HER-STORY IN HISTORY: WOMEN OF THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

“Kaffir Meid” is one of the heart wrenching and derogatory names that was used to address the wives, daughters, and sisters who came to visit their loved ones at Robben Island during political imprisonment. Those journeys of sorrow to the Island bore no certainty on the likelihood of seeing their loved ones for a minute or more. The duration of their visit was dependent on what was deemed inappropriate political speech, gestures or speaking an unlawful language (any other languages apart from English, Afrikaans or isiXhosa) during an official visit by a warder.

An exhibition of visitors’ registers available for viewing at Robben Island Museum’s Jetty 1 at the V&A Waterfront. This specific register includes Winnie Mandela’s visit to see Nelson Mandela on 13 April 1974.
“A number of wives of political prisoners were either detained in jail several times, torture by mind breaking itself develops paranoia and brings into dominance those destructive aspects of behaviour which, under normal circumstances, can be kept under control or done away with. As a result, detainees or prisoners are set against themselves, but also on each other.”1 Speaking at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1997, Joyce Sikhakhane Ranken’s testimony is one of countless sad testimonies of how women were indirectly and directly affected by the carefully orchestrated Apartheid regime as deliberate attempts to oppress black communities socially, economically, and psychologically.

How is Robben Island Museum (RIM) preserving the social memory of women?

The effects of Apartheid run deep from a societal perspective. In our continuous quest to educate South Africans and the rest of the world about the history of Robben Island Museum (RIM), we launched a Lecture Series in 2017 to commemorate women holistically. The second edition of the lecture series was dedicated to Mam’ Albertina Sisulu whose husband, Walter Sisulu, was also incarcerated on Robben Island.

In recognising the women who stood the test of time, RIM’s Imbokodo Lecture series seeks to celebrate the social, cultural, and political achievements of women as a mark of respect for those who have sacrificed their lives and freedom for a just South Africa. The lectures also aim to highlight the significant role that women such as Sophia Williams, Lilian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, and Rahima Moosa, who led the 09 August 1956 march to the Union Buildings in Pretoria to hand over petitions opposing the Pass Laws of the time. This brave act signalled the unified strength of women and led to the slogan, “Wathint’ Abafazi, Wathint’ Imbokodo” (“You strike a woman, you strike a rock”).
As we recognise the courage and resilience displayed by the 1956 stalwarts, RIM also wishes to celebrate the women who are game changers in 2019, the so called “fierce future females” through an exhibition that will feature:

1. Chelsea Van Wyk: South Africa’s first female Audi Master Technician
2. Okhela Gampu: Coordinator of Operations Zeitz Mocaa
3. Laurien Johannes: South Africa’s first female rugby coach
4. Suga: Presenter of Heart FM’s drive time show
5. Tammy Langtry: First female Assistant Curator of Zeitz Mocaa
6. Candra Shanice: South Africa’s first female shipbuilder
7. Arlene Wehr: First woman to fill the position of Head of Operations for the District West Fire and Rescue Service.
8. Siviwe Gwarube: Former RIM alumnus of the Young Leaders Academy and one of the youngest Members of Parliament of South Africa.

Most recently President Cyril Ramaphosa proved that gender equality both a women’s issue and a political issue when he announced a gender-balanced Cabinet of Ministers that will lead South Africa for the next five years. “Our President’s Cabinet announcement sends a clear message to all South Africans that we should strive towards gender equality in the boardroom, in the media, on the sport field, in employee recruitment, and all other aspects of our society,” said Morongoa Ramaboa, RIM Spokesperson. We view the Imbokodo Lecture as an ideal platform to celebrate the historical female figures, who have brought us where we are today, and the women who are currently rising as role models. These women are showing us the way towards a society where women are equal to the men whom they work alongside every day,” Ramaboa concluded.

The RIM 2019 Imbokodo Lecture will take place on Wednesday, 21 August 2019 from 17:00 to 21:00 at the Ballroom West, Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC). A limited number of seats have been reserved for media to attend. Should you wish to attend, please RSVP directly with Reputation Matters’ Chris Bischoff (chris@reputationmatters.co.za) and Nadia Nel (nadia@reputationmatters.co.za) no later than Thursday, 08 August 2019. A menu from which to select your preferred dinner courses will be shared upon receipt of your written confirmation of attendance.
Media Contacts:

Chris Bischoff                      Nadia Nel
chris@reputationmatters.co.za       nadia@reputationmatters.co.za
081 435 2917                        081 439 3912

List of References