



AFRICA-FRIDAY REFLECTIONS

"AFROCENTRIC THOUGHT"



LESSONS TO LEARN FROM THE WOMEN OF AUGUST 9TH, 1956.

REBAONE TSATSINYANE.

Almost sixty-five years ago, on August 9th 1956, about 20 000 Black Azanian women marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria, Gauteng. The purpose of the march was to show resistance against the apartheid system's legislation on Pass Laws for Black women. The Laws were a form of discriminatory internal passports, which were used to separate Black Azanians and limit their movements.

The irony here being that they were being subjected to these limitations on Land that belongs to their Ancestors. In an effort to make sure that as many women attend the march as possible, it was scheduled to take place on a Thursday, which was a day when all Black Azanian women who worked as domestic workers were given the day off. Upon arrival at the Union Buildings, a petition was signed by over 14 000 Black Azanian women.

These fierce Warrior Queens demanded the immediate ban of Pass Laws against Black women. This was a day that practically cemented the strength and determination of Black women in this country. Their fearlessness was seen as an act of defiance against the apartheid regime, but to the rest of the continent and in the diaspora, it showed formidable power and unity.

I genuinely believe that when the women marched to those Union Buildings, it was not just in an effort to end the Pass Laws, but also every piece of discriminatory legislation, custom or practice that existed back then, and continues to exist in contemporary times – whose only aim is to marginalize and oppress us. What we've come to know about Black women and the Black race in its entirety, is that we are each other's soldiers. We quite literally go to war for each other. We do this because we understand that we can't get liberation by appealing; it's the sort of thing we have to fight for.

"...we can't get liberation by appealing; it's the sort of thing we have to fight for."

Today, we live in a South AfriKKKa, and an Afrika that still continues to marginalize and oppress Black women. I use the words Azania and South AfriKKKa to refer to one place, whose

realities are very different from each other. Azania is a name that represents our country in its liberated form, while South AfriKKKa represents the Dutch criminal settler colony that was established in 1910. The women of 1956 were marching for Azania and not South AfriKKKa.

"The women of 1956 were marching for Azania and not South AfriKKKa."

Not only that, but they were also marching against the many ills that exist in our society. One of the most potent ones being the war between Afrikan men and Afrikan women, i.e. patriarchy vs. matriarchy. Not understanding that Afrikan men need Afrikan women, and Afrikan women also need Afrikan men.

I don't mean for the purpose of procreation only, but for support and guidance too. The spirit of an Afrikan woman is one that is gentle and sensitive. While the spirit of an Afrikan man is firm and strong-willed. But this is not to say that an Afrikan woman can't be firm and strong-willed, or that an Afrikan man can't be gentle and sensitive.

My point is that we complement each other. That's why some households have women as the leaders of that house, and some have men as the leaders of that house. It's about finding what works for your home and your community.

I believe that the women of 1956 possessed both gentleness and sensitivity, and also firmness and strong-will. They had to, seeing how they lived in a world where they unfortunately didn't have to fight only their white oppressors, but also the egocentric Black men who saw themselves as the anointed leaders of the Afrikan liberation movement. These women refused to stand by as damsels in distress, waiting for the men to come liberate them.

The women of 1956 are women who understood that a real Afrikan man is one who listens to the Afrikan woman. He understands that women are the carriers of knowledge and wisdom, and he treats her as such. This sick idea of how women are supposed to "stay in line" and not question anything a man says, is false. Not only that, but it is not the Afrikan way of doing things.

Men in pre-colonial Afrika, i.e. men in ancient Kemet, respected and revered Afrikan women. They had sculptures, statutes and paintings exalting Afrikan women as divine Beings, goddesses and leaders of their nations. What does this tell us? It tells us that Afrikan women have always been seen and treated as Beings of divinity. We bring life into this world. That is a blessing and an honour. The men in pre-colonial Afrika understood this.

When colonialism came, it unfortunately changed all of that. Not only did it erase our way of life, but also our values, cultures and customs. The Afrikan men we see and know today, are not the same as the pre-colonial Afrikan men we often read about in books about Afrikan history (real Afrikan history). This is because when the Europeans came, they raped, killed and distorted the Afrikan man and his Manhood.

As a protector, he was stripped of his natural role in the Afrikan family and Afrikan society. He was beaten, enslaved, and had his woman and children taken away from him. He was taught violence. He was conditioned to believe that his violence and aggression are the only language that gets him what he wants. And the unfortunate reality is that sometimes, all it takes is a conversation to help iron things out. We think that colonization only took our Land and resources away from us, but it actually robbed us of our honour as Afrikan men and Afrikan women too.

"We think that colonisation only took our Land and resources away from us, but it actually robbed us of our honour as Afrikan men and Afrikan women too."

In as much as the Afrikan continent stood in solidarity against apartheid and imperialism in all its forms, it also had its flaws. These include the constant need to present women in the liberation struggle as footnotes instead of elevating them to their rightful place in Afrikan history.

The year 1956 proves that the Black woman is able to do whatever needs to be done in order to ensure her liberation.

In pre-colonial Afrika, we had fierce, Black nation-builders and rulers of sovereign states such as Queen Nzinga of modern-day Angola; Queen Mother Nana Yaa Asantewaa of West Afrika's Ashanti Empire in modern-day Ghana; and the Candices of modern-day Sudan. Post-colonially, we also had liberation sheroes such as Mama Zanyiwe Madikizela of Azania; Mama Maria Nyerere of Tanzania; and Mama Nokuzola Mndende, who is one the founders of Icamagu Heritage Institute.

These are women who played undeniably significant roles in the fight for Afrikan liberation, some in political spheres, others in socio-economic and spiritual spheres.

We have to recognize these women for what they really are. We have to acknowledge that we stand on their shoulders. We are who we are because they made it possible for us to exist in the way that we do. It is unfortunate that the pages of history barely even mention their names. There continues to be an unfailing inability to recognize their work.

These are Great Ancestors whose names invoke so much power in us, yet not much is said about them.

Our governments claim to want to empower women, but they can barely manage to bring honour to the women who birthed our nations.

"We also ask for leadership that knows that a lost soul cannot lead the people, and that a country that speaks against its own history and heritage, is a dead country."

We are not asking for weekly holidays in remembrance of them. That would just be a waste of time. What we do ask for, is curriculums that will begin to teach us and our young about our real history. We also ask for leadership that knows that a lost soul cannot lead the people, and that a country that speaks against its own history and heritage, is a dead country.

Lesedi.



Rebaone Tsatsinyane.