, she won the battle that mattered most and managed to protect, for generations, an important cultural symbol of Africa's most widely known, revered and titular tribe of Ghana.

Queen Nandi kaBhebhe (c. 1760-1827)

Famously known as the mother of the great King Shaka, who battled and defeated the British in the Battle of Isandlwana in 1871 and unified the Zulu nation, Queen Nandi kaBhebhe is deeply revered for her role in raising her son to greatness. Although ashamed for having her son out of wedlock, she was regarded as the power behind the throne and a trusted advisor to the king.

Chief Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti (1900-1978)

Although popularly known as an Afrobeat pioneer, Fela Kuti's mother, Chief Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, the Nigerian educator, political campaigner, suffragist, and women's rights activist, was a thorn in the side of the head of military and state, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, whose government deployed some 1,000 soldiers to storm the family property in Lagos, inflicting injuries and resultant complications that ultimately led to her death. Fela transformed her home into a commune that he called the Kalakuta Republic, which is a standing monument to the bravery of Ransome-Kuti.

Dr Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (1938-)

While it should not be celebrated that a woman only became president of a country 43 years after the formation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the forerunner to the African Union (AU), Liberia's Dr Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's most outstanding achievement is not in ascending to the presidency in her two terms, 2006 to 2018. Arguably, her greatest feat was ushering in the most extended stable

period since William Tubman's 27-year tenure, followed by the longest and bloodiest civil war led by Charles Taylor and others that bled the country of its lives and wealth. Indeed, she may have been alluding to the failure of Africa's male-dominated leaders when she declared, "Africa is not poor. It's just poorly led." Her leadership of Liberia through reconciliation and recovery earned her the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011. Her unprecedented leadership paved the way for women's ascendancy to the highest offices in Africa.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (1977-)

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the award-winning Nigerian contemporary writer, shot to fame with her second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), which was the depiction of the devastation caused by the Nigerian Civil War, and has been using her pen to narrate authentic stories of Africa, hope and war through a lived experience, and for advocating for feminism. As she said, "I write from real life." (Mail & Guardian 2013) She is an undisputed contemporary voice of a confident and articulate Africa, challenging the Western narrative of a single stereotypical story of Africa.

Graça Machel (1945 -)

It is easy to remember Graça Machel, the Mozambican politician and humanitarian, as the woman who famously married two of the most consequential post-colonial struggle heroes, South Africa's Nelson Mandela and Mozambique's Samora Machel. Still, she was much more than that - a celebrated advocate for youth and women and a leading voice on African democracy. She has used her advantageous position and influence "to create impact and better the lives of others . . . that is what it is being a powerful woman," she said in a Forbes 2020 interview (Forbes Africa, Woman 2023).

Queen Modjadji I to VII (1800-)

Queen Modjadji, also known as the Rain Queen, is the hereditary queen of the Balobedu people of the Limpopo

province of South Africa. An intriguing mystical figure, she is believed to have the power to make rain for her allies and drought for their enemies - an unrivalled power and tradition that has remained unchanged over time.

African Women: Pioneering, Powerful and Resilient

Unfazed by colonial oppression and patriarchial suppression, these are just a few examples of the countless extraordinary women who have shaped the continent's history, sometimes quietly, others loudly, but always forward, effectively. They have led collectively, such as the 20,000-strong 9 August 1956 march by women led by Lillian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, Rahima Moosa and Sophia Williams-De Bruyn to protest against the apartheid government's control over the movement of black women in urban areas, and alone, as the Rosa Parks, the African American civil rights hero in the Diaspora, who refused to vacate a seat on a bus in favour of a white passenger in Montgomery, Alabama.

Others, such as the South African 800-metre Olympic champion Caster Semenya, chartered new territories when she challenged the European Court of Human Rights, which decided she was discriminated against by rules in the track and field that forced her to medically reduce her natural hormone levels to compete in major competitions.

Through it all, African and Diaspora women have never wavered or cowered in the face of challenges. They have not merely been behind renowned great men but have often been the prime architects of the history behind the very men who ran with the honour. As mothers, partners, professionals, or even activists, they have been pioneering, leading powerfully and resiliently, and putting on the boots to lead from the front when necessary. While many still battle for equity, inclusion and respect, Africa is undoubtedly better because of its women. And a fair share of these women have been in this Republic of South Africa.

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3

The Rise of Women into Leadership

Maria Frahm-Arp

Introduction

It was only in the 20th century, after the First World War, that large numbers of women began to work outside the home and that significant numbers of women took up leadership positions in business, education, law, medicine, religion, and politics. This chapter explores women's rise in leadership positions outside of the private sphere, from the end of the First World War until the start of the age of artificial intelligence (AI).

This historical overview is divided into four sections or periods. The first began at the end of the First World War in 1919 and ended after the Second World War in 1945. The second period is from 1945 until the advent of the Internet in 1993. The third is the era from 1993 until the moment when AI began to significantly affect social life, which was arguably most notably seen in the 2016 US presidential elections. The fourth epoch, the Age of AI, is what we are currently living in. During each of these periods, women's roles in society changed dramatically as new opportunities opened up for women, enabling them to take up more and more leadership positions in society, commerce, education, medicine, law and government.

The Age of Women's Mobility: 1919 – 1945

By the end of the First World War, the world was a different place, but most of all, it was different for women. This was a

time of new opportunities, new mobility, and new fashions for women, all of which enabled them to take up leadership roles in various sectors.

The First World War changed the landscape for women. During the war, women were drawn into a variety of different jobs, from nursing, teaching, and secretarial work to leadership positions in factories where working-class women had been employed for over a century. Before the war, working-class women did paid work either in factories or inside homes doing domestic and childminding work. Middle-class women only did unpaid work within the home, and upper-class women did not work at all. Two essential things changed the landscape. The first was that so many men died during the war, and their positions as secretaries in businesses, teachers in schools, and workers in factories needed to be filled. The second was the advent of electricity into upper- and middle-class homes, dramatically reducing the need for armies of domestic staff to keep fires burning and kettles boiling (Luckin, 1990, Tobey, 1996).

Access to education and leadership opportunities began to open up for women. Young women were allowed to study at universities and colleges in Britain, Europe and North America in much more significant numbers after the war. During the 1920s and 1930s, many universities began to allow women to sit exams and obtain degrees. Oxford University first granted women degrees in 1920 (Solomon, 1985, Robinson, 2009). Opportunities also opened up as women became the heads of the typing pools, the managers of teams within a factory or leaders in trade union movements. Johanna Scheepers and Johanna Cornelius are examples of this, as they became key leaders in the South African Garment Workers Union in the 1920s (SAHO, 2019). The women's movement and their resistance to political and economic oppression in South Africa had its roots in these moments and movements of resistance (Walker, 1991).

During this time the first wave feminism suffragette women finally won the right for women to vote. The

suffragette movement began in the early 1800s but gained wider support in the 1880s. It finally realised its goals between 1910 and 1930 when most white women were allowed to vote. In 1918 women could vote in Germany; in 1920 white women could vote in America; in 1928 women in Britain could vote; in 1930 white women were permitted to vote in South Africa and finally in 1994 black South African women were allowed to vote.

Linked to these new opportunities was new mobility. The advent of the bicycle made it possible and affordable for men and women to travel further distances faster. Women were able to travel reliably and safely to jobs, making it possible for them to take up work outside the home (Strange, 2002). With new work and new transport, women's mobility was further enhanced through new fashions and by the end of the 1920s long full skirts with tight corsets were a thing of the past (Freedman, 1974, Luceño, 2018).

The Age of Women's Voices: 1945 – 1993

During the Second World War, hundreds and thousands of working- and middle-class women were employed in almost all sectors of healthcare, education, business and the army. The generation of young women who had received a better education than their mothers' before the Second World War, were called on to work in positions that required a high level of education and academic abilities such as code-breaking and espionage; jobs which, before the war would never have been given to women (McKay, 2011, Smith, 2015).

After the war, women continued to work in positions that had previously only been filled by men, partly because so many men had died, but also because women had proven what they were capable of doing this work. Economically, many women needed to work because they were left widowed after the war or could not find men to marry (Kuhn, 1989). After the war, many women continued to work in paid employment outside the home, yet society still regarded the 'good woman' as the mother and wife who stayed at home and worked (without

earning any money for this work) in the domestic setting. In the 1950s, popular culture presented the ideal woman as the middle-class, white mother of two children who stayed at home and ran the perfect home while her husband went out to work (Nicholson, 2015).

Through the 1950s and 1960s as more women entered university and more women took up professional positions in a wide variety of fields, they began to bring new ideas into social, cultural, economic, academic and political spaces. These were the years that gave birth to the emergence of whole new academic fields such as gender studies and feminist scholarship. Simone de Beauvoir blazed this new trail with her 1949 book The Second Sex (De Beauvoir, 2009).

The second wave of feminism swept through society in the 1960s, growing in popularity as women fought to be accepted into academia, journalism, the arts, politics, medicine and law. As women began to take up positions in these professions, they also found their voice and started to express their concerns in articles, books, demonstrations, rallies and grassroot campaigns. Women such as Betty Friedan, and Ruth Bader Ginsburg championed the Women's Movement, fighting for the equal rights of women, equal pay for women, the right for women to have abortions and the acceptance of contraception allowing women to choose when, if, and how many children they had (Jennings, 2014). Yet, in protest to this, there was also a whole movement against the American Equal Rights Act led by women such as Phyllis Schlafly, fighting against abortion and arguing that a woman's place was in the home (Steuter, 1992, Hardisty, 2019). While the Women's Movement had its roots in the era before the 1960s and still has not reached all it set out to achieve (Cobble, Gordon and Henry, 2014), it influenced other movements fighting for women's liberation throughout the world, including South Africa.

This was a period of remarkable women leaders in South Africa. In 1954 South African women established the Federation of South African Women (FSAW) fighting for the

equal opportunity for all women no matter their race, class or background. The voice and leadership of women in South Africa was particularly pronounced as women took up the battle against apartheid, fighting for freedom and equality as they led the 1952 Defiance Campaign and protested at the 1955 Treason Trial. On 9 August 1956, the women of South Africa, led by heroines like Lilian Ngoyi organised the Women's March to Pretoria in protest against racial oppression (Frates, 1993). In 1960 black women were at the forefront of the Sharpeville protest (Brown, 2016). Post Sharpeville, the banning of the African National Congress and Pan-Africanist Congress, political protests on the African National Congress and Pan-Africanist Congress, and political protests in South Africa became more militant and dangerous. Many people, including leaders of the FSAW, such as Hilda Bernstein and Ruth Mompati, fled into exile (Hassim, 2004).

Nevertheless, women such as Winnie Madikizela-Mandela continued to lead the revolution, culminating in the 1976 Soweto riots (Brown, 2016). The period from 1978 until the end of the apartheid saw black South Africans slip into deeper poverty as men and women were paid less and less for their labour. Women became active members of trade unions in the 1980s as they fought for a liveable wage (Walker, 1991). In 1987, the Women's Congress was formed as women in South Africa, like their counterparts elsewhere in the world, fought for equal pay, an end to sexism, equal education for girl children and an end to the oppression of women (Seidman, 1993).

Outside of South Africa, an icon of this period was Margaret Thatcher, who became the first female British Prime Minister and held this office from 1979 until 1990. Thatcher, a wife and mother of two, proved that women could do and have it all. She was a superwoman who made decisions about nuclear war during the day and came home to cook for her family in the evenings.

The Age of Superwomen: 1993 – 2019

As communism ended in 1989 and apartheid ended in 1994, a new era of hope and optimism dawned. Yet the start of the new epoch is the Internet and the World Wide Web, which became globally accessible to ordinary working people in 1993. The Internet, with its instant connectivity for everyone .

For women, this became a time of possibilities as more women entered the workplace and began to take up positions of leadership and authority. Even ancient organisations such as the church began to allow women into positions of leadership. In 1993 the worldwide communion of the Anglican Church ordained their first female priests in England, South Africa, Australia, and North America. This was the age of promise, and there was no more alluring promise than being a superwoman, a term first used in 1986. Women were told that they could do it all and have it all. They could work in professional jobs, earn good salaries while still being active and present mothers to their children. Endless magazine articles were written telling women how to balance it all and have it all, which over time led to women experiencing increased levels of stress, burnout and anxiety (Sumra and Schillaci, 2015).

South Africa became an exciting example of gender equality when its first parliament was formed in 1994, in which 26,2% of government seats were held by women (the global average was 11%) (SAHO, 2024). In South African business, the first generation of black women entered professional jobs from accounting to law (Frahm-Arp, 2010). During this period, many businesses began to make it compulsory that a certain percentage of women should be hired and appointed into top management positions and elected to the boards of companies (Iyer, 2009). Yet, progress and emancipation were not equally experienced by all women, and many women saw little benefit in their everyday lives. The third wave of feminism, or the womanist movement, emerged during this period and shone a bright light on these inequalities, arguing that there needed to be a far greater awareness of the intersectionality of race, class and gender. They highlighted that black, female, working-

class people were still the poorest, least educated and most disenfranchised in societies across the world (Brewer, 2020).

The arguments of many of these womanists, predominantly African American women or women from the Global South, began to have an impact. New economic and social development projects were conceptualised that foregrounded the needs of women. Research, often conducted by women, showed that if women had more economic agency, they were better able to care for themselves and their children than when they were kept dependent on men. This led 'many non-profit and non-government agencies in the Global North to invest in women's micro-businesses in the Global South', raising a new generation of female entrepreneurs and business leaders (Duvendack and Maclean, 2018). It also created new systems of women's dependencies on external, male-dominated financial power structures (Moodie, 2013).

From the early 1990s, in India (Bhalla and Kaur, 2011) and China (Wu and Zhang, 2010), the number of women entering higher education vastly increased. With this, there was a massive migration from rural areas into urban areas as these countries changed from mainly agrarian to industrial in a generation. Even in more religiously fundamental countries such as Libya, Tunisia, Mali and Egypt, women received more education than ever before (Badri and Tripp, 2017). Many of these women, who, behind their hijabs, had learnt to read, write and use technology, played a critical role in the spread of the Arab Spring, which began in December 2010. Their education allowed them to voice their opinions on social media as the uprising spread through North Africa and the Middle East, challenging authoritarian rulers, high youth unemployment, and rampant police corruption (Johansson-Nogués, 2013).

While much about this age started out positively, by the early 2010s the glass ceiling had become all too real as leadership in most Fortune 500 companies was still mainly in the hands of men (Zweigenhaft and Domhoff, 2011). Women like Arianna Huffington of the Huffington Post, the worldwide

media super success that started in 2005, were the exception. In the booming and highly lucrative world of information technology of the dot-com era, very few women were hired, and none became multi-millionaires as men did (Tapia, 2006). Statistics in Europe and North America show that women were still doing the vast majority of the childcare and housework, highlighting ongoing gender inequality in housework, even though more and more women were also employed in work outside the home (Treas and Tai, 2016).

During the mid-2000s, more and more research showed how working women struggled to balance the demands of work and families and self-care. More women reported burnout and mental healthcare problems, and research showed an ever-increasing number of women struggling with severe eating disorders, all attributed to the superwoman phenomena, which demand unrealistic standards of perfection from women (Genz, 2009). This became ever more problematic with the rise of social media and the age of the mediated self.

The Age of the Mediated Woman: 2016 – 2024

In 2003, LinkedIn was launched (although it only became a global phenomenon in 2011), and in 2004 Facebook was launched, both offering the first global social media sites. Instagram was launched in 2010. Initially, Facebook and LinkedIn were networking platforms where people could share personal information and interests. Through these online, virtual spaces, women and men began to mediate who they were and the image they presented to the world. A new phenomenon of the mediate self, the self that one presents to the world, which may or may not be anchored in a lived reality, began to emerge (Storr, 2017). This put even more pressure on women to live up to impossible ideals. Women presented themselves to each other on their social media pages as looking perfect, having perfect children, being married to the perfect husband and eating perfect meals in perfect restaurants. These mediated selves became ever more influential as women took seriously what others portrayed in these virtual social spaces.

With this, a whole new form of female leadership was born as influencers emerged who influenced other women's decisions, from how they shopped to what jobs they applied for.

While these changes were impactful, the turning point was the emergence of sophisticated AI algorithms that began to push information, images and ideas to people, primarily suggesting similar sites and groups that people might be interested in following. The effects of this were first seen as having real social and political consequences with the 2016 US Presidential elections, where it was alleged that the Trump team used algorithms to rig how and what information voters consumed before the elections (Assibong et al., 2020).

This epoch was also a moment when women, connected through social media as never before, stood up against sexual harassment and gender-based violence as the hashtag MeToo went viral. The #MeToo movement was started in 2006 by Tarana Burke, a survivor of sexual harassment and violence who campaigned for women to speak out against sexual harassment and to disrupt the sexist systems that allow sexual violence to continue unchecked (#metoo, 2024)). It was only in 2017 that the movement went viral and began to attract significant support, which led to several powerful men being accused, arrested and tried on charges of sexual harassment and violence against women.

One of the unforeseen developments has been the lowering of salaries in industries that have become heavily dominated by women, such as education and medicine. One example of this was the series of strikes by junior doctors in Britain between 2023 and 2024. In the last thirty years, more and more women have entered medicine, filling positions primarily as GPs (general practitioners) and junior doctors. Over the last 15 years, salaries for these positions have not increased in line with inflation. By 2023, junior doctors argued that they needed a 35% salary increase to bring their earning power back in line with what it had been in 2002. The decrease in professional salaries was also seen in academia as more and more women filled academic

posts. These salary decreases were not driven solely by the rise of women in these professions, but the correlation is clear, according to a study published in *Labour Economics* (Harris, 2022).

Conclusion

This overview of how women have entered into employed work and then taken up leadership positions shows that the process has been both creative and challenging. The period since the First World War can be divided into four epochs. The first epoch, 1919 to 1945, saw the rise of women's mobility. New work opportunities outside the home opened up for women, and as fashions became freer and women had access to affordable transportation, they could embrace these opportunities. In the second epoch, 1945 to 1993, women found their voice as they entered professional jobs and began to reshape academia, education, culture, arts, and politics. In the third period, 1993 to 2016, the idea of a superwoman peaked as women embraced all the new possibilities and juggled being career women who also offered intense mothering to their children and did the bulk of the housework at home. The fourth epoch, 2016 to 2024, has seen the rise of social media and the mediative self. It has also been a time when women have protested against sexual harassment and sexual violence as high levels of gender-based violence continue to be a reality for many women. It is also the first time in human history where countries, for example, Italy and China, have recorded adverse birth rates mainly due to women having higher education levels and pursuing professional careers and, in the process, having fewer or no children (Wang et al., 2023). The overview in this chapter sets the scene for the chapters to follow, which explore the many different journeys women have taken to rise into various positions of leadership and influence.

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4

Levelling the Academic Field

Zeblon Vilakazi

Not many people know the story of Mary Susan Makobatjatji Malahlela, a black woman from Limpopo who broke through many gender barriers before the advent of apartheid in 1948. Malahlela was South Africa's first black female doctor who graduated from University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) on 21 June 1947. She took the Hippocratic Oath, completed her

internship at McCord Hospital in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, and remained there as a doctor until 1949.

She then moved with her family to Kliptown, where she established her first surgery in Beacon Road, followed by a second at Crossroads in Mofolo South. She had to close her first surgery due to the Group Areas Act and relocated to Dobsonville. Malahlela served her community for 34 years as the first black doctor at the Heinsbeek Community Clinic and as a member of the first Baragwanath Medical Advisory Board. She passed away at age 65 after serving in various capacities in the health, education and social welfare sectors.

The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa awarded Malahlela the Order of the Baobab (Silver) for her "excellent contribution in the provision of medical services to the oppressed majority of South Africans during the apartheid era."

Malahlela overcame multiple obstacles from her birthplace in Polokwane on her journey towards receiving recognition through a Presidential Order. She trundled through racism, sexism, classism, apartheid, forced relocation, and other forms of discrimination and prejudice, many issues which still confront women in science and higher education today, albeit not always overtly.

This is not a new phenomenon – if we look back in time, female scientists like Marie Curie, a Nobel prize-winner in two different scientific fields, who discovered radium and polonium and who is known as the founder of radioactivity, used much of her time to advocate for the rights of women scientists. Similarly, aviator and astronaut Wally Funk was excluded from spaceflight due to her gender, and Dorothy Vaughan and her protégé Creola Katherine Johnson had to work in separate National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) facilities due to the colour of their skin. These were extraordinary women who made significant contributions to science and technology and soared to the apex of their scientific careers, despite the odds.

Closer to home, the trajectories of Professors Sehliselo Ndlovu, Nosipho Moloto and Elizabeth Mavhunga are both inspiring and courageous. Like their United States of America (US) counterparts, they have made their mark in engineering and science education, with Professor Ndlovu holding a South African Research Chair in Hydrometallurgy and Sustainable Development, Moloto awarded a National Science and Technology Forum Award and Mavhunga being the third South African to win the United States National Association for Research in Science Teaching Award.

Similarly, we are led by A-rated professors and healthcare activists like Glenda Gray and Helen Rees, who, like Malahlela, aside from conducting world-class research, spend much of their time in the streets of Hillbrow or the corridors of the Chris Hani Baragwanath Academic Hospital to serve the broader community. I am proud to work alongside the women in my executive leadership and senior management teams, who are experts in their field and go beyond the call of duty to serve students, the University, and the higher education sector and to advance the public good.

However, this is not the norm in society – for example, women still make up only a fraction of the leadership at universities in South Africa. According to a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) report, "less than 30 percent of the world's researchers are women, with studies showing that women in STEM are published less, paid less for their research and do not advance as far as men in their careers".

A recent study by the African Academy of Sciences (The African Academy of Sciences 2020) found that several factors, reinforced at various levels, including the individual, family, society, and work environment, contribute to whether a woman finds a science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) career appealing, and determines her success in these fields. The report also found that women scientists tend to work primarily in academic and government institutions, while more male scientists are found in the

private sector. Women are often concentrated in the lower echelons of responsibility and have limited leadership opportunities. For example, female scientists are often lecturers and assistant researchers in academia, and fewer are professors. Women are rarely research directors or principal investigators in major studies.

A US study, Women's Reasons for Leaving the Engineering Field (Frontiers in Psychology 2017), also raised alarm about the flight of female engineers to the finance industry. Reasons included unfair working conditions, pay gaps and industry attitudes.

So, how do we change the culture in universities, science councils, and the higher education, technology, private and industrial sectors to ensure that women do not have to fight for their rightful place in the academy?

- First, there is a glaring need for structured and well-resourced programmes to be introduced – the Diversifying the Academy initiative and the Female Academic Leadership Fellowships are great examples of how to drive gender transformation in science and the academy actively.
- Next, we need to build the pipeline of female scientists and academics from enrolment through to undergraduate and postgraduate levels, then offer postdoctoral opportunities to entice more women to enter the fields of science, engineering, technology, and academia.
- The development of the curriculum for STEM-related qualifications also needs to be considered - they usually include hardcore science content only and not people-relations components that relate to gender and diversity in the workplace.
- The advent of artificial intelligence tools and platforms and their inherent biases are phenomena that we have to address now before they shape a new culture and the role in which women scientists, and particularly African female scientists, are forced to occupy.

- We need to ensure that women scientists and academics thrive and are incentivised to advance in their careers in the fields that they choose.
- We must be vigilant and act with purpose to address gender discrimination, gender-based harm, femicide, patriarchy and toxic masculinity, which remains inherent in society, both overtly and covertly.
- We must have creative awareness campaigns and adequate policies, procedures and rules in place to address all forms of gender discrimination.

Finally, we must take heed of the words of Dr Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the former United Nations Women's Executive Director, who, in an address on International Women's Day, said: "Incentives will be needed to recruit and retain female workers, like expanded maternity benefits for women that also support their re-entry into work, adoption of the Women's Empowerment Principles, and direct representation at decision-making levels."

It is fitting to close with her quote from a speech in 2019 when she addressed graduates in the Wits Great Hall when she was awarded an honorary doctorate: "Gender inequality, the lack of representation of women in seats of power and the challenges brought about by climate change such as climate refugees need to be addressed with more vigour. Higher education institutions must continue with their leadership role in addressing gender inequality and creating a just society. We cannot bring about the changes that are required in the world without the participation of institutions of learning."

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5

The Journey of the First Black Woman Chartered Accountant in South Africa

Nonkululeko Gobodo

Early life and inspiration

I grew up in Mthatha in the Eastern Cape during the time of the Independent State of the former Transkei that became the Eastern Cape in the post-apartheid era. The former Transkei was, to a certain extent, cushioned from the harsh conditions experienced by black people in the old South Africa. Black people were still a subject of discrimination and prejudice. At the time, Transkei was a vibrant community and an inspiring environment. Many black people and women were professionals or running their businesses. There was a university formerly known as the University of Transkei (now the Mthatha Campus of Walter Sisulu University) that created opportunities for civil servants and the youth to acquire higher education. People took full advantage of those opportunities. The first black firm of chartered accountants was established in my hometown by Professor Wiseman Nkuhlu. The environment inspired me to further my education. Prof Nkuhlu inspired me to become a chartered accountant and to one day open my own firm of chartered accountants. My parents played a key role in encouraging me to study further and pursue my highest ambitions in life.

Discovering my path

I was the middle child of five siblings. I had the known middle child syndrome of believing you are unloved because you are not famous for anything in the family. I was quiet and reserved as a child. At some point, my mother became worried that I was not going to make it in life and started verbalising her fears. I became even more withdrawn and developed low self-esteem as a result. I did not know who I was or what I wanted to study after matric. I was saved when I took a gap year after matric to work at my father's panel beating shop as I was figuring out what I wanted to do with my life. There, I encountered racism and sexism for the first time from the two white managers of the business. I was 19 but courageously stood up to them, determined to be treated as a colleague and with respect. I was also trained as a bookkeeper, and I could catch on very quickly. I became a productive member of the team. From that experience, I found myself and realised that I was not the person I believed I was back when I was growing up. I could see that although I was quiet, that did not translate to being dumb; I was smart and strong - able to stand up to white male bullies. I learnt from that experience never again to allow the opinions of others about me to define who I am. This held me in good stead as I faced racism and sexism in the corporate world, refusing to accept the stereotype that I was expected to fit into as a black woman.

While at the panel beating shop, I was exposed to accounting and auditing because of Prof Nkuhlu's firm, WL Nkuhlu & Co., which were our auditors. I had never heard about chartered accountancy before, so I decided to pursue studies towards the accounting profession. After the gap year, I went to school to study for a BCom degree, and later, I became the first black woman to qualify as a chartered accountant. This achievement changed my life, putting me in the spotlight as a role model for others, a responsibility I took seriously.

Professional challenges and achievements

The accounting profession was an environment that white males dominated. As women and black people, we had to find ways of navigating the environment very early to get the kind of training we believed we deserved. Those early black people who qualified as chartered accountants were pioneers, breaking barriers and charting the way for others. Prof Nkuhlu and the few chartered accountants he had produced were our role models. No woman had qualified that I could look up to at that stage. I became the first black woman to qualify. As a trainee accountant at KPMG, I quickly realised that I had to identify opportunities to receive good training, which I did successfully. I soon proved to the partners that I was competent and capable. I was promoted early within the firm as a result. I was also cautious not to allow prejudice against me because I was a black woman, always standing up when I encountered it. I would soon earn the respect of whoever was responsible. This was because I always did it from a place of knowing who I was. I had gone to black schools and a black university where my identity as a capable person was formed. I therefore refused to see myself as being inferior to anyone. I am disturbed by the struggles of black people who attended Model C schools and so-called white universities, where they faced prejudice and are now facing an identity crisis.

When I was promoted to Chief Financial Officer (CFO) in 1989 at 29 years of age, I became the only woman who was part of the EXCO (Executive Committee). These were challenging environments, times to navigate, and, as a pioneer, I would be the only woman around the table. I again learnt to assert myself early as a capable professional who soon earned the respect of my colleagues and those under my leadership - which constituted men in middle management.

Entrepreneurship and expansion

While completing my articles at KPMG, I envisioned starting my own practice one day. In 1992, the time had come for me

to begin my journey as an entrepreneur. I decided to open a firm of chartered accountants, knowing that this would be a challenging venture. Everyone around me was very fearful, reminding me that it would be difficult to compete against the big eight international firms of accountants. I did not listen to them because I realised that they were expressing their fears. I was committed to my vision and determined to succeed. I had always wanted to prove to myself and others that there was nothing I could not do as a black woman. Growing up in an environment where one is constantly told that there are things one cannot do drove me to disprove that sentiment. As black accountants, we were determined not to allow a system to determine our destiny. We had studied as hard as everyone and passed the chartered accountant (CA) professional examinations. We believed that we deserved to play a significant role in our country's accounting profession and economy. I opened my firm in Mthatha, together with a personal assistant. The practice soon grew to two offices in the Eastern Cape and 30 staff members. I brought another black woman-CA as a partner into the practice, and we were always mindful of opening opportunities for other women. Most of the trainees in our practice were women.

At the dawn of democracy in 1994, I decided to seize the moment by expanding my practice to other parts of the country. I encouraged a few managers from established international firms to join me, and we founded a new firm called Gobodo Inc. with eight partners and 150 staff, with Johannesburg as the headquarters. The firm grew so much that we opened offices in other provinces in South Africa. We credit our success to the opportunities that the new democratic government offered. I want to mention Nkosazana Stella Sigcau, the Public Enterprises Minister at the time. She was a champion for the transformation of black people and women. She opened state-owned companies (SOCs) to black professional firms like accountants, lawyers, engineers, etc. She opened an opportunity for black accounting firms to be joint auditors of Transnet, the first SOC to be opened as a pilot. SOCs were only audited by the Big 8 accounting firms.

She encouraged us to come together as black firms to build the capacity to perform the audit. Eight black firms formed a consortium and established APF Inc., while individual firms continued with their private firms outside APF. This move was an excellent opportunity to grow black firms. Our practices grew exponentially overnight. Minister Stella Sigcau soon opened other SOCs to black firms. The firms also expanded by forming mergers, fuelling their accounting firms' growth. This was a catalyst for the sustainable black accounting firms that still exist today.

Overcoming systemic barriers

At the time, Transnet and the other SOCs were led by white males. It was a challenging environment to navigate. The minister took another courageous step to replace the white managers with black managers. She appointed Saki Macozoma as Transnet's CEO and Gloria Serobe as the CFO. The environment became more supportive of the black firms at Transnet, and having a black woman as the leader of the Finance Division was very helpful. The black firms continued to grow as more SOCs opened their doors to the black firms. Other arms of government also opened their doors, notably the Office of the Auditor General, which had not given any work to black firms before. We gained experience through auditing big SOCs. Minister Sigcau had created a model where we audited the various divisions of Transnet with the big firms, and they were required to train the staff and partners of the black firms. One woman changed the course of history for black people and women. Overall, a few black firms were led by women and are still led by women today.

The medium-sized black accounting firms that we established continued to grow. After about 15 years, it became clear that the firms were losing ground because the international accounting firms became BEE-compliant. This meant that there was no requirement to partner with black firms. We started to be brought into big audits as contractors and not joint auditors, with a percentage share of the audit

being 20% and not the 50:50 we were used to. We had to either review our strategy or lose all we had built in the previous 15 years. I was the CEO of Gobodo Inc. at the time. I started talking to other medium-sized black firms to consider a merger between us. We were often told that we could not be assigned to big projects because we did not have the capacity. We had also built experience and were ambitious to handle big projects without partnering with the Big 4. When Minister Stella Sigcau championed our transformation, I realised that she did not think we would conduct joint audits with the Big 4 forever. It was time to take the growth of our firms to the next level.

We started merger negotiations between Gobodo Inc. and SizweNtsaluba vsp. These talks culminated in a merger of the two firms to form SizweNtsalubaGobodo, announced in April 2011. We embarked on the enormous task of integrating two medium-sized firms - no easy task. I was the Executive Chairman of the new firm, and Victor Sekese was the CEO. The integration was a difficult task that challenged all of us to the core. As expected, we were committed to our vision and were determined to succeed. Many naysayers expected us to fail purely because we were black people. We needed to build new systems, which we did not need before because of our dependency on the Big 4. We also needed to develop our partners and staff to compete with the established firms. The merger was a success. We achieved our vision of handling big projects on our own. We were appointed to conduct large audits of state-owned companies on our own. The firm grew to be the largest black accounting firm in South Africa and the fifth largest in the country. We pursued an African strategy by opening offices on the continent. We were clear that we wanted to create a legacy for future generations. We wanted to show black children that they could also perform big things like we did. We did not squander the opportunities we were given; we established sustainable black businesses that still exist today.

I am very proud of what we achieved. We owe our success to the many executives and board members, both men and women of state institutions, who supported us. What we achieved continues to be a symbol of the success

of the country's efforts at transformation, inspiring many black people and women. I have had many women I looked up to as mentors. I must, however, honour my mother, who was my first mentor. She was a matriarch, a strong woman who instilled self-confidence in me, and who embodied fearlessness which defined my journey in life.

Having retired from the accounting profession, I am left with a deep sense of fulfilment. I achieved my goals beyond anything I could have imagined. I proved to myself and others that there was nothing I could not accomplish as a black woman. The biggest lesson I learnt in my journey is the power of dreaming and having a vision for life; that a vision that is believed in and committed to will always lead to success. My vision carried me during challenging times, keeping me focused on achieving my goals. We can achieve anything when we believe in ourselves and are prepared to work hard at our goals. Although I lived in a society where I faced discrimination and was often dismissed as incapable because I was a black woman, I never allowed those opinions and discouragements to define who I am. The other big lesson I learnt was the importance of capable and effective leadership. It was going to take visionary, solid leadership to achieve our ambitious goals. The success or failure of an organisation rests squarely on its leadership. We were leaders who took those we were leading with us as we pursued our goals. We faced challenges with courage; never quitting. Leaders who showed up during difficult times, not making excuses but getting on with the task. Above all, I appreciate the importance of leading with integrity and ethics, and I believe this is why the businesses we started still exist today. One of the achievements I am most proud of is how we contributed to the pipeline of black accountants and women. We had been made to believe that we could not become chartered accountants; we did not just disprove that; instead, we produced them in numbers. I now sit on boards of listed companies and have authored an autobiography, *Awakened to my true self*. In the book, I share my journey as a professional in a male-dominated environment and as an

entrepreneur. My book / autobiography is being used as a mentorship tool by many women and young professionals, culminating in running an organisation called *Awakened Global*, a social initiative that seeks to contribute towards gender and racial inequality.

Addressing gender inequality

We have seen a transformation in the role and status of women in the world over time. However, there is still a lot to be done. This issue requires everyone's involvement - both men and women to achieve the necessary changes for equality. Women have always faced prejudice and discrimination in every culture for a long time. We may not fully understand the genesis of gender inequality, but we know that the role of women in society has been changing since the 20th century. We are coming from a time when women were not allowed to receive higher education because their destiny in life was predetermined (Lues, 2005). There was a time when women could not vote or open a simple bank account without the assistance of their male partners. Married women were prohibited from continuing their teaching careers in South Africa. Many women opted not to get married. Most of my primary school teachers were not married because of that. Women, therefore, were not afforded the same opportunities for advancement afforded to men. Patriarchy is, of course, at the centre of all this. Despite the progress that has been achieved, women are still lagging behind men in all positions of significance, as seen today. Myths were invented about women, about them being weak, inferior, not capable, belonging in the kitchen, etc. These myths are still believed today and continue to bedevil women in the corporate world and society. This is despite evidence to the contrary.

Women have been outperforming men in schools and at university in recent times. In 2024, I attended a graduation ceremony when women who achieved distinctions and top awards outnumbered men. In the accounting profession, more women than men pass the board examination (SAICA, 2023).

Yet, when you look at the C-suite and other top positions, there are very few women. What happens to these top women achievers? Women start their careers from a point of being undermined and disregarded as not being capable. They work in environments that are hostile to them without affirmation and recognition. They must work double hard to prove themselves and earn the respect of their male colleagues, who are often in leadership positions. Systemic conditions must also be addressed to level the playing field so that women can reach their full potential.

Society must appreciate that the role of women has changed. Society must restructure itself to take this into account. Women's burden of domestic responsibilities and caregiving must be addressed (and possibly identified as payable labour). This is the most significant contributor to women lagging behind men in personal advancement. This cultural expectation of women continues even though women are now also working and pursuing their own career goals. There is a belief that only women can perform these tasks. The truth is that women can perform these tasks because they were trained to perform them, whereas anybody can be trained to cook, clean, and take care of children. It was not believed that women could lead in business or politics. Women today are leaders in these fields because they have been trained. Women often feel guilty about their career goals, passing up promotions so that they could be good mothers and wives. Even this desire is a product of conditioning from societal expectations of women. Changes must start in the home. We must create safe spaces at home and work where conversations can be held to address this issue and achieve equity in domestic responsibilities.

The World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Report found that amongst 33 countries representing 54% of the global working population, men spent just a third of the time women spent performing unpaid work (WEF, 2022). We appreciate the countries that have introduced parity in parental leave, where both parents are given equal maternity and paternity leave. These measures will go a long way in addressing the

prevailing systemic conditions and achieving equity. Corporate institutions must investigate and change all policies that are prejudiced against women. More policies are also needed at the national level to promote gender equality.

The other area where we need our diversity and inclusion programmes to address is the unfair power dynamics between the sexes. The excuse of unconscious bias can no longer hold after all the work performed to bring awareness to the condition. "We need to change the gender biases and social norms, but the ultimate goal is to change the power relations between women and men and between people", says Aroa Santiago, a gender specialist (Urso, 2023).

Research has shown the cost to the economy of gender inequality (Hughes, 2023). It is simply not fair that men can reach their highest goals in life while women are expected to curtail their ambitions because of cultural expectations. This is especially sad when the woman in a union is more ambitious and has more capacity to create an income stream or even wealth for the household. In such situations, the woman sometimes holds back because the man feels like a failure because he cannot fulfil his provider duty. In many cases, the feeling of being a failure by the man leads to gender-based violence. We must efficiently use all available talents and gifts within the family to benefit the family. There must be freedom for couples to choose which role each wants to play, regardless of gender. Society must not look down on men who play a more prominent role in domestic responsibilities, while the woman is more of the breadwinner. I have seen several cases where families successfully practise these seemingly opposite roles; thus, we need more such cases. Women have achieved great strides in their fight for equality over the years. They also take responsibility for their growth and advancement despite the challenging conditions under which they work. There are other consequences to the slow pace of change. Women are now making decisions that are right for them, like choosing not to marry, having no children, or having children on their own. They are increasingly choosing their careers and freedom over marriage. Women must continue championing their

transformation and not wait for society to change. We salute the men in our society who are champions of gender equality. The road is long, and we should never lose focus on the need to change our societies. I always say that we must change how we raise our boys and girls. The men we are mostly complaining about were raised in families and by women. When divisions of labour are equal in the family, and girls are given equal opportunities for advancement, we will see a shift in consciousness about the role of the sexes in society.

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Part 2

Imbokodo, we salute you!

6

Leadership Lessons from my Grandmother, Ms Tshianeo Nyamande Marwala

Tshilidzi Marwala

My grandmother, Ms Tshianeo Nyamande Marwala, is the most influential person in my life. She was an inspirational leader, an organic engineer, an entrepreneur, and our family matriarch. Her picture hangs in my office in Tokyo, Japan, alongside that of the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. António Guterres. My grandmother so inspired me that in her honour, I established the Tshianeo Marwala Scholarship at the University of Johannesburg with a donation from our family, Mr. Mike Teke and others (UJ News, 2019).

Early Life

I come from Duthuni Village in the Limpopo province of South Africa. We were refugees from Mukula/Makonde village, where my grandfather, Mr. Tshikeleme Tshamano Jack Marwala, fled hidden in a sack after a headman-ship dispute. Tshikeleme is a Venda version of the Afrikaans word *skelm*, which means a sly man. My grandfather, whom I loved dearly, was sly or cunning and had a rude temper. I spent many beautiful moments with him, accompanying him to the river to bathe, scrubbing his back and listening to his many stories, which my children Khathu, Thendo and Denga enjoy.

I don't know when my grandmother and grandfather met, but what I know is that my grandmother was his second wife in a polygamous arrangement. My grandmother was also from Mukula/Makonde village, and I am unsure whether they escaped together or if my grandmother followed him.

My grandmother knew how to control my grandfather's temper and knew how to put my grandfather in his place. In that way, my grandmother was a diplomatic disciplinarian.

Though Mukula and Makonde villages are close to Georgenholtz Mission station, where the German missionaries established a school, my grandmother did not attend school. This was because her father did not want her daughter to attend school. I often wonder how far my grandmother would have gone if she had attended school. Had she gone to school, I think she would have made it to history books in her own right.

Her two brothers, James and Joseph Nyamande, made it onto the world stage, albeit as less than foot soldiers. They were policemen who were then conscripted into the Second World War, and we suspect that they served in North Africa to confront Rommel the Desert Fox. They had no medals, and in many ways, due to the depth of racism on both sides, the Nazi axis of evil and the American-led allies, they were relegated to the "dustbin of history." When they came back, they could not hear and were given bicycles. Despite the invisibility

of the participation of my granduncles, we are proud that, in small ways, they contributed towards the defeat of the Nazis, which ultimately accelerated the decolonisation of the African continent.

My first engineering teacher

I studied for a Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, USA, for which I obtained Magna Cum Laude (high distinction). I then studied for a Master of Mechanical Engineering from the University of Pretoria. Finally, I completed a PhD in Artificial Intelligence (AI) from the University of Cambridge and was a Postdoctoral Fellow at Imperial College in London. I have had great teachers at these great universities, but none come close to my grandmother.

My grandmother was my first engineering teacher. She used to make clay pots and mats and brew beer, and I would accompany her to the river to collect clay. Later, when I was at the University of Cambridge, Professors David Cebon and Mike Ashby called this process of selecting clay *Material Selection* and developed a computational tool to simplify it (Ashby et al., 2007). My grandmother had no computational tool for selecting clay but had the organic wisdom to know which clay to choose to make her pots.

After that, she would manufacture the pots. A pot is a complicated structure. It is round but hollow inside. It is essential to have the right thickness of the pot's walls. If it is too thin, the pot will break. It requires much energy to cook if it is too thick. This process of finding the proper thickness of the pot is called *optimisation*. There are complex mathematical algorithms for optimisation, and my grandmother did not know any of these, but she was wise to know precisely what pot thickness to choose (Perez and Marwala, 2008).

After the pots were formed, she put them in the furnace and heated them until they were so hot that her eyes reflected

red. She would cool the pots slowly. She knew the pot would crack if she cooled it too fast by pouring cold water when it was still hot. The process of cooling slowly is best described using the Boltzmann equation. The Austrian physicist and philosopher Ludwig Boltzmann developed the Boltzmann equation in 1872. This ground-breaking equation shows how a material behaves statistically by looking at the places and speeds of the particles that make it up. My grandmother did not know Ludwig Boltzmann and his equation, but she was wise enough to know his proposed principles without going to school (Lee, 2019). The Boltzmann equation is also used in the AI field of simulated annealing to find the best aircraft manufacturing method (Sato et al., 2014).

After the clay pots cooled, she would knock each pot and determine whether it was good based on how long it rang. If it rang for a long time, it was a good pot; if it rang for a short time, it was a bad pot. In engineering, we learned from a book, *Vibrations*, by a professor from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Den Hartog, that if it rings for a long time, it is a lightly damped structure, meaning there is no fluid trapped inside. In contrast, if it rings for a short time, it is a damped structure (Den Hartog, 1956).

My grandmother, who could not read or write, was sufficiently wise to know all these concepts without knowing Den Hartog or reading his impressive book. As time passed, my grandmother started throwing away good pots, thinking they were bad. She could not listen properly to the ringing clay pots because her hearing was deteriorating as she grew old.

Introduction to artificial intelligence

When I arrived at the University of Cambridge as a PhD student in 1997, I wrote a thesis inspired by my grandmother and her clay pots titled *Fault identification using neural networks and vibration data* (Marwala, 2001). We wanted to detect the faults of structures, and here we use a car engine as an example, based on their sound. Instead of knocking the

car engine and using my grandmother's ear to listen to its sound, I used an accelerometer to listen to its sound. Instead of using my grandmother's wisdom to determine whether it is a good engine, we used AI. It turns out the AI is more accurate than my grandmother. It seemed it never became tired, and my grandmother would become tired, especially after a long day.

An entrepreneur

My grandmother was an inspiring entrepreneur. She sold these clay pots that she made. Additionally, she used to make mats and plant tobacco, which she would grind into snuff. Without getting into the merits of tobacco, she was the first person to introduce me to the concepts of profit or loss. She introduced me to the idea of closing a business if it is not making a profit. Later, when I went to the Harvard Business School for an executive programme, I learned the concepts of corporate restructuring, which I first learned from my grandmother, who, at one point, sold clay pots, snuff, homemade alcohol, and mats and stopped the snuff business because it was making a loss (Harvard Gazette, 2007).

A teacher of complexity

My grandmother also taught me about the complexity of life. Our neighbour, Ms Phophi Ramadolela, used to come in the early morning to gossip about life at Duthuni Village. Little did they know that I was awake and only pretending to be asleep as I listened to all sorts of village gossip. This introduced me to complex issues around fights between individuals, breakups, financial hardships, sibling rivalry, etc., and prepared me for life as a diplomat.

Considerate

The last time I saw my grandmother was in 1991 at Garankuwa Hospital. I had returned from the University of Cape Town

(UCT), where I was studying, and my father, my brother Tshamano and I visited my grandmother, who was then sick. I also bid her farewell as I transferred from UCT to Case Western Reserve University in the USA. I later found out that she was dying of lung cancer and had instructed everyone that I should not be informed as I was relocating to the USA and I therefore should not bear the burden of her illness. In moments like these, I sincerely appreciate how considerate my grandmother was.

My grandmother was superstitious and terrified of snakes, lightning, and witchcraft. Even though she was very wise, she was also a product of her time. For example, she would add extra curtains in my study room so the neighbours would not see me, as they might bewitch me. Though I am not superstitious, I appreciated her care and her consideration. To try to reconcile my grandmother's dual belief system, science, with a touch of superstition, I am at peace knowing that she was an organic engineer.

In 1992, when I was sitting in my room at Kusch House in Cleveland, Ohio, I received a telegram two weeks late that informed me of her passing. It was late because it was first delivered to the wrong address. The message of the telegram still etched in my mind was: "Tshianeo is dead, STOP." The curtain was closed on the extraordinary life of a great leader, organic engineer, and wise woman.

Leadership lessons from my grandmother

Though my grandmother is gone, I draw leadership lessons daily from her. I have become an Executive Dean of Engineering, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research and Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of Johannesburg. I have worked on many boards, including Nedbank, one of the biggest banks in South Africa. I have been a trustee of the Nelson Mandela Foundation. I am now a Rector of the United Nations (UN) University and Under-Secretary-General of the UN. Throughout these roles, I have drawn from several

leadership lessons from my grandmother, and I am sharing ten of these:

1. **A leader's education shines like a beacon, guiding the way to progress for everyone who follows**

I have often quoted my grandmother saying, "Knowledge becomes education when it finds a purpose in society." Perhaps because my grandmother did not go to school, even though she grew up in a village with a school, she could imagine what she was missing by not receiving an education. For this reason, she educated her only son, my father, Vho-Shavhani Alpheus Marwala, to become a celebrated mathematics teacher who taught me complicated mathematics concepts such as algorithms, geometry and algebra. My grandmother was so captivated by education that she would wake me up when the first cock crows so that I could study.

2. **A leader who listens gains the wisdom of many, turning collective voices into powerful guidance**

My grandmother used to listen to the ringing of clay pots to determine their structural integrity. The South African philosopher Eugène Marais studied ant hills and 100 years ago became the first to know how white ants (termites) work. He then published *The Soul of White Ant (Die Siel van die Mier) in* 1937 (Marais, 2009). Dorigo and Stützle studied Marais's work and proposed the celebrated AI algorithm, the *Ant Colony Optimization* (Dorigo and Stützle, 2004). None of this could have happened if Marais did not listen to the environment around him. Ant hills are beautiful, but they are more beautiful when we understand them and use that understanding for something useful, such as the *Ant Colony Optimization*, which solves the old-age problem of the Travelling Salesman (Brezina and Čičková, 2011).

3. **A leader who seizes the fleeting moment turns potential into triumph, for opportunities wait for no one**

There is a famous statement by Leonard Ravenhill: "An opportunity of a lifetime must be taken in the lifetime of the opportunity." When I was in Matric (Grade 12 in high school),

we were told there would be a winter school at Tshisimani Training College to help us prepare for English, mathematics and science exams. To attend this programme, we needed to pay R20.00. However, after the course, we would take an examination where the top performer would be awarded a prize of R50.00. It sounded like an excellent business deal because there was a chance that I would be the winner of the prize. When I explained this to my grandmother, she immediately invested R20.00. I attended the winter school, became the top performer, won R50.00, and made a profit of R30.00. In this regard, my grandmother reminds me of seizing opportunities before they expire.

4. **A leader achieves boundless success when they seek progress, not praise, letting the glory be shared by all**

One of the lessons my grandmother taught me was that a leader can achieve much by not worrying about who receives the credit. When I was a Vice-Chancellor of UJ, we were approached to establish an Innovation Campus in Devland, Soweto, which has since been completed. The campus was built by a social and economic activist, Ms Deborah Terhune. When the Devland Complex was being constructed, UJ had a minimal role. Accenture is now an investor, but UJ students and the Soweto community are beneficiaries. The campus might never have been completed if we allowed turf wars and the person claiming the credit to take precedence. Nevertheless, we appreciated Ms Terhune for her outstanding work.

5. **A wise leader listens to the whispers of the world, sensing the unseen before taking action**

My grandmother took me everywhere, especially to visit the family. One such visit was to see my aunt Vho-Munzhenzi Thivhafuni Mushavhanamadi at Ngovhela Village. Between Ngovhela Village and Duthuni Village, where we lived, there was a river that we had to cross to reach the other village. Whenever we had to cross this river, my grandmother would look at the waves (she called them *tsinga*, meaning veins) of the river before we crossed. She would say that if the veins were thick (strong water flow), we should postpone the trip

because we would be washed away. In fluid mechanics, if the water veins are thick, it is a turbulent flow. If the water veins are thin, then it is laminar flow (Riveros and Riveros-Rosas, 2010). When I became Rector of UN University, we introduced the concept of a UN University Hub. We needed to test the idea before implementing it, so we introduced the first Hub in Calgary, Canada (University of Calgary, 2023). Now that this hub is thriving (after sensing progress), we have launched hubs in Hamburg, Germany, and Lund, Sweden, and we look forward to launching UN University hubs in Africa.

6. A leader who tells a compelling story ignites the hearts of their followers, turning visions into shared realities

My grandmother was a great storyteller (Marwala, 2020). In the Venda culture, there is a system of storytelling (*Ngano*) to deliver messages (Luonde Vhavenda History, n.d.). *Ngano* is a Tshivenda word for fairytales, often told by family members, particularly mothers and grandmothers. My grandmother was a master of this type of storytelling. These stories are based on animals, such as rabbits, hares, hyenas, owls, and snakes, and the characters are often portrayed as mischievous, intelligent, unwise, cunning, unreliable, evil, or kind. Some of the characters in this story include *Sankambe*, who is thoughtful and playful, a trait used in diplomacy and managing complex situations. I often use these stories to explain complex engineering concepts and to lead.

7. A true leader's strength is measured not by their words but by the silent impact of their deeds

My grandmother always reminded me of the Venda proverb: *"Ndi mutonga kanwe ndi thumbu ya bvani."* A leader's effectiveness and the overall success of the team or organisation can be negatively impacted by their boastfulness. A negative and demotivating environment is established when leaders consistently boast about their accomplishments and exaggerate their capabilities. It can potentially alienate team members who may feel undervalued and overlooked. Boastful leaders frequently

encounter difficulties in establishing trust and rapport, as their primary objective is to promote themselves rather than foster genuine collaboration.

Furthermore, their exaggerated personalities can obstruct their ability to learn and develop by ignoring their deficiencies. An egotistical leader may be perceived as condescending and disconnected, which can make it challenging to inspire and earn the respect of others. In the end, their conduct may result in a lack of morale, high turnover rates, and lost opportunities for improvement.

8. Patience in a leader is not the absence of action, but the wisdom to wait for the right moment to act decisively

The virtue of patience is especially advantageous for a leader. A positive and productive work environment is fostered by a patient leader who ensures that team members feel heard and understood. A patient leader remains calm despite obstacles, setbacks, or conflicts, meticulously evaluating all available alternatives before deciding. This systematic approach generates superior solutions and fosters a sense of confidence and trust within the team. Effective communication and collaboration are facilitated by patience, as team members can easily share ideas and concerns without fear of being dismissed or hurried.

Additionally, a patient leader respects the learning and development process, acknowledging that errors are unavoidable and can serve as valuable opportunities for improvement. This method fosters an environment of perpetual learning and innovation. In the end, a patient leader establishes a more supportive and empowering environment, which results in improved overall results, higher engagement, and increased morale.

9. The boldness of a leader ignites the courage of many, turning dreams into daring deeds

A courageous leader can stimulate innovation and progress. A courageous leader is unafraid to challenge the status quo, press boundaries, and take calculated risks. They motivate their

team to pursue ambitious objectives, adopt novel concepts, and think creatively. A courageous leader exhibits resilience and determination in the face of adversity, motivating the team to persist and devise innovative solutions. They engender trust in their team's capacity to surmount challenges by making difficult choices and taking decisive action. That is, they demonstrate confidence. Bold leaders are also unashamed to express their opinions and advocate for their convictions, even in the presence of opposition. This authenticity and conviction may inspire others to emulate them. Ultimately, a courageous leader establishes a culture of courage, innovation, and ambition that can result in enduring success and innovative accomplishments. When my grandmother, who was selling clay pots, snuff, mats and homebrewed alcohol, realised that the snuff business was making a loss, she boldly closed it.

10. A leader who travels to distant places gathers the wisdom of the world, enriching their vision and guiding their people

Travel offers leaders invaluable experiences that can substantially improve their effectiveness. Leaders can develop a more comprehensive and well-rounded decision-making process by fostering a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives and a broader perspective through immersion in various cultures. Experiencing new environments and challenges also cultivates adaptability and resilience, which are indispensable attributes for successfully navigating the intricacies of leadership. Travel frequently exposes leaders to innovative ideas and practices not prevalent in their usual social contexts, stimulating creativity and fostering novel approaches. Furthermore, the development of cultural intelligence and empathy, which facilitates communication and collaboration with disparate teams and constituents, can be achieved by travelling to various regions of the globe. In general, travel has the potential to alter a leader's perspective, enhancing their adaptability, cultural awareness, and open-mindedness, thereby enhancing their capacity to lead effectively in

a world that is becoming more interconnected. As my grandmother would often quote a Tshivenda proverb: *"Wa sa tshimbila u mala khaladzi"*, meaning "You don't travel, *you marry your sister*." When I was exploring going to study in America, my grandfather enthusiastically encouraged me, stating that living so far away from me would greatly expand my horizons.

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7

An Ode to the Two Women Who 'Made me a Person'[1]

Tinyiko Maluleke

My Mother

Enter the blaring brass band, the drum major and the drum majorettes in tow - marching to the rolling sound of finely tuned African drums of various sizes and various octaves. When the pace of the drums decreases, the announcer's voice rose. "Ladies and gentlemen, I present to you, Mamayila Mabyeletela Maluleke neé Shiviti, a young woman of poise and grace, daughter of Mhlava Jack Shiviti and Madzivandlela Ntavasi Shiviti, the first of four siblings, a loving mother of four, and a longsuffering Penelope in matrimony" (Ndebele, 2003). Loud applause, frantic ululations and hysterical halalas rang out, as my mother, Mamayila Mabyeletela Shiviti, walked in and swaggered across the large stage of life. She swung her *xibelani* (traditional padded skirt of Vatsonga women) this way and that way. Her large earrings swayed gracefully beneath her ears. The gold-plated arm bangles jangled, the foot bracelets tinkled, and the loose-hanging necklaces sparkled in her large oval eyes. A radiant halo hovered over her afro hair as she walked across the stage of life on earth.

Hardly a month after Barry Hertzog finally got his 'Hetzog Bills' passed (Brookes, 1936), just as Hitler was

1 See Augustine Shutte's erudite argument that personhood is not a given state of being, but an aspirational state to be acquired and realised (Shutte, 2018).

warming up to his two-year-old role as the Führer of Germany, the Xavunyami village midwives announced my mother's birth. She was born on 28 May 1936. Her father, Mhlava Jack Shiviti was disappointed that his newborn daughter was not a boy. However, his wife Madzivandlela Ntavasi Shiviti sat in lotus position, tightly embracing her newborn child, singing the Xitsonga version of the song, *Lullaby*: *thula sthandwa sami, thula* (Belafonte and Makeba, 1965). In a society where childlessness was the ultimate badge of shame and stigma for women, Ntavasi appreciated her inestimable fortune and welcomed her girl child with tremendous joy. Under her mother's abundant love and her father's grudging affection, she had as happy a childhood as the villages of her youth could offer. Her first few years on earth were spent in the village of Xavunyami, on the banks of the Levubu River. But after her father's death, she moved with her mother back to ka-Mtsetweni village – a village which clung, as if for dear life, to the southern side of the tall Mashao hill. Mamayila Mabyeletela and her age mates crisscrossed the village searching for delicious termites and locusts. They loved the taste of the wild fruits that grew on the hundreds of trees in the forest that covered the landscape. On hot summer days, the giggling youngsters would pick wildflowers and run all the way down to the Majemani River to splash, swim and frolic. By age 15, Mamayila and her fellow female age mates were put through the prescribed puberty rites – meant to prepare them for marriage.

One day, while Mamayila and her agemates were drawing water from the fountain by the Majemani rivulet, a boy from the outskirts of the Valdezia Mission Station, some 25 kilometres away from ka-Mtsetweni village, proposed love to Mamayila. His name was Obed Huhlwani Maluleke. He had taken momentary refuge at his own maternal grandmother's home, ka-Mtsetweni village, after a petty misdemeanour back home at Valdezia. Young Mamayila was so taken aback by such a bold, loud, repeated and very public declaration of love that she hastily withdrew from the fountain crowd and ran

away home. That, apparently, is how my mother, Mamayila Mabyeletela Shiviti, daughter of Mhlava Jack Shiviti and Madzivandlela Ntavasi Shiviti, met my father, Obed Huhlwani Maluleke, son of Mnene Huhlwani Maluleke and Sevengwani Maluleke. Upon the completion of the premarital rites and rituals involving a herd of cattle, traditional beer, exchanges of ground tobacco snuff, rowdy singing, and vigorous dancing amidst jubilant ululations, Obed and Mamayila were married in the mid-1950s. I am the third of the children they had together.

My mother did not stick around for long. In those days, young black women died easily, and they died early. Childbirth, hypertension, hunger, heartache, and hopelessness conspired and took turns to claim black female lives by the dozens. Young black women also died from waiting. Waiting for rains, waiting for the water wells to fill up, waiting for letters from migrant lovers, waiting for sons and daughters to grow up and waiting for the elusive happiness they once dreamt of. Early in February 1965, the very year that Mandela was allowed his first visitor in Robben Island, while Hendrik Verwoerd was violently deploying his homeland system across the land, even as Robert Sobukwe languished in solitary confinement, Mamayila Mabyeletela Maluleke died suddenly.

There are two versions of precisely where and exactly when she died - thanks to the brittleness of oral tradition and the tenuousness of memory. According to one version, she died peacefully under the shade of a large fig tree near her marital home. In terms of the alternative version, she died inside a hut at her marital home on the outskirts of the Valdezia Mission Station, surrounded by the women of the family, including her younger sister. A day or two before she died, she had lost her ability to speak. Apparently, just before she breathed her last breath, she raised her right hand and, using her fingers, signaled the sign for the number four. Her younger sister – Mhani Ndaheni - insists that through the number four hand sign, my mother intended to communicate the following message: 'Take care of my four little children'. And Mhani Ndaheni did.

My mother was 29 years old when she passed on. I was just a little over three years old. Since then, she has been the most present absence in my life. I have felt her absent presence at every sharp curve and at every crucial stage in my life. I guess that's one way of explaining the inexplicable, formative influence and impact of someone physically absent yet so palpably present. I myself am the concrete evidence that once upon a very short time, my mother and I coexisted, first when I was in her womb, later when she cuddled me as a baby and when she watched me take my first step as a toddler.

Whenever I have felt like I am losing my bearings in life, the assured love of my absent-yet-present mother has steadied me and enabled me to correct my course, throughout my life. When I was a teenager, she and I spoke often, even though she was not physically present. Our favourite conversation times were just before I fell asleep or just before I snapped out of my celestial morning reveries. To date, I continue to have long conversations with my mother. In this way, she has been my confidante, companion, interlocutor and intercessor, all at once.

A lot is made of parental (physical) presence nowadays, especially in light of the widespread phenomenon of absent fathers. But presence is not merely or only physical. If it was, it wouldn't be such a vexatious problem. Fathers and mothers accused of parental absence are seldom only or purely physically absent. There are many other ways in which they are absent. Indeed, some kids might have been better off with absent parents; than to have present parents whose actual presence brings more trauma and pain than nurture.

My deceased mother may have been physically absent for most of my life, but she has been and remains present in every other way. Before following her ancestors, she made sure that I had all the love and all the strength to enable me to navigate my life journey. As the curtain of my mother's life came down, the curtain of my budding life was raised. I have no physical memory of her laughter, diction or affection. And yet, I feel as if I know by heart the hilarity of her voice, the softness of

her touch and the warmth of her compassion. For me, there is no doubt that without the protection of my mother's spirit, my life would have been much harder. But her presence in my life was not metaphorical or merely imaginary. She was also present through the women who took over the nurturing and mothering role from her.

My Grandmother

Let us rewind back to 12 June 1912 - one year before the enactment of the infamous 1913 Native Land Act, five months after the establishment of the African National Congress, and one month before the beginning of Word War I. In the early morning of that day, there was a swathe of redness that hung like a crown of gold, over the Soutpansberg mountains of the Transvaal - as the region was known then. On that day, the Levubu River awaited dawn with anticipation, as its leaping waters increasingly reflected the rising sun. The black inhabitants of the dozen or so villages scattered along the banks of the river also waited for a new day, literally and figuratively. Suddenly, in one of the villages on the northern side of the Rivubye, the silence of dawn was rudely interrupted. The furious sound of the kudu horn echoed across the valleys and rolling hills that punctuated the terrain. It was followed by the gut-wrenching summons of the big village drum – a sound that hit one's chest like a sledgehammer - designed to shake the most profound slumber off the most lethargic village somnambulist. The sound signalled an important village announcement – usually a death, a birth or a rebirth – rebirths facilitated by various village rites of passage.

This time, the sound of the kudu horn and the beat of the big drum signalled the birth of my grandmother – Ntavasi, Madzivandlela N'wa-Diki Maswanganyi - the second child and the only daughter amongst the four children of Dick Baloyi and his second wife, Phoseka Baloyi neé Gaveni. The stories of Ntavasi's childhood are written in the forests that grew like a moustache along the Levubu River. There she played hide and seek with other children from her village. On the banks of that

river, they were taught the ancient songs and the ancient arts of the village. While my grandmother was not a great singer – owing to her rather faint voice – she was a great maker of pots, weaver of baskets and rugs – arts she had acquired from the older women of the village, including her own mother, Phoseka Gaveni.

But alas, as a girlchild, the script of Ntavasi's life was written in almost indelible ink. In Xavunyami society, girls were reared and nurtured for one end – marriage. In those days, marriage was the all-consuming and ultimate goal in the life of a girlchild. Girls were taught that they were like 'a chicken reared for possible gifting to important visitors' (*wanhwana i huku yo khomela vayeni*). Not only should girls be ready to be 'gifted away'; they were required to 'make themselves worthy' of being gifted away into marriage. Accordingly, my grandmother was deemed ready to be 'gifted away' into marriage shortly after puberty. She became the second wife of a migrant mineworker named Mhlava Jack Shiviti – a man probably old enough to be her father.

Before we stampede into sighs of glee, self-congratulation and feigned 'relief' that we are no longer that society that 'gives girl children away', let us take a minute to think about the tremendous marriage pressure women continue to endure in contemporary society. The pressures may not be as blatant and overt as they used to be, but they remain as stubborn, persistent and widespread as ever. Indications are that, in many countries the world over, more money is invested in the education of young males than in the education of females. Indeed, even when the females end up top of their class and pass with flying colours, the males usually get the jobs, especially the top jobs. Before we cheat ourselves into thinking that our society is better than the society in which my grandmother grew up, a hundred years ago, let us reflect on these persistent inequalities. While employers the world over chant the slogan of 'no work no pay' as soon as workers raise a single finger in protest about working conditions, spare a thought for the millions of women whose domestic work is not even recognised as work, let alone

work that is worthy of remuneration. And yet, the economies of every country rest on the unpaid and unrecognised work of women.

The Shiviti homestead, into which my grandmother was married, lay smack in the middle of Xavunyami Village, a village perched upon the fertile tract of land on the northern banks of the Levubu River. By the time my mother was born in 1936 - the first of the two daughters born to Ntavasi and Jack Shiviti - the apartheid regime had forcibly removed the residents of Xavunyam Village to the southern side of Levubu River, much further away from the river, on barren land. In this way, the white government 'cleared the ground' – literally – for white people to settle on the fertile part of the land and in that way, take full advantage of the 1913 Native Land Act. This obnoxious pattern was monotonously repeated across the country. In one short generation, the black people who lived in the dozen or so villages along both sides of the banks of the Levubu River were systematically rendered landless, cattle-less and penniless.

By the time my grandmother gave birth to her first child in the 1930s, the cattle wealth and food security systems into which she herself was born in 1912 had long evaporated – thanks to the ruthless efficiency with which the 1913 Land Act was implemented. With the loss of land, came the loss of livelihood and dignity. So much so that the former residents of Xavunyami Village went back to the place that they used to call home with their tails between their legs - in search of gainful employment – as landless tenants in the newly established 'New England' (rendered *Nyonghilandi* by the locals). For a while, my grandmother resisted this eventuality. But when her husband, Jack Shiviti, died, she was compelled to become a farm worker in New England herself. How else would she have raised her two girl children, the first of whom was my own mother?

But the girls were so young; she had to carry the youngest of them – mhani Ndaheni - on her back as she toiled on the farm of a white man – nicknamed "the Partridge"

(*N'hwari*) by the workers. This was because no matter how early the workers arrived 'the Partridge' would already be at work. It was rumoured that he slept only for three hours per night and that he spent the rest of night walking up and down the length and breadth of his fields. 'Surely he's not a human being, he is a partridge', some workers surmised. One day, the Partridge offered Grandma Ntavasi some hair-raising advice: "Why don't you throw that baby into the Levubu River, so you can focus on the work for which I pay you?"

From then on, my grandmother realised that Partridge's farm was not a place to raise a child. She knew she had to leave sooner rather than later. And she did. This was when she met a local herbalist of great repute called Dumazi Jan Maswanganyi. He promised her heaven and earth. Maswanganyi made her his fourth, youngest and for a while, his favourite wife. But Grandma was, once again, unlucky in marriage. A few years into her second marriage, Maswanganyi died. He left her in the hands of his other wives and their children. He also left her with two more children of her own – a boy and a girl. Life became so hard that she had no choice but to return to the Partridge and beg for a job. How humiliating! It was at this time that she renamed herself – 'Nhlupheki' – the suffering one.

Fast forward to that fateful day in February 1965 when Grandma Nhlupheki attended the funeral of her first-born – my mother. She had lost two husbands before. But the loss of her first-born daughter pierced through her heart like a red-hot sword. She was inconsolable. Amidst the crowd of mourners at my mother's funeral, she felt most alone in her grief. Above all, she worried about the grandchildren she now had to adopt as her own children. In hindsight, this is a job she did very well, if only because she marshalled, orientated and enlisted her other daughters to help her raise her motherless grandchildren.

Neither Grandma Nhlupheki nor her daughter, Mamayila Mabyeletela, my mother, were celebrities of any kind. They had no struggle credentials. They were not in the front of the

queue during the famous 1956 women's march on the Union Buildings. At that time they were preoccupied with the small matters of daily survival in rural Limpopo. Nor were they leading lights in science or education. They stand no chance in hell of ever receiving a National Order. Neither my mother nor my Grandma would make it into a book about great South African achievers or inventors. However, these two women invented life for their children and grandchildren. And here is the thing; my mother and my grandmother are not that unique. This country has hundreds and thousands of Mamayilas and Ntavasi –unacknowledged and unsung.

As a child I have committed some serious misdemeanours against my grandmother. I once burnt her winter's harvest of rondavel roof thatch. Allegedly, I was trying to cook something in there. Grandma was beside herself with anger. She ranted, raged and cursed. And all I could do was bawl. But suddenly, as she watched her thatch go up in smoke, she drew me close and embraced me tightly. Both of us were crying out loud. While we were still locked in that loving embrace, along came a man called Nkanyani, the local Zionist[2] preacher-man. My aunt, Mhani Ndaheni, often took me with her to Nkanyani's Zionist Church (Sundkler, 1948) on Sundays. There, I would be soaked and marinated in the vigorous Zionist dances and repetitive songs of praise. During the circular Zionist dances, I clung to Mhani Ndaheni's *xibelani* skirt for dear life. Between the increasing speed of the dancing, the rhythm of the drumbeat and the loud singing, I would lose my bearings and become dizzy, so I ended up lying face-down at the centre of the dancing circle. There, I would fall into deep sleep, with Nkanyani's domineering baritone voice providing me with an inexplicable lullaby, only to wake up when the singing and the dancing suddenly stopped.

But on the day of my grave misdemeanour, preacher man Nkanyani's voice had none of those calming effects.

2 Zionist churches are a type of so-called African Independent Churches and should not be confused with Zionism, often linked with the state of Israel.

He came pushing his hanging pot belly like a wheelbarrow towards me and my grandmother, calling out biblical names in rhyming staccato: Isaiah, Nehemiah, Zecharia, Maria, Hoseah and Jerrrremiyaaah! As if those were abracadabras that could stop the burning of my grandmother's thatch! Once Nkanyani had heard the full story, he wrested me from my grandmother's embrace and proceeded to give me the hiding of my life. Immediately, I added Nkanyani and all members of his Zionist church to my hate list. After all, my Grandma and I had forgiven one another. Who gave Nkanyani the right to punish a poor kid like me? But such was village life – every adult had parental powers over all children.

One Wednesday in May 2011, I cried a river at the Giyani ward of Elim Hospital. On that day, I bid farewell to my grandmother Nhlupheki N'waDiki. She, who stood in the gap to ensure that I got a chance in life, after my mother died. She, who was determined to see me and my siblings through the worst. She, who was the only real evidence that once upon a very short time, I had a mother. She, who was my actual and real mother. She was the wisest and most forgiving human being I had ever known. As well as a delightfully sharp tongue, she had the most beautiful turn of phrase. Nowhere was her wit and grit more evident than in her storytelling. Everytime she told a tale she would start with the aphorism: "*Garingani wa garingani* (I am the storyteller of storytellers)", we the kids would eagerly respond: "*Garingani* (Tell the story)."

Grandma left me no bequest and no requests, no command and no demands. Except that, a month or so before she died, she paid me a memorable visit. She was hurried and impatient on that day. Refusing to sit on the sofa, she sat on the floor and inquired where the family shrine was located. I was trumped. I explained that, being a Christian, there was no shrine either inside or outside my house. With a smirk on her face, she issued a mocking laugh and started to sprinkle snuff on the floor, as she spoke loudly with the ancestors, defiantly beseeching them to bless and protect me and my family. That is how my living room was Christened a holy ancestral shrine. No wonder every time I watch a televised match involving the

Springboks on the TV set in that living room, the Springboks always win.

Surely, without the love, influence and protection of my mother and my grandmother, I wouldn't **be** a person.

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8

From Child Bride to a High-power Executive: The Amazing Journey of Mmathabo Sukati

Randall Carolissen

This is a story of a remarkable heroine and a role model for all women and those excluded from fundamental human rights and banished to the fringes of society. It is an incredible journey of courage, determination, and vision, almost a fairytale in the making. It tells a story of how a young teenage mother with no education made sacrifices beyond belief to rise to occupy some of the most powerful executive positions in corporate South Africa whilst shielding her children from the unavoidable trauma, ensuring that they achieve their full potential.

It bears testimony to the incredible strength of our mothers, who, through no fault of their own, had to assume the role of both parents, as males were shipped off to different parts of the country for work, emasculated by the daily humiliation of a society built on the disempowerment of the black man. The victory over such severe psychological and physical trauma must be documented and discussed, as it has been shown that storytelling is probably the most effective remedy for severe trauma. Therefore, although when reading this story, one is often overwhelmed with sadness, it is also a story of survival, conquering the odds and the purpose of life. This story so unselfishly shared is a gift to our society beset with gender-based violence and our often defeatist attitude to this scourge. It calls into question the adage that men own their women, and this entitlement is along to propriety. It

speaks to the incredible strength of our mothers and the fierce love they hold and execute for their children.

Becoming a child bride

Her early childhood, especially how it shaped her as an African woman?

Mmathabo grew up in Sabie, a small town on the beautiful escarpment in the province of Mpumalanga in South Africa . The idyllic lifestyle which one would expect from such natural beauty masked and belied the horror of forced teenage marriages that young girls are vulnerable to.

She described her family as dysfunctional, with her father, now deceased, a teacher who became an alcoholic, her mother a nurse and an older brother who traipsed in the footsteps of his father, mimicking him in his drinking behaviour. "My father wasn't really functional as far as being present in the family. He drank to the point where if he 'didn't have any alcohol, he would shake. He was like those people that shake when they don't drink or 'don't have alcohol. He was so absent that I cannot even describe him or remember him being abusive." Now living with her, her mother is a retired nurse who desperately tried to keep the family financially on an even keel, investing all her time in her nursing career. The only other sibling was also an alcoholic from a very young age. He died because of alcohol, having been hit in a drunken state by a car in 2012.

She found refuge with her aunt Rose, her mother's relative, a spiritual person she was very close to. She was told that "Rose looked after her when she was still a baby, and that is maybe where the bond was created. From a young age I attended church with her and that is where I got grounded in my faith." She came to live with them when Mmathabo's mother had to go to Johannesburg for a nursing course, as her dad was in a constant state of intoxication.

"I was a very, very intelligent child, always at the top of the class, and the teachers loved me. I would describe myself, that as a child I was a bit of a dreamer, dreaming about a future free of despair and shame of my family. My school friends would describe me as cool, intelligent, quiet, [and] reserved."

Mmathabo's life changed for the worse at the end of Grade 10 when she was forced into an arranged marriage. "I think the mastermind of my arranged marriage was my mom because my dad was barely functional."

This man, to whom she became his second wife, was 24 years older than her and was not educated beyond high school. A township entrepreneur, owning several grocery shops, a tavern and a bottle store. (Throughout the interview, she could not bring herself to call him by his name or even refer to him as an ex-husband; she constantly referred to him as that man.) She guessed her mother thought she would have a comfortable life with him. Perhaps a life better than the one she was living. When this union was first proposed, Mmathabo refused to accede and cried; "I'm still a child and I want to finish school and become a medical doctor."

She thinks her mother thought it was the best thing and that she was protecting her, but it was a harrowing experience. Trying to escape this desperate flow of events, she ran away from home during the December school break and stayed with friends in Middelburg in Mpumalanga. This triggered a family search, but she managed to evade capture when most families joyously spend Christmas together.

However, she had to go back to school to continue into Grade 11 and so in January, she enrolled in a boarding school in an area called Bushbuckridge, which is not too far from Sabie.

So she thought, from Middleburg, she would quickly dash home, get her bags, and return to school. But that was not to be. When she got home, she was locked in by her mother and other people in the community. She was forced to stay and was forcefully given to this man. "I don't like him being called my ex-husband."

"He was already married, so I was basically a second wife". At age 15, she stayed with these two much older people. By the age of 21, within six years, she bore four children to this man, as his first wife didn't or couldn't have children. She was abused terribly physically and emotionally by both and was told that she must give this man as many children as possible. "Basically, I was a baby-making machine and I was beaten severely whenever found with contraceptives of any sort. Even though my own family knew about the abuse they felt helpless and implored on me to make the marriage work, a phenomenon that can be described by many abused women who are financially vulnerable and utterly dependent on the income of a partner." She had no help from anyone, and all she could do was to pray a lot in the only safe space of her room.

Just before turning 21, she gave birth to her fourth child. In her own reality, this coming of age ironically meant to her the signalling of adulthood. This realisation was emancipatory because she felt she could or should take charge of her life. It was a watershed moment as she was thinking about committing suicide all the time, and only her motherly instincts gave her any feeling of self-worth. She decided to run away once again and return to complete school.

She started to plan her escape. When seeking help from her parents, they actively discouraged her from leaving the marriage even though they knew that that man didn't want her to take contraceptives and that he was beating her up - physically abusing her. Her mother regretted the decision to marry her off as a child, but she felt she had no power to help her out.

Under the pretence of visiting her mother, Mmathabo left her marital home and found refuge with a lady friend, Lindiwe Mokoena, in Bushbuckridge. "I left the 3 kids with their father and my fourth one with my mom as she was still a baby. If I had not left, I would have committed suicide. So, it was either I leave, go start a new life and then come back for the kids or, you know, I just commit suicide and leave this world."

She re-entered school in Grade 11. "I'm still friends with Lindiwe today because she helped me out a lot. Her parents were working in Joburg at the time of my going back to school. She provided me with shelter." Lindiwe herself had two children, and she knew Mmathabo from a young age, even before being forced into marriage. Both young ladies returned to school and were in the same class at Ngwaritsane Secondary School in Bushbuckridge.

With many mouths to feed, they had no income and nobody to turn to. They bought and sold vegetables to raise money for food, buy uniforms, and pay school fees.

So that's how Mmathabo went back to school. But she was not entirely free. "This man would come sometimes at the school. He would come and wait at the gate when school was out and pull me into the car forcefully in front of teachers and in front of other kids. I was just a laughingstock of that school. He would drive me to the bushes and rape me and beat me up. It was just a very, very emotional time, but eventually, he stopped doing that because he saw I wasn't budging."

"My school was 45 minutes' drive by taxi from my parents. So I would stay with my mom on weekends or school holidays. I would ask for the kids to visit me there for the weekend or during the school holidays."

During her Grade 11 year, her dad passed away, and her mother had some money from his pension because he was a teacher. Mmathabo would later get R9,000 from this money to go to university for her first year in 1993.

Mmathabo completed her Matric at Promat College in Nelspruit with all her subjects in Higher Grade, including Mathematics and Physical Science, in 1992. "It was a very difficult year as I was at boarding school at Promat College. I was depressed and I isolated myself from other people, with no counselling available. However, prayer and my deep spiritual roots got me through. My mom, who was now supportive of me returning to school, paid for my fees using my dad's pension. I got a letter of regret from the University of Natal and applied for the nursing program at Baragwanath Hospital."

Her initial career choice post-matric was to become a nurse, which would provide income while she was studying. Somehow, her classmates convinced her to consider being a chartered accountant. She applied to the Universities of KwaZulu-Natal and Cape Town without knowing how she would fund her studies. Her mother offered her the R9,000 left in her dad's pension. She was accepted at the University of Cape Town (UCT) into the extended degree programme (EDP) for people from a disadvantaged background.

"Being far away from home was sad for me and the kids, but I realised it would help me to be away from this man so that he wouldn't follow me. You know he 'won't be able to reach me, but it was painful to leave the kids as well."

Going to University in Cape Town, leaving the children behind in Mpumalanga

When she went to university, it was a massive leap of faith. Her life experience seriously impacted her, but she knew she was confident in her maturity. As a child, she never knew what an accountant was all about. At some point, given her severe trauma, she even thought of exiting the programme, changing, and going to do psychology. However, after much research, she decided to stay in the programme.

"I did know how I was going to pay for my studies and accommodation as I only had R9,000 from my mom."

I think the University fees were R35,000 or something like that for tuition and accommodation. I went to UCT with my mother, who only paid for the bus ticket and gave me the R9,000. I trusted God for the rest. One of the first few friends I met at UCT introduced me to the financial aid office. Although she was late for applications for financial aid, UCT still had funds available from the IBM endowment, and even though it was not enough, she could get started with her studies. Later, she was assisted with a student loan of about R14,000 from Standard Bank.

"So that's how I paid for my first year, and then from second year to my honours year, the University's financial aid office offered me a bursary from Sainsbury Trust fund from the United Kingdom."

While the degree she chose is not easy, the first year was bridging, which she did not find difficult, and English and Accounting required the most attention.

Given the severe trauma, it was instructive how Mmathabo related to her fellow students. Would that be an older, wiser sister, a mother figure, or would she just enjoy the carefree life of a student to escape the trauma she was subjected to?

She described university adjustment as being tough. Interesting enough, "I didn't mention that I went for counselling for my own trauma, when I was at university. I consulted with a psychologist from Groote Schuur Hospital and had to attend support group sessions at the hospital with other abused women. I had to constantly remind myself who I was, where I came from, and what responsibilities I had. After all, on average, I was six years older than my peers. This meant I could not play around and had to stay focused on my goals. It also meant I had to complete my studies at minimum time so I could return to my kids."

She isolated herself from student parties and social activities because she was dealing with issues relating to her maternal responsibilities and didn't want to be asked questions. She seldom participated in group activities because she felt different and wouldn't allow people to get close to her. Aside from her study group, she had very few friends at university. "That's why I was so quiet, and I had never gone to any party in the five years I was there. For the five years at UCT, my only entertainment was the occasional movies I would watch on my own. Only many years later, when I tell them my story, they understand". She spent her time studying and catching up with her kids most days, using a large part of her food allowance (from the bursary) on telephone calls. Although still at primary school, her firstborn had to play

mother to the other two siblings, staying with their dad. Mmathabo would, in the evening, guide them through their homework and discuss their well-being as any concerned and nurturing mother would.

She completely immersed herself in her studies. After finishing her classes and having attended to her motherly duties, she would join her study group. This group stayed in two apartment blocks owned by the University of Cape Town in Rondebosch and met Mondays to Thursdays, then continuing with her late into the night. With this focused attitude, the group managed to get through this programme. "I must tell you more than half of our class didn't make it to the end."

When she completed her first degree, the temptation to go and work and reestablish her family was great. In for a penny, in for a pound. She decided to bite the bullet and continue to her BCom (honours) and CTA (Certificate in the Theory of Accounting), the pathway to the Board Examinations to become a Chartered Accountant. With her work ethic firmly established, she found that what is usually a very challenging hurdle was relatively easy to overcome. Her disciplined performance attracted the attention of several accounting companies, and she applied for articles in pursuit of board examinations.

Entering the workplace, towards financial independence.

During her final year (BCom (Hons)), she had to select an audit firm to complete her articles. Her choice fell on Coopers & Lybrand. They later merged with Price Waterhouse to become PricewaterhouseCoopers International Limited (PwC).

Like all other audit companies, they would visit the universities just before final examinations to recruit students.

The PwC Johannesburg office campus appointment list was full, and the PwC Pretoria had only two spaces left, and that's how she ended up in Pretoria. PwC paid R20,000 to tie her in during her final year at UCT, which was a massive boost for her. She could secure an apartment in Sunnyside, a suburb

in Pretoria, and she considered this her first natural step towards independence.

Serving her articles at PwC laid her career foundation. She was given great opportunities to serve clients in various sectors, including banks, pension funds, telecoms, manufacturing, private schools and more. She left PwC for two years and went to the now Stanlib but returned later as a Manager in the Advisory Practice and worked her way up to become a Partner. The process of being admitted as a partner was not an easy one. She had to be nominated by another partner and go through various assessments, including the final interview with senior partners operating at a global level.

She subsequently left PwC as a partner to join the South African Revenue Service (SARS) as the Group Executive for Internal Audit. At that time, Commissioner Gordhan led SARS through a massive modernisation agenda. "PwC and Stanlib laid a foundation for my career, but SARS groomed me to be a strategist, a governance expert, and a force to be reckoned with." She also completed her MBA while at SARS. Observing the evolution of the successful modernisation agenda and the pace at which this programme unfolded taught her a lot as an assurance provider. It stretched her thinking on approaching audits and advisory work more strategically and proactively. The support for her work from the leadership of SARS was tremendous and encouraging.

From SARS, she joined Transnet as the Chief Audit Executive. At the time, Transnet had the biggest Internal Audit function on the continent. The diverse nature of the business further stretched her thinking and required more proactive work. It was a complex operational environment which required that she shift the audit focus from the traditional ways of work to a more operationally focused approach while still executing the traditional audits.

Currently, she is in the telecommunications industry's risk management and compliance space. Her role is that of an enabler to the business which continues to strengthen her governance expertise.

Reintegrating the family

So, it's clear that you had the spiritual but actual strength to deal with many things that would have caused others to falter.

She started integrating her children into a family unit before completing her qualifications at UCT.

"My bursary covered all my university expenses, food and travel allowance during university breaks." She used her allowance for bus tickets to go home, and on some occasions, benefactors would top it up by paying for a flight ticket for the 2,000km trip home. The children would then stay with her through the summer and winter holiday breaks. She believes this made up for her extended periods away from them and kept the bond strong with the children because of the constant phone calls.

"During my first year of articles, January 1998, I met Mr. Sukati, a very kind and loving man who would later become my husband." He was financially secure because he had a well-paying job as a director in a government department and was kind enough to get me off the ground. He bought our first house and helped me fetch my kids from Mpumalanga at the end of December 1998. My first-born started her Grade 8 in Pretoria in 1999 while the other three kids were in primary school. As a trainee auditor, I was paid just over R2,000 net per month. This was not sufficient for a single mother with 4 children. At times, things became desperate, and there was no food on the table, but somehow, we made it."

"Taking the kids from their dad in Mpumalanga was not an easy process as he was using them to hurt me. He would, for example, at times refuse for them to come to stay with me at my mom's house during school holidays. So, when I went to fetch them in December 1998 and requested school transfers, there were a lot of arguments and friction, but eventually, the kids requested to go to Pretoria with me."

In retrospect, the thought never even crossed her mind that the kids would require counselling as they did not show any signs of distress or have challenges in the transition.

Her oldest daughter occasionally became emotional about the plight foisted on her having to play mother whilst still in primary school. Fortunately, this trauma of her oldest daughter never manifested itself as being debilitating or destructive, and today, she is living a very productive life as a professional lady and a well-adjusted mother.

They were moving from where they were to where they wanted to be throughout their young lives. "They were waiting patiently to come and live with me, even though it took so very long. Perhaps what they had was, you know, going to church, praying, trusting God. We prayed, and I mean, they still remind me that we used to pray together every evening. Each child was allocated a day to read a devotional, and we would pray together as a family. We had a set time where we all gathered in the lounge every evening for devotions and prayer."

Her life philosophy and ethos by which she lived

Is there anything you want to point out to people who come from this traumatic background to perhaps look out for so that they don't get trapped in trauma?

"Yeah, my motto of life then was 'The world doesn't owe me anything. It's up to me to reach my dreams.'"

Mmathabo sometimes felt like there was this Divine navigation of her life and a Godly intervention when things went awry. "I don't know how to explain it, but it was like somebody was guiding me all the time. If I found myself stressing about how difficult my life had been or if I started blaming my parents and that man and other people who were involved, I would hear this inner voice telling me not to dwell in the past but rather to focus on my future. I would hear this voice saying just forgive and move on. I had to forgive all these people so I could release myself from the situation and move on."

When she looked at her mother, she could easily have apportioned blame for messing up her life. But instead of blaming, she felt she'd be wasting her time and energy.

"Because even if I can scream at her, I can't go back and start again. So, instead of focusing on that, let me move forward. So, I trusted God that, you know, He's got me. So, I had confidence that if I stayed focused and persevered, I would achieve my goals. This made me result-oriented in that once I set a goal, I drive the relevant activities to produce the required outcome, which mostly exceeds expectations."

This attitude taught her not to take offence easily. For example, whenever there were arguments and conflicts in the workplace or other places, she would focus more on the objective of the task at hand and not dwell on petty issues. "Life can be tough. So many people have endured so much in life, but it is all how you respond to the challenges you face that carve out the path to your future. Excuses do not get you anywhere."

Being single-minded was also one of the few qualities that she developed due to the trauma she experienced. "For example, I had to shut out other voices from my mind when I returned to school after my 4th child. Many people from the community who did not help prevent my trauma, by the way, were laughing at me, saying why go back to school when you already have four children. They would say 'Do you think you will achieve anything? You're too old, and your peers are far ahead.' I had to block those voices out. Even in class in Grade 11, I was one of the oldest, but I had to be resilient, ignore any negative comments and stay focused.

Another quality that came out of my life experience was courage. I do not easily get discouraged by people. I also do not make emotional decisions most of the time. Even when publicly humiliated, I can maintain my composure and focus on my goals. I believe things happen for a reason. I constantly review every painful situation to assess and think about how I would deal with it in the future should I face the same challenge. I also determine what life is teaching me about every situation. At the end of the day, I am not defined by situations but by my Creator. This gives me the courage to handle different challenges.

I believe that so many women have endured so much abuse in life, and most of them struggle to get out of those situations. Some even get killed by their spouses. I believe if we as women speak out and share our life stories, we can help a lot of other women deal with their situations better."

Do you think single-mindedness could also be used to describe or explain your rapid rise through the ranks? And then when I met you, you were operating at the highest possible ranks in one of the SARS offices, which is one of the biggest operations in South Africa. That did contribute, but what about that, and what other factors can you ascribe your success to in your career?

In response, she stated empathetically, "Hard work, you know, I mean, I had to. I had four kids when I joined PwC; fortunately, PwC also was very supportive."

She continued her work ethic and worked until late at night, creating space for her kids, like fetching them from school and then continuing with her late into the night. She attributed her resilience to her spiritual life; often, when times were tough, she found inspiration and sustenance in the Bible.

"That has helped me a lot because when I do my job, I want to do it in such a way that, you know, the outcome must be as close to perfect as possible."

"With any project or task assigned to me, delivering on time or before time was non-negotiable. I try most of the time to deliver before time, and I do over and above what is expected."

She offers many lessons that we can take from employers as to how we deal with ladies who have family responsibilities and the dual role of being a mother, which is probably much more imposing than being a father.

However, there are more challenges to balancing family life and professional life.

What would you tell employers about what you've learned from that?

"Firms should find ways to get the most out of professionals whilst fully respecting their motherhood or their roles in their families and society."

If an employer supports female employees, they will get the best out of them. The flexibility displayed by PwC, allowing her to leave the office at 3 pm to fetch her children from school, was proportionally more than compensated for by the additional hours of work that she put in after hours and the diligence displayed in all the assigned work.

"You know, I made sure that after my work is done with the kids, homework and everything else in the evening, I still go sit and work because I didn't want to let them down. I was basically managed or motivated by delivery, not by time. A person can be present at the office from 8 to 5 but may only be productive for 2 hours. I found that the way I was managed was working well for me and the employer."

According to her, PwC was already doing so much for her, and so by supporting female employees in that manner, they understood that they had much more to gain. She can quote many examples of high-performing female employees having to leave and sacrifice their careers because employers did not display this empathy.

"I think if we look at it on a case by case basis, for instance, where a woman has small kids, are they going to primary school, does the employee have a driver that takes the kids to school, etcetera. We can come up with flexible policies that allow women to fulfil their professional responsibilities but also be there for their kids.

Also, let's not penalise female employees with kids; therefore, they cannot make it to the cocktails after work or the golf course over the weekend. They need to be there for their kids, but they also want the career progression. Let's find a way to balance all of this."

I want to spend the next 10 minutes talking about your children and what they have achieved.

"I am very proud of my children. I think that, you know, instilling those spiritual values in them has yielded great results. People always comment about how kind and thoughtful they are, which makes me happy"

Being reintegrated as a family played a big part in what her children achieved.

Her first-born, who had to stand in as a mother to her siblings while she was at primary school, is a medical doctor, and she's currently training as a specialist at the University of Pretoria. She is now a budding microbiologist. She is also an author of children' books, having published a few books.

Her second-born initially studied psychology but then went into information technology (IT). She now works as a business analyst for the First National Bank (FNB).

Her third-born has a Bachelor of Business Science in Finance and graduated with an MBA in April 2023 from GIBS (Gordon Institute of Business Science) as well. He also studied film and TV production. He is an entrepreneur.

Her fourth child is a chartered accountant, and she's currently an assistant manager at EY in Sandton. These are the four children from that other situation with that man, as she calls him.

With Mr Sukati, she also has a 20-year-old son, who is now studying IT on a soccer scholarship at the University of Texas.

Certainly, the things that you've mentioned in all we've been speaking about are valuable for leadership and / or and can contribute to debates or conversations about gender-based violence. Is there anything you would like to convey to women or even to men on those subjects?

"It is instructive to consider how the disenfranchised, particularly black women, now becoming part of the mainstream economy, continue to face marginalisation, often through wanton gender-based violence. Everybody has a role to play, and it should not be a fight against men but a fight

with men. We must educate our fathers, brothers and all men to love and respect women. The African culture of respecting and treating women with reverence must be invoked and nurtured. Often, gender-based violence narratives are replete with attacks on men and invoke failures by men to support their families as incendiary arguments. We must realise that many men abhor gender-based violence, and as a society, we must gather in alliance to address this scourge." Certainly, Mmathabo could have used her traumatic experience as a justifiable reason for turning against men. However, her spirituality and the recognition that she had could turn this into a learning experience for others to militate against this seduction.

How should men change their own image? How should men relate to women?

"Men, love your wives. Respect women, whether she's your wife or not. We women, we just want to be loved and respected. You know, we are easy, we easily return the favor to you. So, if we are respected by you, it's easy for us to open our hearts and just love you back. Because just like you men, women also have their own dreams and goals. Gender-based violence kills many women's goals. So, let's be careful and cautious in the way we deal with women."

"Men, go back to basics and take your position as a father, a real father, not just a biological father. Be a father to your kids and a loving husband to your wife, women and kids. Respect their rights and aspirations. Remember, just like you they also have dreams and aspirations. Do not be the one that destroys a woman's life."

Concluding wisdom

Emerging neuroscience and the study of the brain's plasticity show that conscious effort and the utter conviction for striving for one's dreams can rewire one's brain for success. It further develops techniques for preparing damaged brain cells, sharpening your other senses to compensate. This is not easily

achieved and requires utter dedication to live in this heady zone of achievement and a life of fulfilment.

Whilst this process of rewiring your brain is often voluntary, in the case of people like Ms Sukati, there is simply no alternative. Any option for not applying yourself will lead to failure and the failure of those dear to us. So, she had no choice but to make those sacrifices to carve out a life of fulfilment for herself and her children. Her odyssey finds resonance in Viktor Frankl's work, which examines life's purpose. His harrowing documentation of how survivors managed the ultimate horrors of the Nazi concentration camps is groundbreaking and guides how important the pursuit of life's purpose is. To live a life without purpose is like breathing whilst you are dead. But alas, not everybody is strong enough or has the universe in their favour. Your success requires grit. Angela Duckworth defines grit as passion and perseverance for long-term goals. As Angela Duckworth phrased it, "One way to think about grit is to consider what grit isn't. Grit isn't talent. Grit isn't luck. Grit isn't how intensely, for the moment, you want something."

Therefore, Ms Sukati's life story, described in extreme brevity, compromises the incentive and courage of those in utter despair and with no hope. Her story is especially poignant and relevant in our South African society, plagued by gender-based violence and exploitation of women and children. She stands tall as a woman of incredible courage and heroism, and her willingness to share it is not only brave or cathartic to herself but a natural special gift to our nation.

9

An Ode to Ten Women Who Have Taught Me Valuable Life Lessons

Alistair Mokoena

As a Christian, I believe God uses human beings to manifest His love for us and His wisdom so that we may feel His presence. I doubt that He places people in our lives to help us navigate this complex thing called life. We are called to submit to His will and purpose for our lives; therefore, it is only proper to follow His lead and His example.

He plants clues for us and leaves signposts in plain sight so that we may know how to go when facing life's crossroads. It is important to remember and acknowledge that all wisdom comes from God. Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV, 2011) says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and He will make your paths straight."

I dedicate this chapter to ten remarkable women who have left an indelible mark on my life. I am eternally grateful that God has placed these incredible women in various chapters of my life so I may know His love for me.

Lesson 1

Corinthians 13:13 (NIV, 2011) - "And now these three remain; faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."

A lesson by my wife, Mrs Nandi Mokoena

Thank you for teaching me about faith, hope and love. I see so much of God's goodness in you.

Your optimism and faith in humanity fill me with hope. Thank you for teaching me that love is a verb and that a verb is a doing word. You have taught me that actions speak louder than words. Your love for others never ceases to amaze me. Your kindness, selflessness and generosity of spirit are unparalleled. You have made many sacrifices for our family, and I thank you. You have been the biggest supporter of my career. I owe my success to you.

You have opened my eyes to God's deeds, my ears to His message, and my heart to His love. The lessons you continue to teach me have shaped the man I am today. Your grace and compassion have helped me grow. Your support and friendship have taught me the value of *Ubuntu*, and your love sustains me.

You have taught me the value of taking things in my stride instead of overthinking everything. You have taught me to relax and not be anxious. You have taught me perspective and optimism. Because of you, I now cut myself slack and am more patient with myself. This has allowed me to treat others with grace.

Lesson 2

Romans 12:12-14 (NIV, 2011) - "Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse."

A lesson by my mother: Dr Joyce Mokoena

Mother, not a day goes by when I don't feel your love for your family. Every time I speak to you, I learn something new. I knew all of life's most important lessons from you and Dad. As much as you are a dreamer, you are also a realist. You taught me that being an optimist does not mean wearing rose-tinted glasses. You have taught me to confront reality because, as you say, challenges are a given. All we can control is how we respond to these challenges. You have taught me that, just as

every door has a key, every problem has a solution, and every setback is followed by recovery.

You have taught me that every human being is responsible for spreading love and hope. You taught me to open my home to others and to share the little that I have with those in need. You taught me that no matter your circumstances, there is hope for all of us to reach our destiny. All we have to do is find our purpose and live by it. We have to pray for clarity of purpose and pray more for strength and courage to stay the course.

I am inspired by your giving heart. Your generosity of spirit fuels me. You taught me forgiveness, grace and mercy. You taught me to pray for and bless my enemies instead of cursing them.

You taught me that to choose peace is not to surrender. You also taught me that it is not essential to win every fight. Reconciliation is always the best way forward, especially if a relationship is essential to you. Relationships need nurturing. Therefore, we must adopt a long-term view of relationship building and avoid short-termism.

Lesson 3

2 Corinthians 12:9 (NIV, 2011) - "My power is made perfect in weakness."

A lesson by my late mother-in-law: Dr Imelda Mpikashe

Thanks for teaching me that it's ok to embrace vulnerability and that it is possible to feel secure in a moment of weakness because God protects the vulnerable. Throughout life's challenges, you rely on God to guide, protect, and strengthen you. After losing your husband at a young age, you single-handedly raised two beautiful daughters while studying medicine. Through your deeds, I am reminded of 2 Timothy verses 1 to 7, which say, "for God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but a spirit of power and love and a sound mind."

God threw his protective armour over your family because of your faith. When life dealt you lemons, you firmly believed that God would turn these into lemonade. In Setswana, we say *"mosadi otshwara thipa kamo bogaleng"* which literally means a woman holds a knife on the blade side. This speaks to your protective and nurturing qualities as a mother.

As a loving matriarch, you were our pillar of strength. A sage who provided wise counsel and a good Samaritan who shared all she had with the less fortunate. As a doctor in private practice, I remember how you used to attend to the sick even when they couldn't afford to pay you. When you ran a hospital, you displayed the utmost patience and compassion. Through you, I learned the principle that "your work is your prayer."

You were a God-fearing woman. You praised and worshipped the Lord in everything you did and gave thanks in all situations. You led by example, and through you, the Bible came alive. You used words to teach and to build. You often pointed at your knees and said, "remember to kneel down and take everything to God in prayer." Thank you for raising your daughters in the ways of the Lord, for they, too, have raised their offspring in the ways of the Lord. Your legacy lives on.

Lesson 4

Proverbs 31:26-29 (NIV, 2011) - "She opens her mouth in wisdom; kindly instruction is on her tongue. She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness."

A lesson by my late maternal grandmother, Mrs Elizabeth Pooe

Throughout your life, you were love and wisdom personified. It's been years since you passed on, but your wise words have carried me to this day. You were as sharp as a scalpel and as wise as an owl. You taught me that practising *Ubuntu* is worth more than chasing money and that being kind is more important than being right. When Grandpa died, you filled the gap he left and led us all with grace and poise as a wise and powerful matriarch. You raised so many children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren with the patience of Job.

You were such a brilliant cook and host. Mealtimes at home have left me with the best soul food memories. I now know the role of soul food in keeping a family together. Thank you for passing your recipes on to your daughters. My Mom definitely got her cooking skills from you. Because of you, I fell in love with cooking. Not only did you feed your family, but you also fed neighbours and strangers.

You always emphasised the importance of being a close-knit family. You taught my brothers and I to always stick together and be each other's keeper. One of the many Setswana phrases you taught me was *"bana ba motho wa kgaogana tlhogo ya tsie"* which means siblings share everything, including something as tiny as a locust's head. This gesture taught me the importance of sharing my little with others, and that blood is thicker than water.

Lesson 5

Proverbs 14:23 (NIV, 2011) - "All hard work brings profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty."

A lesson by my maternal aunt, Dr Mosidi Pooe

One of the joys of coming from a family of hard-working, high achievers like yourself is that I, too, believe that I can achieve anything through hard, smart work and prayer. Thank you for teaching me the value of hard work. Thank you for making me appreciate the value of continuous learning.

As a nurse, you decided to study further and specialise in psychiatric nursing. You then decided to become a medical doctor. You didn't stop there. You studied further and qualified as a psychiatrist. And now you're reading towards a PhD. Your hunger for knowledge is exemplary.

Your success is a testament to the fact that God rewards hard work. I'm reminded of Jeremiah 29:11, which says, "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." May God give you the strength to push on and achieve even more greatness.

Lesson 6

Proverbs 22:6 (NIV, 2011) - "Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old, they will not turn from it."

A lesson by the former Principal of Ikageng Primary School, Mrs Khambule

As the headmistress of my primary school, you were the first Chief Executive Officer I ever encountered. Watching you lead the school with a firm but kind hand taught me my first leadership lesson. You were a God-fearing leader who ensured that every learner was raised and tutored according to the ways of the Lord. I will never forget the phrase, "Cleanliness is next to godliness."

I still remember the hymns we sang at school assembly time and some preachers visiting the school to share the gospel. I remember how motivated and inspired our teachers were and how they took pride in their work. Our school was known for producing good academic results, cleanliness and general orderliness. None of these things are possible without outstanding leadership.

Lesson 7

Thessalonians 5:11 (NIV, 2011) - "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing."

A lesson by my former Arts teacher at Mmabatho High School: Ms Sharle Matthews:

The role of a teacher in a learner's life is critical. A good teacher lays a foundation for future success by moulding a learner's character and encouraging them to believe in themselves. My Arts teacher at Mmabatho High School, Ms Sharle Matthews, was one such teacher.

Ms Matthews, I remember feeling very insecure about my artistic ability in high school until you came along and made me see the beauty in my work. You allowed me to play

with a pencil and encouraged me to let the paintbrush flow. You taught me that art is, first and foremost, about expression and that expression is subject to interpretation.

Whenever I tried to reproduce a subject I was looking at, I would struggle, but you encouraged me and taught me that my interpretation of the subject was good enough and that I should celebrate it instead of focusing on the imperfections. It was clear to both that I would never be an A student in art, but you still encouraged me and built my self-belief. This experience taught me that there's a market for every product, including my art. Thank you for teaching me the meaning of "beauty is in the eye of the beholder."

Lesson 8

Ephesians 4:29 (NIV, 2011) - "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others according to their needs, that it may benefit those that listen."

A lesson by my former Mmabatho High School Mathematics teacher, Mrs Qhobosheane

Boarding school can be intimidating when you arrive, especially if it's your first time away from home. One of the hostel wardens at Mmabatho High School was Mrs Qhobosheane, who also happened to be my friend Karabo's Mom, so I was privileged to experience the teacher and mother figure in her.

Mrs Qhobosheane, when I arrived at Mmabatho High School at the tender age of 11, desperately missing my parents, you and Mr Qhobosheane welcomed me with open arms and ensured I felt at home. I experienced a mother's love from you, which helped me cope with being away from home for the first time.

You later became my maths teacher, and because of your support and encouragement, I did pretty well in maths. You were tough and demanding but did so with a parent's love. You kept reminding us of the future ahead and that all we needed

to do to access it was focus on our studies and work hard. I'm glad I followed your advice. I am now reaping the rewards of the discipline you instilled in me. You taught me that "it takes a village to raise a child."

Lesson 9

Colossians 3:12-13 (NIV, 2011) - "Therefore as God's chosen people, holy and dearly beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievance you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

A lesson by the former CEO of Unilever South Africa: Mrs Gail Klintworth

I've had the fortune of serving under and learning from some formidable female leaders, whether in my family, community, school, university or the workplace. When I arrived at Unilever as a marketing trainee, you were the Marketing Director. That was my first job and my first experience with having a manager.

Gail, you were a superb leader to all of us at Unilever. You taught me that a good leader is humble, approachable and accessible. Your words were kind and encouraging. You set the bar high and pushed us to achieve greatness. You led from the front and led by example. Whenever juniors like myself gave presentations to the Board of Directors, you made us feel welcome and appreciated.

You knew us all by name and took an interest in our lives. You would often ask about my family, including my older brother who was a medical doctor like your husband, Keith. You encouraged us to show up and bring our whole selves to work. This is a lesson I have carried throughout my career as a leader: we need to be interested in the whole person, not just the person we encounter at work.

Lesson 10

1 Peter 2:16-17 (NIV, 2011) - "Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honour everyone."

A lesson by the Director of IIE-Vega School: Dr Carla Enslin

IIE-Vega School, of which Dr Carla Enslin is a co-founder, has produced many great marketing and advertising professionals. Carla, thanks for your work to empower young creative minds to do magic. What you and the team at IIE-Vega School have built is an incredible institution where dreamers and inventors are nurtured.

Thank you for signing me up as one of the post-graduate supervisors and for inviting me to be a regular guest speaker at IIE-Vega School. Thank you for teaching me that one of the best ways to build trust with others is by wearing one's heart on one's sleeve. When people know your heart, they tend to trust you and give you the benefit of the doubt.

Your "glass half-full, live and let live, the world is your oyster" personality lights up any room you walk into. Your passion for insights and understanding how the human mind works made me fall in love with research. You see and acknowledge everyone. You celebrate diversity and champion inclusivity. Thank you for teaching me to catch bees with honey.

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10

The Staying Power of Women

Mike Teke

In this contribution, I reflect on my time with my grandmother Mrs Dorothea Teke. I reflect and think of what went through my grandmother's mind when she was departing this world. Did she worry about who was going to take over and care for me in the future? Yes, she did. Did she concern herself about my future? I believe she did. I interrogated myself with these questions as my grandmother saw me as different from other children in the household, and she realised that being different made me vulnerable to those who were curious about my appearance. Many people used to be curious as to why I was light in complexion and why I had the type of hair I had. She was my protector in all respects. I was not her favourite grandchild, but I believe she was deeply concerned about my vulnerability.

Dorothea Teke was a matriarch, a strong leader and head of our household and an amazing caregiver. She had this staying power, no matter the circumstances. I use Dorothea, Mma and grandmother interchangeably in this writing to refer to one individual, my grandmother, Dorothea Teke.

My grandfather, Cornelius Teke passed away in 1955, and my grandmother was left to raise ten children, and later, the grandchildren became part of the Teke family. We were raised in a home led by a matriarch. Dorothea Teke was referred to or addressed by everyone as 'Koko' or amongst her friends as 'Tonti', and I addressed her as Mma. I called her Mma because she was there when I was born, and my mother handed me over to her when the time came for her to return to work. My mother was a domestic worker who stayed at work during the week and only returned home on Saturday mornings. She left

again on Sunday afternoons. Mma was unflinching when she took the responsibility of raising a baby who looked different to other children. I mean very different. There is a reason for it, but it is not something to elaborate on now. I try to put myself in my grandmother's shoes and imagine how she reacted as she thought about how she was going to raise me. I will later delve into her reaction to my appearance when she saw me for the first time.

Our home was what I would describe as disciplined and everyone was aligned to Dorothea's plan, dreams and aspirations on running a household. There was order at No. 9 Malaza Street, Kwa Thema. We were not well-off or financially strong enough to have all the resources or necessities, but we had a wonderful and fulfilled life because of Dorothea Teke. No one ever disrespected the rules set out by my grandmother, and one would have thought or had an impression that our home was led by a man (as we all know of the mindset regarding gender). My two uncles, Daniel and Simon followed the rules and orders by Mma, and my two brothers, Alpheus and the late Abram, did the same. My brothers overindulged in alcohol, just like a lot of young men those days and my grandmother could not always manage or deal with that, but, whenever they returned home from their indulgence, they knew that the key person or the head of our household was my grandmother. Thus, they straightened up and treated our home respectfully, without any rowdiness.

Mma was an amazing leader and head of the household that I still revere today. I am at the stage in my life and career where I can attest to and differentiate between great leadership and no leadership at all. I have made it my responsibility to read, learn and study the art of leadership, but I cannot refer to myself as some fundi or guru in leadership. I watch the day-to-day performance of individuals in leadership roles and critique their behaviour, performance and the results they produce versus what is expected. I watch leaders in business, politics, social organisations and in many other areas, and I can attest that there is much to learn. There are great leaders out there who make things happen and deliver outstanding

results and there are those who only hold the title, however with nothing to show for it. Mma did not have any education but was capable.

The movie industry has greatly enriched our lives with movies that teach us valuable lessons about life and leadership. One such example is *The Godfather* (Puso and Coppola, 1972), a movie about the life of an Italian family in the United States of America, and Sicily. All three *Godfather* movies are filled with profound leadership lessons. While it might seem incongruous to draw parallels between a crime family and the values and leadership style displayed by my grandmother, it is the leadership lessons from the movie that I'm focusing on – both about what to do and what not to do. In the movie, one of the notable lines by Don Licio Lucchesi, a leader of the Vatican conspirators was "Our ships must sail in the same direction". Reflecting on this, it is clear that in our household, my grandmother made sure that our 'ships' sailed in the same direction. I remember as a child, one family member attempted to explore the idea of cooking for only her children – my grandmother's grandchildren (our cousins). This idea, however, never succeeded or even took root under the watchful eye of Mma Dorothea Teke. She wanted everyone to be warm, happy, and comfortable in sharing the same meals and experiences. She just would not tolerate any situation that could lead to a chaotic household. As always, No was her answer!

The strength of leadership comes with decisive action from a leader. When my grandmother decided that our four-roomed house had become smaller, she proposed that my uncle Simon and others consider expanding the house by adding some rooms and a garage. She realised that this was imperative, even as she would not be able to contribute financially herself. I used to closely watch her during serious family meetings when important matters were discussed. She displayed unflinching facial expressions that warned everyone that she took no prisoners. We once had a new tenant who rented our garage space (these were and are still useful as accommodation for rental, especially because we did not

have a car) who, at the end of the month, my grandmother briskly walked to his door to collect rent money. That routine happened on time and on the last day of every month.

My two brothers who were far older than me would now and again try to sneak their girlfriends in, and my grandmother would pretend that she had not noticed. But as soon as they relaxed in some corner of our small house, Dorothea would show up and instruct them to leave her house immediately.

In her Setswana expression, she frequently said "*Ke tlhoya taba ga ke tlhoye motho*," which simply meant she plays the ball and not the man or she deals with the heart of the matter and not the individual. I guess my uncles understood from that expression that there would be no misbehaviour while Mma was firmly in charge.

In later years, my uncle, Simon, who used to tell everyone who cared to listen that "*ke mojalefa*" – meaning he was the Teke family's rightful heir apparent and took over our home as head when my grandmother passed away on the 26th of December of 1979. As mentioned earlier, I have always taken a keen interest in leadership behaviour, and one lesson I particularly recall is the comparison between my grandmother's time as the matriarch and my uncle's leadership and as head of the family after Mma's departure. My uncle's time was characterised by pure chaos. I acknowledge that my two brothers were heavily impacted by alcohol abuse, with their lives plagued by misfortune. I have always been saddened that they never had a chance for a decent life, and I don't believe it's their fault. They never held on to a job, never had families of their own, they were often unruly after a few drinks, and that led to some violence inside our home. My grandmother controlled it well, but when my uncle took over, all hell broke loose. These two were incessantly at each other's throats, literally sometimes.

The Dorothea Teke curfews, which were adhered to by everyone, suddenly changed, and it was a free-for-all. My uncle, who was also affected by alcohol abuse, could not face and hold tough conversations like our matriarch. She was

tough. We all clearly understood that the No. 9 Malaza Street 'ships' (referring to different children and cousins) were all sailing in the same direction. There's a Setswana saying, "*Ga go poo pedi fa*," which simply means "There are no two bulls in this kraal". It was after her departure that we experienced the proverbial ships scattering in different directions and several bulls taking over in the Teke kraal at 9 Malaza Street.

My grandmother ingrained in me the view that women are natural caregivers. I agree that this may be a generalised view as we know that there are exceptions who don't fit the mould of a caregiver out there. Dorothea Teke was an amazing caregiver with compassion, empathy, pose and just sheer grace. She was blessed with ten children. She cared for her dying husband and was left to raise six boys and four girls on her own, with grandchildren in the mix, later in her life. This is the kind of woman who also took care of her children on their death beds due to different ailments, caring for them and burying them. Mma was a formidable woman with amazing staying power. I sometimes reflect on how she coped with the overwhelming grief of having had to bury her husband, then later several of her own children and still control and lead a household.

After we extended our house from a four-roomed home to accommodate more of us, I recall that it was not only the Teke family residing in the house but other people, who were not family relations as well. They were not strangers either and we did not refer to them as strangers, but they were not related to us in any way. My grandmother accommodated everyone who needed a home. I remember 'Adam,' 'Regop,' 'Brush,' and 'John.' We lived with them as part of our family and my grandmother never allowed any of them to be discriminated against. I still wonder if it mattered to my grandmother as to where these people came from, because all she cared about and all we knew was that they were part of us. These were not strangers.

The caregiving nature and mentality of my grandmother shone most brightly during my mother's illness. When my

mother fell ill and could no longer work, she returned home, weakened and unable to manage daily tasks, my grandmother looked after her daughter, unwavering as always.

I have learned many lessons from this Matriarch, Leader and Caregiver – Dorothy Teke. The lessons I am sharing have moulded me into the person I am today, and I have managed to achieve incredible success from these lessons.

Lesson number one

"*Tloga tloga e tloga kgale, modisa kgomo otswa natso*." My grandmother instilled in me the habit of waking up early in the mornings. Every day. To date, my body clock does not falter. I slept next to my grandmother from my early childhood, and every morning, she would wake up to make the fire; once the stove was warm, she would wake me up and help me get ready for school. This is one routine I still follow. It used to amaze me that even though we lived with many of my cousins, she only woke me up for this ritual, and it didn't matter whether it was during normal school days or school holidays. This continued while some of my cousins slept until late during school holidays. As the saying goes, the early worm catches the fattest worm, and so, if you wish to catch up with me, catch me before 6 a.m. The power of consistency is demonstrated.

Lesson number two

The ability to say 'NO.' The ability to say NO effectively makes you lose friends and those in your network. My grandmother was direct and to the point. Whenever she said NO, she meant it. I have struggled with some conversations where I believe that someone is pulling the wool over my face, and I just laugh or just dismiss them easily. My grandmother came across as harsh when she said NO but that was the truth.

Lesson number three

There is a quotation attributed to King Louis the XVIII of France as he is reputed to have said, "punctuality is the politeness of kings." The world is driven by time and deadlines. Failure to manage time correctly leads to disastrous outcomes, especially when one espouses professionalism. I used to notice that my grandmother arrived very early for any engagement and never wanted to disappoint anyone. I learned that from her and even when I walked to school in the morning, I had to leave home early to be at school on time and I always walked alone. I had a mate who walked with me to school, but I never depended on him at all. Thursday afternoons and Sunday mornings were known in our household as days when my grandmother would be in her church uniform, and she left very early to go to church. We joined her on Sundays, but I must admit we were not as consistent as she was.

Lesson number four

My grandmother took care of everyone, including my uncles, brothers, aunts, cousins and many more, even though some of them were employed, they were not as reliable as my grandmother. I learnt that 'the buck stops with me' when I manage a household. During the apartheid years, black people (pensioners) received pension, but it was not the same arrangement as white people. Black people received their pension only six months in a year, which was paid every other month. We all knew that on the day my grandmother received her pension, she first went to pay rent (including rates and taxes) and then made sure to buy us the best food we could ever enjoy as a family, and that was tripe and offal. This was an amazing delicacy in the Teke household, and we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves, though it happened only on the days when she received her pension. She cared for everyone and fully understood that the buck stopped with her.

Lesson number five

Cleanliness, great hygiene and being organised were so well practised in our household; even now I still enjoy the drills related to these activities. It began early in the morning when my grandmother assisted me with washing myself, as in taking a bath, wearing clean well-prepared clothes - though limited in quantities, and wearing polished shoes - which were polished (I was properly trained and drilled to do this diligently) the day before when I returned from school. When I returned from school every day, the first thing I did was to change into my home clothes and then polish my shoes thoroughly, placing them in one place all the time to be able to find them the following day before I went to school.

It is all about the staying power of women. Every time I start a conversation about my grandmother, I feel an overwhelming surge of emotions. I want to weep because of the painful experiences she was subjected to throughout her life, but she remained resilient and gritty. This is a person who was content to lead and raise her family and I believe her reward was just her watching us grow. There was never any lap of luxury that my grandmother enjoyed.

My grandmother raised her ten children after her husband, Cornelius Teke had passed on. She just had that staying power we experience today with lots of women, girls and mothers who often find themselves left or abandoned by their partners or spouses and they just push hard and raise their children with resilience, grit and perseverance. I recently watched several young ladies who graduated with university degrees, having been assisted by their mothers single-handedly with the fathers missing in action. That is the staying power of women. I know that women are referred to as '*Izimbokodo*,' and for me, in our mining language, I salute women as '*Ysters*'.

My grandmother had the capability and capacity to accept when my mother arrived to give birth to me, her different grandson, took me in and raised me. Some people

might believe that it was inevitable for her to take me in or had no choice because I was her grandson, but during those years, to raise a child who looked coloured (mixed race) meant that one had to always explain why I looked the way I did. My late aunt, Shadi, who was my grandmother's oldest daughter, my mother's sister, used to tell me that when she came to see me for the first time when I was born, my grandmother told her that Seipei (my mother) had given birth to a '*Baas*,' as in a white person (a boss). That white person turned out to be her favourite grandchild. She had unconditional and doting love for me above all others in our household.

My grandmother resolved family and community problems daily. I recall that even one of our neighbours, who was abusive to his wife, had to face the toughness of my grandmother. Every time my grandmother heard the commotion, or when the fights started between these neighbours, she would walk over and sternly reprimand the husband. I never understood what gave her the courage to do that, and I now understand that women are as resilient as *Ysters*, who don't bury their heads in the sand in times of trouble.

I still don't know how to express my gratitude for the upbringing I received from Mma. Because of her, I never felt like an orphan. I will forever miss Mma Dorothea Teke.

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11

An Ode to My Mother

Lebogang Seale

Every day at sunrise, I wake up to the bright sight of a plant right next to my bedroom window, bursting with colour and energy. The *Strelitzia reginae*, or the cane flower, as the plant is commonly called, is ever resplendent in its fleshy, succulent leaves and orange flowers. It has an uncanny ability to thrive in sun and shade and ward off frosty weather. And to crown it all, it can also withstand dry spells, an extra advantage for any living object in a city bedevilled by recent intermittent water outages like Johannesburg.

Waking up to this beautiful sight always conjures images of my Mother, Puledi Mmamodjadji Seale, my head instantly zooming in on her from her remote home in Limpopo province. No matter how far I am from my rural home, there seems to be no escaping the imposing figure draped in African traditional attire striding the yard while humming to herself. Beneath the dazzle of her gaiety and splendour lies a unique symbol of the triumph of the human spirit over adversity, suffering and injustice.

I had not been around on this earth to glimpse Mother's upbringing. However, from an early age, my curiosity about how she and my father met gave me a hint. The fact that the proverbial Cupid's arrow brought them closely together while Mother was a dayworker on a farm where Father and the rest of our family had been living on was enough to give away Mother's tough and strict background. I always wondered, because of the slave-like working and living conditions on the farm, how on earth Mother would leave her village for a place where survival meant a daily struggle, a battle between life and death. Not that I knew much about village life, but some

of the things I witnessed my parents and other relatives going through on the farm were enough to scare me.

However, my Mother never ceased to amaze me with her courage and bravery. Even in the face of the most trying of conditions, because of the unrelenting pressure of back-breaking labour, she embraced her situation calmly and easily. You would not notice that she was suffering, so much so that her demeanour defied the century-old Sepedi proverb, '*Monna ke nku o llela teng*' (loosely translated, a man is like a sheep that cries from inwardly). There was a secret to that, as I later found out. Mother was not your ordinary, pliable worker who waited to be told what to do and follow instructions. She was skilful and innovative in a unique way and exemplified the leadership qualities that could have put her male counterparts to shame.

During summer, for instance, when tomatoes seemed to ripen rapidly and sent the white farm owners into a panic over potential financial losses, they looked up to my Mother for relief. Mother could sort tomatoes according to their grades and pack them in small boxes with such deft skill that left the white masters in awe as the fruits were loaded onto a truck headed to the fresh produce markets in Johannesburg or elsewhere. This was a task she performed with aplomb that even with their meanness, the farmers could not ignore the rare talent she had.

If it were not because of the laws that dictated, in tandem with the chauvinism of the time, that women could not play leadership roles, my Mother would easily have been amongst the leaders at the packhouse, if not on the entire farm itself. Nevertheless, it would not be an overstatement to say that she was the de-facto deputy to my grandfather, who was the foreman at the packhouse or shed, as it was commonly known.

The saying that it is usually the most challenging times that test our resolve and bring the best out of humanity rings true for my Mother. At the height of the oppressive conditions on the farm, when the physical assaults accompanying the drudgery of farm labour were meted out with gusto, as if they

were a sport, my Mother often became the self-appointed champion of workers' rights. She would often respond to the threats and assaults in a manner that shook the conscience of even the most oppressive, hard-nosed of white masters.

When, for instance, in a rare case of open resistance, female workers decided not to go to work one Saturday, my Mother's leadership qualities were fully displayed. On Monday, when the workers reported for work, the farm owner's older son, who had assumed managerial roles, instructed the workers to line up so he could whip them with sticks. Mother, who had been standing in the middle, suddenly walked up to the farmer, lay face down in front of him and commanded him to beat her at once. That drove the farmer into such guilt that he halted his hateful instincts. It was only later, when my Mother was out of sight, that the farmer proceeded with the assaults. This was much to the chagrin of Mother, who never hesitated to question the farmer.

She was also an industrious and resourceful woman. On weekends, when men and women descended at our home to buy sorghum beer that my grandfather sold, my Mother saw a golden opportunity to supplement her meagre wages. She became famous for baking the most sumptuous bread buns. She baked the buns from a makeshift oven lit with firewood she built on the ground. My siblings and I always looked forward to weekends to savour the warm buns.

There was more to my Mother to demonstrate that the qualities of a true *imbokodo* lie in her. When, many moons ago, after the demonic spectre of land dispossession that had befallen our community culminated into forced evictions, my Mother was amongst those at the forefront in ensuring that the departure was safe and less stressful. My Father had long fled the farm, so it was also left to my Mother to ensure that we were well taken care of. The forced departure was on all accounts quite a challenging experience, as it happened on a day when seasonally blustery weather hit the farm.

Yet, even when weighed down by the weariness and fatigue of walking a long distance in search of a new home, my

Mother ensured that the experience was free from harm – the relief from the many years of toil and suffering on the farm impelling her on. Drenched and wretched, the mother and children kept going, moving from one village to another while searching for a fixed place of abode. When finally, Mother found what looked like a preferred place, building the huts that would serve as shelter fell on her alone. The inclement weather made the task more difficult. As she was building, it would rain and wash away the clay soil. When the rains subsided, she would start building again, only for the rain to start pouring down all over again. Finding herself tested to the limit, she tended to leave things to fate, hoping the situation would resolve itself. It seldom did, prompting her to resume the back-breaking task.

Finally, just as she was beginning to settle down at the village, the farmers came knocking on our door. The reason for the unannounced visit: To ask my mother to return to the farm as a day worker. Two months after she left was all it took before the farmers pursued her. Mother had no choice but to go – the circumstances over which our family, like many others, had no control, dragging them back to the place from which we had been forced out. The very same place that they had vowed never to return to for so long as conditions remained the same. It seemed that the more they tried to escape hardship, the more it stalked them, hunting them down like hungry and angry hyenas.

The huts that Mother built were by no account comfortable, but we nevertheless took solace in being away from the farm. In winter, when we became accustomed to being entertained by cold draughts whistling through the makeshift wooden doors, Mother was always there to ensure that the huts were in better condition and that we had enough blankets. Mother would spread wet dung on the floor at least once a month to keep the soil intact and the dust away. We would watch as she spread the dung with dexterity and at impressive speed, the stench of cow dung violating the clean air. Nevertheless, once the cow dung had dried out,

the smoothness and beauty of our home were something to marvel at.

In December, when women decorated their huts and walls with patterns in colourful clay ochre in preparation for Christmas, Mother always ensured that our home was not left behind. Our home, like many others, would be transformed into a vibrant display of colours. The colourful paintings represented women's artistic spirit and the cultural and social fabric that held the community together. It was a reminder that, for all the poverty, we were part of a community that was bound together by the spirit of solidarity and resilience.

A strict disciplinarian, Mother had no tolerance for idleness. With the struggle for water a perpetual theme in the village, we knew that we needed to play our part with the domestic chores. If Mother came back from the farms to find that there was no water at home, we would be in for a hiding. It did not matter that we relied on the wells that we had to dig in the river or the few hand pumps installed a distance away from people's homes. The pumps were labour intensive, yielded little water, and often broke easily. Nothing exemplified our struggle more than the challenge of water.

Mother's resourcefulness was something to marvel at. Even when she had grown older, and her body could no longer carry the weight of hard labour, she continued to find ways to generate income. After 'retiring' from the farms, she resumed baking bread buns. She also became famous for brewing the best *umqombothi.* Often, she supplemented this with *mokgope* (a sweetened version of *umqombothi*) and cooked *mala mogodu* (tripe) and chicken feet. On weekends, and sometimes during the week, our home would teem with men and women savouring *umboqobothi*. Mother had no patience with people who wasted time in indolence and sloth. This was often apparent when someone asked for a free drink or asked to take it on credit.

Yet, she still had sympathy and empathy for the less fortunate. In a world filled with adversity, Mother stands as a beacon of hope. And just like the *Strelitzia reginae* plant at

my home in Johannesburg, my mother is a living testimony of the power of resilience, grit and perseverance. *Womandla*!

12

Resilience and Grace: The Journey of a South African Woman Across Eras

Nolitha Vukuza

I am a woman of many eras, from apartheid and democratic times in South Africa, of the 20th and the 21st centuries, of rural and urban life, of Bantustans and the Republic of South Africa, and of the Republic to the world. I have worked in many environments: public, private, institutional, social, cultural, local and global. One constant thing with all these shifting sands is that I am a simple South African black woman, whenever and wherever I have been. I was never career-guided into any of the roles I subsequently played. Still, I was armed with rural resilience, a high sense of adaptability and a positive attitude. I look back and only feel grateful. My contribution seeks to share my experiences of these unfamiliar and complex meanderings as a form of self-expression with the hope that I can connect with my fellow human beings, not least women of younger generations.

My Upbringing

I was born and raised by semi-literate women of courage, strength, and faith, women who produced food with their own hands and made bricks with their hands to build houses that men would dwell in. Ours was a happy childhood; it was simple, hard-working, and caring.

As I look back, my Mother, aunts and their cousins come to mind. As for my mother, she was wedded quite early in life on the outskirts of Peddie, in the Eastern Cape where I was born. She missed out on the higher grades of primary

school. Like most fathers of the time, her father believed that a girl's home was with a husband. She tells us that when she realised that she could go no further at school, she prayed to God that if ever she were to get married, she would be given an enlightened husband who would be good enough to put their children through school. God did. My father, a loving, intelligent, confident, eloquent, hardworking, wise, independent, and enthusiastic provider, put us through school. My mom, as semi-literate as she was, produced three girls educated at St Matthew's College, a prestigious Anglican girl's boarding school in Keiskammahoek in the Eastern Cape. We later became university graduates. My brother also went to high school, whilst our oldest, suffering from ill health from a tender age, could not go to any significant grade in a learning institution.

My mother was soft-spoken, an introvert, kind-hearted, gentle, churchly, and homely. Her business was her family, church and, to a lesser extent, community affairs. She was a stay-at-home mom. As I grew up, I realised that even though my father was the head of the family and strong-willed by character, my mother was the heart and anchor of our home. She was a hard worker, resilient and quiet. Her character and the way she lived her life inspired and shaped my life, in turn. Just by being herself, she taught me about simple women's quiet strength, resilience, and staying power.

Interest in Women's Issues

My interest in women's issues was born from my struggles as a woman, especially during apartheid, when there were no human rights enshrined in the Constitution. Even if there were, as a black African woman, such provisions were never made for my kind! Even in my community, our struggles did not have a name, nor was there activism about ending them. Whenever women got married, they were told that marriage was not a land of milk and honey, and that they were expected to submit to their in-laws' authority. Women were not supposed to question their husbands' whereabouts nor search

their pockets, and worst of all, leaving a husband because of infidelity was not a valid reason. Men were also guided on how to be good husbands, to love their wives, and to provide for their families. Then again, it was scoffed upon if a man did not have a child outside of marriage, especially if a new couple delayed having children.

It was perhaps fortuitous that I qualified as a social worker from the University of Fort Hare in 1980. As I practised at Cecilia Makiwane Hospital and Mdantsane Magistrate's Court, I was exposed to all kinds of vulnerable women. A happy woman hardly ever seeks help from a social worker. Women suffered from poverty of all types and manifestations. They suffered from violence of equal proportions as well. Women still suffer from it today.

It is not adequate to speak about violence in general terms. Violence has a name, a place, a culture, and features, and it knows no class. It is pervasive to all women regardless of age, race, class or circumstances. It is not limited to physical harm; it includes emotional violation, financial oppression, social alienation, political oppression, and all other forms of abuses that stand in the way of self-determination, self-expression and self-realisation. Its nature is elusive. It hides in relationships and opportunities. As I gained experience in dealing with women's issues as a social worker and a lecturer at UNITRA (University of Transkei), I gained a clearer understanding of its dodgy nature. Several years later, I expanded on this topic at the University of Johannesburg when I shared a stage with the Namibian former First Lady (2023). On this occasion, I pointed out the true nature of gender-based violence (GBV).

GBV is not gender-specific; it is human-specific. It violates the body, the mind, the heart, and the spirit of the victim. It happens at schools, universities, on the streets, in churches, homes, on the Internet, in social media, in hospitals, prisons, creches, flea markets, in government, etc. It happens to natural children, to those in foster care and to those who are adopted. It occurs in nuclear families, extended families,

stepfamilies, and families-in-law. It happens between parents, children, relatives and strangers. GBV is pervasive. It has many faces; again, it is pervasive! This is the problem with GBV; it is ubiquitous and wears unsuspicious regalia. It has no personality, no character. It is a feeling of violation of whatever form: insecurity, uncertainty, doubt, fearfulness". (UJ News 2023)

Like most women, I have suffered subjugation, abuse and discrimination. My marriage was marred by physical violence and abuse, from which I attempted to flee, hide, and return to many times. There was no concerted effort, at least not at a societal level, to support or rebuke this kind of abuse of women by their spouses. It was not endorsed, but there were no tight accountabilities nor deterrents to protect and support women in this situation. Yes, there was a rebuke from family and friends and, at times, church interventions, but again, no higher standards than these were held. The only times the courts listened, at least in my case, was when I filed for divorce. By this time, one needs to produce evidence of all those instances of abuse to convince the courts that you have a valid case. Some of the evidence cannot be put in a file. However, the scars are on and in my heart and mind.

Motherhood

For any woman, motherhood is a life-altering experience. For some, being a mother is an enriching and multifaceted experience encompassing a range of emotions, responsibilities, and roles. For families, an additional member is also a great source of pride. The names given to each child are usually steeped in history, culture, or future expectations.

It would be a mistake to think motherhood means the same to every woman. For some, it can be overwhelming and, in some instances, an unwelcome burden. I spare a thought for those for whom motherhood posed life-altering challenges for the worse. For me, I bore two children: a girl and a boy, now 40 and 38 years respectively. They brought joy to my heart and

life and taught me about myself and life in general. I grew up with them; they became like siblings to me.

There are also attendant challenges to raising children, not least as a divorced mother. Mothers are central to all those developing stages as children go through adolescence, teenage years, university, and adulthood. There are also instances where, as a career woman, work gets in the way of being around them all the time. After a long divorce, I decided to take my children to a boarding school at the ages of 8 and 10. As I dropped them off in Grahamstown on that first day of their boarding life, my heart and every limb in my body physically ached. I could neither eat nor sleep, even though in a matter of days, I was to drive 1,000 kilometres away from them to complete my master's degree at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). That meant that the three of us were now students. It also meant that we depended on my meagre lecturer salary from UNITRA, Umtata in our three locations.

My children had to embark on a long-haul bus journey from Makhanda to Johannesburg during the holidays. We would all squeeze into the one room I was allocated at an on-campus residence at Wits. There was no time for self-pity. I had to push through to complete my studies to return to work. A lot happened in between. One incident involved receiving a call that required me to drive overnight back to Umtata to salvage what little remained after a plumbing accident. The disaster destroyed everything valuable: furniture, crockery, carpets, clothes, appliances - almost everything. This was on top of my car being stolen just months before my divorce. Despite all these challenges, I persevered, completed my studies and returned to UNITRA.

Private Sector

From being a lecturer at UNITRA, I ascended to the public and corporate sectors in 1996 and 1997, respectively. This was two years after South Africa became a democratic country. The corporate sector is generally known for its high-performance ethos, where I attribute my knowledge of strategic planning,

leadership, customer service, innovation, risk management, adaptability, etc.

Not many women were in the organisation, at least not at the executive level, and certainly not black women at that level. There was a dominant male culture to which everyone was implicitly expected to subscribe to, its jokes, drinks, hobbies, language, and cars. There was an unspoken expectation and pressure to identify with that male-dominated culture, and a code of conduct that one was expected to adopt if one were to be taken seriously. There was a cost to pay for not identifying with these, such as being referred to as "not nice", "sulky", "not cooperative", "grumpy" - you name it. Women had to prove themselves far more than men and force themselves to be vocal in meetings, lest their silence be taken as ignorance. There was a sort of a "social exam" that we had to pass. Nevertheless, I was able to withstand the male domination that I was subjected to; I did not allow people to dictate who I should be. I had to work hard, and all of that made me stronger.

My Formal Interest in Women's Issues.

I formalised my interest in women's issues through my master's degree when my dissertation focused on a study aimed at ascertaining the reasons for black women academics and administrators of the then "University of Transkei" being concentrated at the lower levels of the occupational hierarchy (N. Linda, 1996). Of course, there were many reasons for this, not least the apartheid policy of subjugating black people. There were also reasons within the sector and universities as to why women remained in the lower echelons of university hierarchies. Amongst these were the over-representation of males at selection and appointment committees, the lack of support for women in academics, etc. This was 26 years ago.

Significant progress has been made in including female academics in the higher levels of university hierarchies and society. However, a study conducted by C. Schultz and E. Rankhumise on *Constraints and Contributors in Advancing Black Women Academic Researchers at a University in South*

Africa (C. Schultz and E. Rankhumise, 2023) reveals that workload, work-life balance, research challenges, a male-dominated environment, limited time and lack of support and funding are constraints and contributors in advancing women academic researchers at the Tshwane University of Technology. It is clear that, after 26 years since my research, women academics are still facing similar challenges.

Overall, South Africa has made notable progress in promoting women to leadership positions, even though ongoing efforts are needed to address persistent barriers to ensure that women can achieve equal representation and influence across all sectors of society.

Childhood Recollection and Doing Something About It

One such issue that I never knew had an impact on me kept surfacing each time I had the opportunity to speak about women's issues and that stems from my childhood recollection. This was the practice of *ukuthwala* (abduction of girls to be forcefully married to older men).

I was in standard 5 (now referred to as Grade 7) when my late friend Landezwa did not show up at school. We were very close, and I wholly relied on her assistance for my sewing project. One of the classes that girls took was sewing, and handwork or gardening was for boys. I could not sew to save my life, and I depended on Landezwa to do that for me. This was a private arrangement between us. On the day we were supposed to show our sewing to the teacher, I waited for Landezwa to come to school and help me out. She never came.

I waited for her every day until the school closed for the year. Some days, it feels like I'm still waiting for her. I later learnt that she was abducted (*ukuthwala*) by an elderly man on her way to school. I was worried about my sewing, but I was worried about her, too. I liked her very much. As I grew up and adopted many roles, I often wondered what would have become of Landezwa had she finished school.

Landezwa was not the first young girl to be abducted by an older man. Many girls continue to suffer this fate. It is reported in papers, on social media and on the radio. Politicians know about it, chiefs know about it, the church knows about it, and people talk about it in buses, cars and taxis. It is a deplorable act. Landezwa's life aspirations were cut short because of male chauvinism. This story is not over yet; it is a developing story in this chapter.

Legislature

In 2008 I joined a political party called The Congress of the People (COPE); an opposition party that was formed in 2008. I later became its publicly elected Member of Parliament (MP). Within the party structures, I held the position of a member of the National Executive Committee. My brief political career is a topic for another discussion; the focus of this contribution is to explore my involvement in issues affecting women.

In Parliament, I served on the Portfolio Committee on Higher Education. As an MP, I automatically became a member of the COPE Caucus in Parliament. From time to time, the Caucus or leader of the Party in Parliament will assign duties to members. Such a duty was assigned to me in 2010 and 2011, respectively, when, on behalf of COPE, I delivered two successive speeches on the commemoration of International Women's Day during the Joint Sitting of the National Assembly (NA) and the National Council of Provinces (NCOP).

In 2010, in my boldest move yet, I took to the Parliament podium to speak against violence against women. (Hansard, 2010). I decried its dangers to women and girls, its effects and its everlasting impact.

The speech was well received across the political spectrum. For the moment it unified the House on the plight of women and girls; there was no opposition to the call I was making of stopping violence against women and of using the Constitution to protect women against it. As the House exploded into applause after applause in agreement (Hansard,

2010), it felt like I was finally doing something about the violence that we experienced as women. Of course, that would never be enough, but in my view, it was certainly a first formal step in the right direction.

Just a week before the 2011 International Women's Day debate in the National Assembly, I watched, on television, with horror, an exposé on "*ukuthwala*", the plight of young girls being abducted by older men. It was unbelievable listening to men justifying this act as tradition. This issue, like a bad dream, kept recurring in society and kept coming to my face. There was no better time than to take it head-on. My second National Assembly debate was on the abhorrent act of *ukuthwala*. As I listened to the applause by the honourable members (Hansard, 2011), I felt an awkward sense of relief. It felt like, at last, I did something about Landezwa's abduction, unlike the state of helplessness I was in when she was taken from me in standard 5. Nothing can ever be enough to address the wrong that besets these young girls, but raising awareness will hopefully lead to programmes that would systematically lead to the eradication of this abhorrent practice.

I look back at the dusty streets of my village, Mgwalana, at Peddie, where I grew up, and my mind goes back to the classroom where we did our sewing. I realise that the state of helplessness is only temporary. Something can always be done by anyone.

Higher Education Diplomacy

My political career was cut short by an appointment as a South African Higher Education and Training attaché to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), to a few global organisations like the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the International Labor Organization (ILO) and a few European countries. One of UNESCO's global priorities is Africa and gender equality, mainly focusing on social justice for women and girls (UNESCO, 2023).

Besides the crucial role of bridging the gap between South Africa's educational objectives and UNESCO's global educational initiatives, there are other challenges faced by a woman alone in a foreign country, as was my case. I was not saved from the attitudes, assumptions, perspectives and practices (cultural and otherwise) levelled against me. Dealing with these challenges demanded internal resources such as adaptation, resistance, resilience and agility, all of which I possessed but was not fully aware of. The learning opportunities were equally valuable for making me stronger and better as a global citizen. Embracing multiculturalism is an adaptive approach to assimilating with diverse cultures, communities and traditions.

University of Johannesburg (UJ)

My interest in women's issues continued as I joined UJ in 2018. I was appointed a Senior Executive Director, initially in the Vice-Chancellor's Office and later with the responsibility for University Relations, Student Affairs and UJ Sport. It was clear to me the implicit mandate "Do your best, African woman". History will be the judge, but to the best of my ability, I echoed at every corner I could, at every platform, event, the plight of, and opportunities for women. There are many conferences, meetings, summits and dialogues that are held in the country and worldwide on how to combat the scourge of GBV against women. I sometimes become uncomfortable by the high-flown language of these conversations amongst a particular class talking about the plight of a specific class of women. I think back to my aunts and cousins in my village and wonder if they would relate to the tools of empowerment purported to be for them. During one of my last engagements at the UJ Women and ImPACT: Innovation and Sustainability in Africa (WIISA) Conference, 2023 (UJ News 2023), as I welcomed the national and international guests, I raised my discomfort about this kind of engagement of women by women. Something tells me that we will only get to empower other women if:

- we reduce the complexity of the playing field,

- we decode the language of participation,
- we provide tools with which women can identify,
- moderate our tone, and
- speak with empathy, consideration, accommodation and compassion. This, for me, would be woman-to-woman talk, not talk about other women.

Retirement

As I retired on 31 March 2024, after 43 years of service comprising seven careers, I can say that I have experienced personal growth and career fulfilment, none of which came free and cheap, if you get what I mean. I learned, unlearned, relearned, I laughed, I cried, I was happy, I was sad, I prayed, I played, I tried, I failed, I tried, I passed. The taste in my mouth is sweet, the brain in my head ticks, and my spirit remains free. I met wonderful people along the way. I made friends, lost some and gained others. My priorities are family, personal happiness, health, service to people, mentoring, continuous learning and healthy friendships.

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13

Ode to My First and Best Leadership Coach and Law Teacher

Letlhokwa George Mpedi

My mother was amongst the many attendees during my inauguration as the third Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the esteemed University of Johannesburg (UJ) on 10 March 2023. When her presence was recognised, she stood up and waved to the crowd. It was an extraordinary moment for my family and me. The last time I saw her filled with pride like this was when a Doctor of Laws (LLD) degree was conferred on me at the same venue, the Sanlam Auditorium, on 27 September 2006. She shed tears of joy, the only kind a mother should shed. I began my speech by expressing gratitude to my parents:

> "I am Letlhokwa George Mpedi, the son of Daniel Pule Mpedi, a construction worker, and Josephine Hambile Mpedi, a housewife. As far back as I can remember, my father said he wanted me to be a lawyer, while my mother instilled a strong sense of discipline in me and sparked my love for education. Their words and unwavering belief in my potential certainly informed my journey. For many years, I wanted to be the best criminal lawyer in the country until I was bitten by the academic bug."

As I spoke, I was overwhelmed with emotions. Looking back, it's a miracle I did not cry on that podium. I do not doubt that my mother was just as emotional as I was. It's completely understandable, considering what we have been through as a family. You see, when I was six years old, my father passed away in a work-related accident, leaving my mother, in her

early thirties, as a widow with five children to raise. Being an unemployed homemaker with five children to feed, clothe, and educate was an incredibly daunting task. Though for many, it would have seemed easier to give up on life, she chose to prioritise raising us. And she did so admirably. As she often reminded us, our father had left her in her own house, and that's where she intended to live and eventually pass away.

With the meagre workman's compensation (as it was known then) survivors' benefits, she toiled, put food on the table and clothes on our backs, and sent us to school. We never went to bed hungry. Not even once. As the legendary American rapper Tupac Shakur put it: "You always was committed. A poor single mother on welfare, tell me how you did it" (Shakur, 1995). Well, she ran all sorts of informal businesses. Apart from nurturing us to adulthood, she taught my siblings and me valuable lessons, many of which I use in life and my leadership roles. Looking back, she was my first and best leadership coach and law teacher despite her limited schooling.

Leadership coach

My mother is, to me, the first and best leadership coach I have had. Throughout my leadership journey, I have often encountered leaders with impressive educational qualifications, yet I wonder how they fulfil certain roles. Qualifications alone do not make a leader. As the saying goes: "A crown does not make a king." My mother would outshine these so-called 'leaders' with her natural leadership abilities. It stands to reason that leadership should be recognised or classified as a distinct skill, something that, unfortunately, some leaders lack. My mother exemplifies true leadership skills that go beyond formal education. Amongst the many leadership lessons I learnt from her, I would like to single out the following:

- **Humanity above titles:** My mother has always reminded us that one should first be a human and a priest second. She maintained that problems begin when one puts titles above humanity. This, she argued, is the essence of

humble leadership. Human beings often prioritise their titles and positions over their humanity, often completely forgetting that they are simply human. This approach emphasises the need for humility. It's important to note that humility does not equate to lacking intelligence. One should not demand respect but should also not tolerate being disrespected. This requires individuals in positions of authority to take their roles seriously while maintaining a humble attitude. Edgar H. Schein and Peter A. Schein called for a new approach to leadership in 2018. That is "humble leadership" (Schein and Schein, 2018). Humble leadership is "a leadership style that considers followers equal and valuable partners" (Strüfing, 2014). With this in mind, I am grateful that my mother taught me the importance of humility over four decades ago.

- **Embracing Resilience:** Life can be challenging at times, but no matter how insurmountable life's challenges may seem, one must never lose hope nor give up. This is one of the lessons my mother taught me. She always said, "*masa ga ana swele,*" meaning that 'dawn is never spiteful'. Notwithstanding how difficult the situation may seem, a new day will come. Most importantly, one must make the most of any situation one finds themselves in. My mother has demonstrated throughout my life that we must play the hand that life deals us, no matter how bad it may be. As the saying goes: "When life gives you lemons, make lemonade." As leaders, instead of feeling sorry for ourselves, we must rally our teams and proceed with the task at hand.
- **Sharing is caring:** While my family had enough to eat, there were many instances when I, as a child, had Oliver Twist "Please, Sir, I want some more" (Charles Dickens, 1838) moments. I sometimes longed for more. For example, getting a second glass of cold drink or an extra slice of bread. If my wish had been granted, this would have meant that one of my siblings would not get a cold drink or a fair share of the loaf of bread. That kind of outcome would have been absolutely unacceptable

and, therefore, not tolerated by my mother. She always reminded us that: *"Bana ba motho ba kgaogana tlhogo ya tsie"* (siblings share the head of a locust) and, most notably, "*molomo o o jang o roga o o sa jeng*" (the mouth that eats insults the one that does not eat). This taught me the danger of being selfish and inconsiderate. If uncontrolled, these tendencies always lead to greediness and inability to compromise, something that will be difficult to shake off in an adult life. That, in turn, leads to self-importance and narcissistic behaviour.

- **Every cloud has a silver lining:** My mother wanted us to be educated and have a better life. Despite her limited education, she never had an inferiority complex. In fact, she often used it to her advantage. For instance, when I was announced as the Vice-Chancellor and Principal of UJ, some inquisitive villagers asked her to confirm that her son was now a 'big secretary' of UJ. She told me that her standard answer was that she does not understand these things due to her limited schooling, and as a result, she does not know what they are talking about. Curious, I asked why she did not satisfy the villagers' curiosity. She answered, "I do not want my child to be bewitched", ever so protective as any mother would be. That reminded me of her belief that one should always use disadvantageous situations, such as her limited education, to one's advantage when it serves a significant purpose. By downplaying her understanding of my position, she shielded me from potential envy or ill-will. Indeed, every cloud has a silver lining.
- **Keeping busy:** My mother abhorred laziness. She used to say, *"o seke wa dula ka matsogo"* (do not sit idle). That kind of thinking kept us going and thriving as a family. It instilled a good work ethic in me. I have learnt in the process that a person with a good work ethic can never say "I have arrived", as life is a constant journey of continuous self-improvement and self-discovery. Becoming the best that one can be in the process is an inevitable consequence of competing with

yourself. Linked to her disapproval of laziness, she deplored shortcuts. People often claim to work smarter. Invariably, this implies that they are cutting corners. Yet, an environment where corners are cut always leads to undesirable consequences.

Law Teacher

Studying law was easy for me. I achieved several awards and distinctions, including in Criminal Law, where I received the Vice-Chancellor's Merit Award Certificate for being the top student in that course in 1994. In addition, I studied law successfully and earned several degrees, including an LLD degree. I am grateful for the hard work and resilient attitude instilled by my mother in me as a child. As I reflect on my journey, I also realise that my mother unwittingly taught me many legal principles and provisions without her having attended law school. I owe much of my success to these lessons. These principles and legal provisions include the following:

- **Common purpose:** Growing up in my village, my homeboys and I would play soccer matches with boys from other parts of the village or even neighbouring villages. Disputes would arise about a disallowed goal or some dubious refereeing decision that would get us quickly hot under the collar. Money and pride were always at stake. Rocks, sticks or anything that we could lay our hands on would fly in all directions. These fights would last for weeks, especially during school holidays, as the factions would regroup quickly and fight on. This is the sort of nonsense that my mother never tolerated. It did not matter whether I threw a rock or I only shouted, I would receive a severe hiding as it demonstrated my intention to inflict harm on the rival boys. A doctrine in South African law deals with such a scenario called the doctrine of common purpose. According to this doctrine, "…if two or more people, having a common purpose to commit a crime, act together in order to

achieve that purpose, then the conduct of each of them in the execution of that purpose is imputed to the others" (Snyman and Hoctor, 2021). This principle originated in English case law (Watney, 2020) and was widely used during apartheid South Africa, particularly in crowd murder cases (Parker, 1996).

- **Possession of goods suspected to have been stolen:** Returning home with unexplained goods would lead to a scolding and a demand to return them. South African law deals with the possession of goods suspected to be stolen. Section 36 of the *General Law Amendment Act* 62 of 1955 provides that: "Any person who is found in possession of any goods, other than stock or produce as defined in section thirteen of the Stock Theft Act, 1923 (Act No. 26 of 1923), in regard to which there is reasonable suspicion that they have been stolen and is unable to give a satisfactory account of such possession, shall be guilty of an offence…" (South Africa, 1955). Just as my mother held me accountable for not explaining where the goods came from, the law holds individuals responsible for possessing items that are suspected to be stolen.
- **Letter of demand:** I was in primary school when I first wrote a letter of demand on my mother's instruction. Amongst many of our informal businesses, we sold *mala le mogodu* (tripe). Some of my school teachers occasionally purchased this *mala le mogodu* on credit. When the 'parcel', i.e. payment, was overdue, my mother would not waste time claiming what was rightfully hers. She would summon me to bring a pen and a writing pad and write every word she said. The letter had all the elements of a letter of demand. The letter clearly stated the details of the debt, including the amount owed and the deadline for payment. In conclusion, the letter contained a threat (i.e., the consequences of non-payment): should they fail to comply with the demand, she would pay them a visit at their workplace and start by greeting the principal. The letter always did the trick.

- **Right to be heard:** Although I did not become the hotshot lawyer my father wished me to be, I believe that, despite the limited time for other things due to the demands of my role as Vice-Chancellor and Principal, I am doing reasonably well as an academic. I am a National Research Foundation (NRF) rated scholar. I am ranked in the B category (i.e., a researcher who enjoys considerable international recognition by peers). Does this mean I have stopped receiving law lessons from my mother? The answer is no. I am still learning and sometimes reminded of the principles, such as the right to be heard. As we grow up, we want to help our parents as best we can. While nothing is wrong with that, we sometimes focus on what we think the solution is to our parents' problems. In so doing, we often neglect to listen and fully understand the nature of the problem before jumping to the solution. I am guilty of this and am doing my best to improve myself. I have come to realise that it is not about the solution that we, as children, can provide. Rather, listening to the explanation, often long-winded, is the most critical part. To many, and rightly so, being given a chance to address a forum, tribunal, or court and state their case is more important than the outcome.

My Coach and Teacher: You are appreciated

With that said, dearest Mama, your life journey, your resilience, the sacrifices that you made for us (your children and grandchildren) and many others deserve to be chronicled in a dedicated book. This small tribute falls short of capturing the full extent of the amazing person that you are. Nevertheless, it serves as a humble acknowledgement to you and many women like you, conveying gratitude for all that you are and all that you do. Thus, I say through the words of Tupac Shakur:

> "I wish I could take the pain away
> If you can make it through the night, there's a

brighter day
Everything will be alright if you hold on
It's a struggle every day, gotta roll on
And there's no way I can pay you back
But my plan is to show you that I understand
You are appreciated

Lady, don't you know we love you? (Dear Mama)
Sweet lady, place no one above you (you are appreciated)
Sweet lady, don't you know we love you? (Dear Mama)
Sweet lady
Lady (dear Mama)
Lady, lady" (Shakur, 1995).

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Part 3

The Struggle Continues

14

Rethink Our World to Achieve Equality for Women: Negative Perceptions, Harmful Stereotypes Still Persist in Our Homes and Workspaces[1]

Letlhokwa George Mpedi and Lebogang Seale

Almost 70 years ago, the war cry *wathint'Abafazi wathint'imbokodo* (you have tampered with the women, you have struck a rock) was heard for the first time. On August 9, 1956, more than 20,000 women united in a mass demonstration at the Union Buildings in Pretoria in protest against the unjust Pass Laws.

Women's Month in August has since emerged as an important opportunity to reflect on and celebrate the achievements and significant role women from all walks of life have played and continue to play in South Africa.

Since the advent of democracy, South Africa has made great strides in the quest for gender equality. We boast a decent contingent of women in parliament and cabinet, and women are increasingly at the helm of institutions, organisations and companies.

Nevertheless, to say that South Africa has achieved equality would be a fallacy. As we celebrate women, we are also called to acknowledge and reflect on the difficulties they

1 A previous version of this contribution was published on SowetanLIVE (Mpedi and Seale, 2023) and has been republished with permission.

continue to face across all spheres of life. Negative perceptions and harmful stereotypes of women persist in our homes and workplaces.

It is a travesty that the majority of women still do not have access to opportunities that can empower them and their communities. Many business practices still make it difficult for women to achieve true inclusion and success. Women remain under-represented across many sectors.

The confluence of factors that have entrenched this inequality includes uneven access to education, lack of opportunity, legal hurdles, job segregation, poor medical care and access to infrastructure, lack of representation, lack of bodily autonomy, stifled religious freedoms, biases and persistent societal mindsets.

Creating a more level playing field requires us to challenge every one of these notions and many others. We have to reconfigure not only our structures, systems, and support but also fundamentally rethink our world.

As society has demonstrated, the implications of failing to do so are dire. Gender-based violence is so prevalent in South Africa that we have been compared to war-torn nations due to the horrific stories that continue to make headlines. We have to tackle gender inequality head-on at an individual level, institutional levels, national level and an international level.

Universities, as the centres for knowledge, have a pivotal role in ensuring gender equity and an inclusive society, free from discrimination, stereotype, stigma and abuse of women. The University of Johannesburg has launched various initiatives to challenge gender inequality in our institutions, and the impact has been tangible.

We have four broad overarching initiatives. Firstly, we actively promote the implementation of gender agenda initiatives and support and prevention programmes. Secondly, we monitor and evaluate gender agenda interventions.

We have also launched institutional forums – including the Men's Forum – to challenge these imbalances. We boast a

Women's Leadership Development Programme to address the gender gap in leadership positions.

Thirdly, we address how gender-based violence intersects with other aspects of identity, including race, sexual orientation and social class. Finally, we ensure constant and effective awareness through a comprehensive communication strategy.

Over half the academic staff at our University are women, and the number of professors and associate professors increased from 287 in 2017 to 387 in 2022. Our Registrar, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic, Deputy-Vice-Chancellor: Research and Innovation (Acting), and Chief Financial Officer are women.

This is not to say we are at the pinnacle and have achieved everything. Part of our duty as institutions is to right these societal imbalances. Importantly, this is a shift we need to see in other facets of society. However, we understand that for positive change to happen in our society, it starts with us.

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15

Women's Day and the Ongoing Struggle Against Gender Inequality

Refilwe Nancy Phaswana-Mafuya

> *"To be born in a developing country is like competing in a race with your arms tied behind your back; to be born a female is to compete with your arms tied behind your back and blindfolded."* - Dr Mamphela Ramphela in Motlhalamme and Setati, (2020).

Women continue to face many gender-equality-related challenges that threaten the advancement of their careers, including complex patriarchal expectations, stereotypical views, harmful cultural norms and practices as well as some unwritten prescribed rules (UNESCO, 2021; 2023; United Nations, 2015; Fox Tree and Vaid, 2022; Motlhalamme and Setati, 2020; Phaswana-Mafuya, 2023a; 2023b). These challenges affect women's career progression, productivity, success rates, retention in academia and leadership. Consequently, they remain in the minority in leadership, management, and governance positions in academia, with fewer women professorships, promotions, mentorships, panels, networks, governance structures, memberships, fellowships, scientific panels, and peer reviews (UNESCO, 2023; 2021; United Nations: Sustainable Development Goals, 2015; Phaswana-Mafuya, 2023a; 2023b).

> *"As an African woman who has faced the challenging journey to the pinnacle of academia and science, the subject matter of challenges women face in academia resonates deeply with me. Even today, the question Acker and Warren*

> *Piper posed in 1984, "Is Higher Education Fair to Women?" remains relevant."* – Prof Olive Shisana (in Phaswana-Mafuya, 2023a).

A range of interventions have been implemented without much impact. This may be attributed the one-size-fits-all approaches that often overlook the unique intersectional needs of women; women in science and academia have diverse needs, and they cannot be boxed into one homogeneous group that will respond to a particular intervention in the same way (Phaswana-Mafuya, 2023a). Institutions tend to employ a piecemeal approach that is not embedded in the core business of academia or academic systems, processes, structures, and frameworks (Phaswana-Mafuya, 2023a). This results in some sophisticated form of exclusion where gender issues seem optional and peripheral, negatively affecting gender mainstreaming and ultimately hampering gender transformative change (Phaswana-Mafuya, 2023a; 2023b).

> *"Promoting the participation of women and girls in science means changing mindsets, fighting gender biases, and stereotypes which limit the expectations and professional goals girls have from early childhood"* – Dr Tasnica Sylvester (2020).

Women's Day is essential as it offers a platform to recognise and celebrate women's role in society despite the many challenges they contend with. The day provides an opportunity to improve awareness of gender diversity and inclusivity in various spheres, including science and academia. It also provides an opportunity to share women's stories of triumph against all odds.

My path to scientific leadership and management was not easy

Looking back, my path to research leadership was not easy. I was consistently in the minority in management and

leadership in science and academia. This made it hard for me to see myself in those around me, as my identity was not adequately reflected in my workspaces. There were limited role models and mentors that I could identify myself with. I sometimes felt like my voice was not loud enough or weighty to be heard by those in the majority. Given this context, I constantly felt the silent pressure to conform to non-diverse cultures, expectations and prejudices of those in the majority with little to no sense of belonging despite my own unique challenges and work-life balance issues**.** As a young mother at the time, I had to find my own ways to juggle high workloads, complex work schedules, and family life without a nearby family support system. I harboured much fear; fear of the unknown, and fear of letting myself down. I had to navigate through a sense of entitlement by those who were in significant numbers, which sometimes made me feel vulnerable, insecure, excluded and dominated most of the time. My self-concept was deeply challenged, and I felt like exiting the system through the next open door I could find. I had to fight the impulse to quit. This incredibly challenging period required courage, focus, dedicated effort, and a support system. Given these challenges, I never thought I would be sustained in my academic and science journey. I have detailed my challenges in my books (Phaswana-Mafuya, 2021a; 2023a; 2023b).

What kept me in the pipeline?

Throughout my career, I managed to stay focused because:

- I was committed to my vision to contribute to society's betterment using my knowledge and skills in epidemiology and public health field. This ignited more passion for the work, stimulated motivation, excellence, and impact, as well as drove me to work on my fears (both natural and imaginary) and to step out of my comfort zone. I set the bar very high for myself; put my name out there for scrutiny, and immersed myself in a world of possibilities and opportunities.

- I surrounded myself with mentors and like-minded people who helped me navigate non-diverse work environments across different career stages, and pointed me to doors of opportunity for career success and impact. I embraced mentorship wholeheartedly and adopted a teachable spirit while distancing myself from passive-aggressive individuals. I developed the resoluteness, courage, and discipline to finish whatever targets I set for myself, against all odds, the tenacity to carry on during tough situations, the perseverance to fight the impulse to give up.
- I learnt to stay focused and proactive, find creative ways of pursuing my endeavours, build good interpersonal relations and communicate my needs effectively even though sometimes they were not responded to. I did a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis of myself, took feedback seriously, reflected and worked on my weaknesses for personal and professional development so that I could become the best version of myself.
- I tapped on my communication abilities to leverage local, African and global networks and ensured stewardship of collaborative opportunities to expand my networks, memberships, fellowships and keep abreast of what was happening around me.

One of the statements that inspired me throughout my career journey:

> "Women are agents of change. They are the driving force that creates better lives for families, communities and, increasingly, the countries they have been elected to govern. Every time a woman excels in a high-profile position, her achievement lifts the social status of women everywhere." Margaret Chan, Physician, Director-General, WHO for the Chinese delegation, 2006–2017 (WHO, 2014).

Despite the challenges I have faced, I have:

- Become *recognised* as a titan against HIV (human immunodeficiency virus), for having brought a new view to health, a scarce-skills Professor of Epidemiology and Public Health, a qualified epidemiologist and an excellent public health scientist.
- Become a woman in science leadership, management, and governance who has been honoured institutionally, nationally, and internationally through work promotions, performance rewards, directorships, fellowships, memberships, nominations, and scholarships.
- Built influence and reputation as a leader who grooms talent with more than 60 mentees to inspire them to follow careers in science, and became part of science conversations, discussions, debates, radio talks, TV talks, panels, and webinars on topical issues in my field during National Science Week, the International Day of Women and Girls in Science, Women's Month, and related gatherings.
- Been honoured with fellowships, panel and professional memberships, and ratings from prestigious institutions such as the African Academy of Science, Academy of Science for South Africa, the National Research Foundation (NRF) (rating), Golden Key International Honours Society, and the Organization for Women in Science in Developing Countries.
- Developed long-term collaborations and partnerships that broadened my horizon, expanded the scope and impact of my work, brought new perspectives, cross-fertilisation of innovative ideas, enhanced personal growth, professional visibility, trans-disciplinarity and sharing of resources.
- Established an outstanding research track record of 170 articles, books, book chapters, and technical reports. My work attracted a lot of media, given its scientific rigour and high quality. I have become a socially engaged scientist, participating in debates, webinars, and outreach, going

beyond sharing traditional outputs for more significant societal impact.

- Received recognitions including Queen Mother of Research; the National Science and Technology Forum (NSTF) *Senior Scientist Award,* contribution to Sector Education and Training (SET); Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) *CEO Award,* Strategic Leadership, HSRC *Ubuntu Award*, Team Leadership; HSRC *Research Award,* Research Excellence and several profilings.
- Disseminated research findings in over 100 national and international conferences and related meetings in over 50 countries.

Various institutions are using my career journey to challenge gender stereotypes and prejudices about the abilities and capabilities of women.

My advice to young people wishing to pursue academic or science careers is that:

> *"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous?"*
> - Marianne Williamson (QuoteInvestigator, 2019).

Although career success is not an osmotic process that simply happens overnight, it is possible to succeed and here are a few pointers to consider:

- Take time to consider your why – what is your life purpose and what drives you? What motivates you? What energises you? What inspires you? What sustains you?
- Be intentional - know what you want, what is important to you, why it is important to you, where you want to go, and why you want to go there and pursue that.
- Believe in yourself. Internal and external factors may shape the nature of your journey, but they do not determine your destiny.

- Invest yourself in learning; do not take shortcuts. Career development is a process of becoming; it takes its course.
- Push yourself to remain focused against all odds; challenges are part of a career. I learned great lessons of humility during the depressing seasons of my career, just as I learned a lot during exciting times.
- Make the most of each opportunity, as it might become a significant milestone in your career.
- Surround yourself with like-minded people who have walked the path before you to overcome challenges.

Challenge yourself to perform assignments you have never performed before to enhance personal and professional growth.

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16

Not Yet *Uhuru*: The Violence Faced by Women in Leadership

Sibongile Vilakazi

When news of the passing of Mama Winnie Nomzamo Madikizela-Mandela broke on that fateful second day of April 2018, we all saw a cry of the people and a nation in mourning for a woman who not only symbolised the struggle for the freedom of black people in South Africa but a woman who was a symbol of the injustices that continue to be suffered by women in society and leadership in particular. Many voices said that Mama Winnie was the female president South Africa did not get to have because she was denied the opportunity. During that mourning period, one saw young women everywhere, and on social media platforms, wearing all black and expressing their love for her under the #SheMultiplied and #IamWinnieMandela hashtags. Until her passing, Mama Winnie had been positioned as a woman who should not be taken seriously because of the lousy publicity she enjoyed post-democracy. While during the struggle for freedom, she was the symbol of defiance, hope for black people and the resilient human spirit, in post-apartheid South Africa, she became the symbol of disorder and the enemy of progress that should be shunned. As though there was a concerted effort to write her off history, she was dehumanised, and she existed in the margins of society with little influence outside the circles of those who knew her personally and held her dearest to their hearts. Some argued that she could not mould herself to adjust to the new South Africa. These people, therefore, blamed her for the ill-treatment she received. Much like a rape victim would be blamed for enticing men to rape her by dressing inappropriately.

Watching the publicly displayed love and adoration by so many South Africans, young and old, but young women in particular, as soon as she passed on was intriguing. Her widely televised funeral reflected without a shadow of a doubt that someone truly significant had departed. The number of people who came out to form a human shield accompanying her casket on the way to the cemetery was spine-chilling. When the rain started pouring heavily, even the mum could say that a giant tree had fallen! The humans may have tried to suppress her majesty and denied her tributes, but nature is fair and pure. It spoke for her and bowed unto her by releasing its heavy tears. The documentaries about her life and stories that were flighted during the week of mourning revealed the painful fact that the very people she so dearly loved, whose dignity she fought for, gave hope to and protected during apartheid days, denied her three times like Peter in the Bible as soon as it was convenient for them. When the time came to enjoy the fruits of the hard-fought-for freedoms for which she was the face, they shunned her. In his novel, *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, Njabulo Ndebele humanises Mama Winnie by positioning her as someone who had to embrace disruption and then rage against order instead of longing for it in order to cope with the frequent evading of her privacy and space by the apartheid police (Njabulo, 2013). Her rejection of order enabled her to be the mother of the nation that she became, a mother that the then nation so desperately needed.

In post-apartheid, when she needed the very nation's protection and love, in the spirit of building 'a nation', her defiance spirit was seen as disruptive to the course. The new era required everyone to behave. We were dubbed a rainbow nation now, and everyone had to put their best foot forward. Women, in particular, had to sit like ladies, and Mama Winnie was not willing to sit like a lady, so she was shunned. She believed the leaders negotiating a way forward for a peaceful country could negotiate harder for more benefits for Africans and women than they were negotiating. In her mind, the negotiators were willing to accept too many concessions in the name of peace and progress.

Therefore, one may wonder why so many young women, particularly, resonated with her spirit of defiance. Considering that these are young women, they would never have experienced Mama Winnie in action. However, they only knew her through the stories about her that were passed down from the generation that experienced her. One may theorise that the women resonated with her spirit because they saw themselves in her. A woman who was made irrelevant by a system that had specific expectations that she could not meet despite her talents, heart and abilities. She was denied her greatness, and it is possible that these young women were and are feeling the same in the environments they find themselves in, where their greatness is minimised or denied. Hence the hashtags 'She Multiplied' and 'I am Winnie Mandela'. In her, the young women lived, and in them, Mama Winnie continued to live on because as much as she did not experience *Uhuru* in her lifetime, it is not yet *Uhuru* for them either. One has to look at statistics on women in leadership to see how accurate this struggle still is for women. For instance, women in the South African workplace reach their ceiling at middle management. Only the lucky few break through the ceiling into senior and executive management. According to the Department of Employment and Labour, for every seven men who occupy top management positions, only two women occupy these positions (Department of Employment and Labour, 2023).

These are just the numbers or representation; we are not yet discussing women's lived experiences in these positions. Experiences such as the much-reported gender pay gap that exists between a man in the same position as a woman. Even after a woman has worked ten times harder than her male counterparts would have to work to reach that position, she would most likely earn less. This is violence against women in the workplace and society. Women continue to suffer at the hands of a system that sees them as dependents who must ask for permission to think, dream and aspire to reach those dreams. Permission must be given to a woman to reach her fullest potential; otherwise, she will be stifled. From a spouse with specific expectations of a 'good wife' at home that she

will have to negotiate with to male allies in business and leadership that she has to deal with to support, mentor and sponsor her to move to the next level of her success.

Little is spoken about these negotiations and expectations from the men in return for their support and permission. The price that women pay for these positions of top leadership or the permission to operate at one's peak. In her biography, '*awakened to my true self*, Nonkululeko Gobodo, much known as the first black woman Chartered Accountant and successful businesswoman, talks about the price she paid to be the successful woman she is known to be. Married at a tender age, she had to negotiate this role with her husband while juggling her dreams of being a chartered accountant and establishing an accounting firm. The negotiations with her husband broke down eventually as she was not prepared to continue playing the script of a good wife that he expected, with little reciprocation. The script was too costly for her emotional well-being and mental stability, and she eventually chose to end the marriage. This was a tough decision, as she writes about how it affected her and wounded her children in particular. They later had to spend time healing the wounds together, which they accomplished. Fortunately for her, the male colleagues who partnered, mentored and sponsored her were true allies who wanted to succeed together with her. For instance, Auditor-General Wycliffe Yako gave her the first big job, which not only grew her firm but also made it a credible accounting firm to win even more jobs in the future. The Auditor-General was responding to the transformation mandate and creating opportunities for black people and women, which was the order of the day in the country at the time. Therefore, Ms Gobodo's success was also the office of the Auditor-General's success for having contributed to the transformation mandate. This is an example of a win-win negotiation in the quest to permit women to succeed.

We see these negotiations where men are true allies on whom we can depend. Logically, men are the ones who must grant us permission by opening the door since they are already inside many of the opportunities that we may be aspiring for

as women. However, not all these negotiations are designed to have win-win outcomes. There are often expectations placed on women, whether explicitly or tacitly. More often than not, women are expected to sit like a lady and not cause problems. One must not complain or be seen as a troublemaker.

An example is where a woman is supported and sponsored into a position, only to get to the top and be given a script to drive and perform on behalf of the men sponsoring her. This often happens when the optics of having a woman in the driving seat serve the agenda more than a genuine belief in the woman's leadership capabilities. Sometimes, a less qualified woman for the job is chosen to simply be the face of the public, while decision-making happens elsewhere. Depending on the agenda, it is a win-win situation if the script aligns with the woman's values and aspirations. However, it is an immediate problem if it does not align. The woman's choice of who will get the position is often carefully considered, considering her characteristics and credentials to ensure that she will execute the desired mandate well.

These ill-conceived negotiations are broken down in the newly termed 'the great breakup' phenomenon. The 'great breakup' describes the growing tendency for women to quit their jobs at senior-level positions. Studies documented by the World Economic Forum highlight this phenomenon with great concern. While it is challenging to create a large pool of women ready for promotion into senior positions, many women promoted to senior positions in America do not last in those positions. Within a short period, they quit their jobs, citing difficulty coping with the role. The reasons for failing to cope are macro-aggression that undermines their authority, feeling overworked and under-appreciated in terms of incentives, and needing flexibility in work hours to tend to family needs. When one looks at these reasons for quitting after probably working very hard to get the position, one can deduce that this is a breakdown in negotiations for the permission for a woman to reach her peak. The talks are often not conducted in good faith. Instead, they become another form of violence against female

leaders, which, in the end, undermines progress towards reaching an equitable society.

As we celebrate yet another Women's Month, we take cognisance of the gains made thus far, but let us also start to interrogate these gains and how they are being realised. Gains that are made because of the agenda to be politically correct and to meet optics have the possibility of doing more harm than good. The agenda to support women must be authentic based on their talents and contributions rather than for any other reason. Genuine respect for what she brings will move us closer to our goal of an equal society and a more balanced world. Mama Winnie Nomzamo Madikizela-Mandela's spirit of defiance is needed now more than ever to end the violence against women leaders and to demand respect and our dignity as women leaders.

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Hoopoe Press

Women's Day, celebrated annually on 9 August, commemorates the 1956 women's march against the discriminatory pass laws during the apartheid era. It was on this day that women from across the nation were led by Helen Joseph, Lillian Ngoyi, Rahima Moosa and Sophia Williams-De Bruyn to the Union Buildings to protest against the oppressive pass laws. As SA History describes it, "The 1956 Women's March played a vital role in women becoming more visible participants in the anti-apartheid struggle." That is not to say that women were not already playing an instrumental role in the struggle. But as history has long demonstrated, this is often a forgotten aspect of our narrative. This unfortunate omission underscores the importance of reclaiming and preserving these stories, weaving them into the broader narrative of societal progress. As we reflect on their fight and the impact of their war cry, "wathint' abafazi, wathint' imbokodo, uza kufa" which translates to "when you strike the women, you strike a rock, you will be crushed you will die", we are given pause to reflect on the progress made in the fight for equality since then. We now live in a democratic society where many of our aspirations have been realised. Yet, there is much we have not managed to achieve. To say that South Africa has achieved equality would be a fallacy. A grim reality is that in many aspects we have failed women.

Pay parity, underrepresentation in industries, unequal access to opportunities, disturbing levels of violence, sexism and misogyny persist unabated. These issues cast a long shadow over our aspirations as a nation. This book aims to shed light on these issues while honouring the progress made and highlighting the road ahead.

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