

# Chapter 9: Gandhi, King, Mandela: Legacies and African Women<sup>1</sup> of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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## Abstract

The drive for '*Peace and Justice for all*' remains as potent in 2023 as it did during the life span of Gandhi, Mandela and King. Many of the challenges of today, would certainly have challenged these men, to speak 'truth to power', for example many issues with regional, national and global ramifications, which impact population groups, animal rights, environmental guardianship and sustainability. Even though questions might be raised about their consideration of their wives and women generally, I would argue that Black women and girls must speak out for themselves. For their own mental health and wellbeing, Black women and girls must rise to meet their own challenges. In light of drawing inspiration from the legacies of the men and their work, I inject the gendered perspectives and provide an overview of the challenges and achievements of Black women and girls in the UK today. These stretch from their leadership in the highest echelons of power, to being university professors, leaders in business, and glamour, and the critical engagement of their under-representation in higher education, as well as forms of subjugation young black girls suffer at the hands of misogynists in the UK today. Yet, the call remains to continue the nonviolent struggle for peace and justice.

**Keywords:** Black women, Black girls, African women, inclusion, diversity, respect, authentic self, misogyny, phenomenal black women

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<sup>1</sup> I refer to African women on the basis that, whether they are living on the continent of Africa, or have migrated abroad, or their foremothers were taken from the continent via the cruel operation of the slave trade. West-ward or East-ward, they still remain African even if they have absorbed the cultures of where they are domiciled.

## I

Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela; the three giants spanning the 19<sup>th</sup> century into the 20<sup>th</sup> century the testament of their call for racial and social justice, their beliefs and actions have proved inspiring for those fighting the stubbornly persistent injustices of the age. The drive for '*Peace and Justice for all*' remains as potent in 2023 as it did during their life span.

Despite the birth of the hard fought for independence of India, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, colour, religion, sex or national origin, and the removal of Apartheid, with the achievement of arguably the most progressive democratic constitution in the world, many battles remain for population groups on the whole and particular sections of society within those groups. There are many issues of regional, national and global ramification which impact people groups and which the trio in their own unique manner would have challenged and advocated for, speaking '*truth to power*'. The contemporary demand for human and animal rights, environmental guardianship and sustainability, would not have been alien to these men. The irony is that so much has changed, and yet, so much has not. The Hebrew scriptures pinpoints humanity's pathologies to the fact that: 'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?' As one ages, there is a realisation that so much of who we are as humans what we exhibit, our actions be they good or bad is down to what is going on internally. Not only how we view ourselves but crucially how we *view and treat* others. There is a symbiotic connectivity there.

## II

It is fair to say, the African woman has held a rather ambiguous position in the societies of the North, probably in the East too. Her positioning in popular culture has been a complex one. Moreover, even in the era of the #MeToo movement (originated by Black women) one continues to observe the devaluation of the Black female voice in too many sectors of society. The travesty of chattel slavery, what it did to her body, mind, and spirit with health reverberation down through the generations still has not been fully understood or told, although sociologists and historians have begun the job (Dadzie 2021). Little is said about how her personhood has been plagiarised. The physical alterations that clearly re-create the African woman's bodily shape or curves, the appropriation of the styling of her hair, clothes, even how she walks in some cases, the copying of her artistic expressions, to the strange phenomena of

individuals choosing to ‘pass’ as Black women, going un-detected and under the radar until a slip-up that gives them away<sup>2</sup>. The spikes of adoration cannot be denied. Recent visits to the UK in spring 2023, by musical artists Beyoncé and Lizzo sent fans of all colours into mania. The wall-to-wall coverage of Tina Turner’s celebrated life and death demonstrated how a select number of Black female cultural icons do manage to transcend what is happening on the ground for the vast majority. Not to say that they themselves are not periodically reminded the ugly face of racism. One thinks of the incident involving Oprah Winfrey with the French sales assistant in the Parisian store<sup>3</sup>. Despite the adulation of a select few, how does fundamental ‘respect’ as Aretha Franklin sang, translate into the everyday scenarios of living, navigating the workplace, and other areas of societal interaction? In popular culture, Netflix and other globalised streaming platforms may have dramas with strong or at least foregrounded Black female leads. Its current though criticised trend of resurrecting forgotten or ignored real life historical African Queens in its dramas, certainly adds to the decolonisation of the cultural myopia that has for too long been reflected in televised dramas. However, the facts and figures on the ground across the board still do not look good for Black women in comparison to their white peers and many continue to feel the micro-aggressions and discrimination in too many spaces as they navigate life.

How we view women, depends on the position of one’s personhood; gender, race, sexuality, the characteristics of what makes us the unique humans we are and our lived experience our ‘socialisation’ to the relationships around us. I am not going to interrogate the relationships between Gandhi, Martin Luther-King, Mandela, and the women in their lives, at least not directly, however during the lifetimes of the trio it was no walk in the park for their wives or the majority of African women around the globe. Although many stood side by side or alone fighting for the ‘the cause’ there are many unsung heroes and she-roses that far outnumber those we can call to mind or are documented in the historical record. It is illuminating to read how Kasturba, Coretta, Evelyn,

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<sup>2</sup> For example Nkechi Amare Diallo (born Rachel Anne Dolezal) American activist known for presenting herself as a black woman despite born to white parents. Former National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People chapter president.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Paris store apologizes to Oprah’ BBC News 24 June 2005; see ‘Oprah Winfrey was victim of racism in Switzerland’. BBC News 9 August 2013. (Accessed 17 March 2025.)

Winnie, Graca embraced their own fights which arguably mirrored and sustained that of the significant male figures in their lives, however long or short the personal relationship lasted. In simple vernacular these women were not push overs and I think we can all agree that in one way or another they paid a heavy price for their unique association with each man.

For African women, so much has changed and yet so much has not. I know that my Great-Great Grandmother Elizabeth, Great-Grandmother Josephine, Grandmother Clauris, even Mother Artielene would be amazed at the opportunities there are now for their descendants in comparison to when they were girls, young women and mothers. We have come a long way; however tropes and stereotypes persist. Furthermore, racism and misogynist treatment remain an ugly mix especially in the press. Ask Michelle Obama, Serena Williams, or Meghan Mountbatten-Windsor, the Duchess of Sussex (for some strange reason refusing to acknowledge the change of status as it suits them, since the death of Queen Elizabeth II, and even prior, the British press persist in calling her Meghan Markle, however they do not follow the same rule by calling Catherine – the Princess of Wales – Kate Middleton, they accord the latter her correct title). In everyday working life, too many anecdotes remind one of the comparatively lower value of African females in relation to white peers. Yet it can be uneven and there are stand-out moments of high visibility that encourage reflection.

### III

King Charles III of the United Kingdom and associated territories was crowned alongside his consort Queen Camilla on the 6 May 2023. In terms of the coronation ceremony there were notable departures from that of his predecessors. Prior to the occasion the PR machinery was on full blast. The chattering classes bent over backwards to drive home the message of the introduction of elements of ‘inclusivity’ and ‘diversity’ (the current buzz terms in the UK in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement) injected into an age old predominately white European ceremony that by its very nature is exclusionary and elite. Now the 21<sup>st</sup> century audience was being invited to see themselves represented in all colours, including the congregants invited that had no place in prior ceremonies. In translation; more black and brown peoples and faith groups and foreign rulers given visibility during the proceedings. One wondered if the King of the Ashantis, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II (the Asantehene and

Lady Julia Osei) would turn up in his full regalia as he had for a reception with the King a few days earlier ... surely the aesthetic feast for the eyes and majestic symbolism of his thick gold bangles, rings on the limbs of its authentically traditional owner, would throw all the looted British crown jewels into shade. Sadly I did not catch sight of the gold or Kente robes.

However, you had to hand it to the organisers, it was indeed visually striking to see the number of Black women taking such a prominent role in the pomp and ceremony. Four were part of the ceremony and later Baroness Scotland (Secretary-General of the Commonwealth of Nations) danced alongside the King at the coronation concert on Sunday. By order of appearance there was Baroness Floella Benjamin, head held high carrying the royal Sceptre, stepping forward with Dame Professor Elizabeth Anionwu carrying the be-jewelled royal orb. There was Baroness Amos Lady of the Garter, announcing the King to the congregants and later the Rt. Revd Rose Bishop Hudson-Wilkin (Bishop of Dover, and Bishop in Canterbury) had a speaking part. Of course, prior to this show and tell, was the South African Soprano (surely soon to be Dame, in the vein of Dame Kiri Te Kanawa before her), a vision of beauty in canary yellow, Pretty Yende who sung '*Sacred Fire*' (were those diamonds around her neck real?). The first African woman to sing solo at the coronation of a British monarch.

What is one to make of this elevated visibility? There was of course the obligatory gospel choir (not too jaunty like at the King's youngest son's wedding), they managed a dignified sway, so much colour injected into the Abbey. However, lest we get carried away, there was a discordant slip later as the Royals gathered on the balcony. One of the Black female commentators revealed her 'authentic self' and expressed her thoughts to the viewers. Her popular Netflix series was no protection for her. The actress, Adjoa Andoh had the audacity in the view of some commentators to state the obvious to anyone with twenty-twenty vision. There were no brown faces on the Buckingham Palace balcony, to quote her. The balcony was 'terribly white' (translation: some things appear to change, yet by alchemy stay the same!). When all the drama dissipated, the family had no visible evidence of 'diversity' or 'inclusion' among their own cliques. This observation threw the media into its usual vitriolic diatribe, of criticism at Andoh's 'tasteless' comments. They brandished stats of the apparent high number of complaints to the networks.

They were all too aware no doubt that the one person-Meghan the Duchess of Sussex who could have injected a little colouration in that balcony image or later official portraiture, had roundly been ostracised and pilloried out

of the country. In the event using agency to return back home to sunny California, taking her Prince with her.

What were we to make of this spectacle of the Black female presence so visible on the national stage when the eyes of the world turned temporarily to view the British and their pageantry, which is re-hashed in different forms throughout the social calendar of the elites and where Black women are beginning to pop up even if it has taken them nearly nine hundred years (for example the Garter ceremony) to do so. That is just one Black woman of African descent in this centuries-old tradition the honour of participation bestowed by the Monarch of the day<sup>4</sup>.

Did this spectacle signal that the battles of African women in Britain are over, now there seems to be endorsement of their competencies from the figurehead at the very apex of the British hierarchy? Or is it all (as many would argue), performative, virtue signalling in front of an estimated viewing audience of eighteen to twenty million (cf. Atkinson 2023, on the coronation event of King Charles).

## IV

The saying goes that you can tell a lot about a society by how they treat their children. Similarly, I believe you can also gage a lot about societies by how they treat their women. In matters of health, crime, employment, childcare, political rights, education, treatment in the criminal justice system, social-economic outcomes in general how are we fairing both in the North and the South of the globe? Are we where we should be? Is it good and safe to be a woman in the society in which we live? What would Gandhi think about the life chances and treatment of women in India right now? Similarly, Martin Luther-King, and Mandela in a country with reputedly the most progressive consti-

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<sup>4</sup> Baroness Valerie Ann Amos, a British Labour Party politician and diplomat who served as the eighth UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, was appointed Lady of the Garter 2022. Before her appointment to the UN, she served as British high Commissioner to Australia. She was created a life peer in 1997, serving as Leader of the House of Lords, and Lord President of the Council from 2002 to 2007. Since September 2020, Amos was Master of University College of Oxford, becoming the first-ever black head of an Oxford college, as well as the first woman to head that college.

tution? Are women barely surviving or thriving across societal measurements of equity in wealth, health, well-being, and other key performance indicators of the recognition of value across society?

It is a complex picture, Black women in Britain though visible yet seem largely invisible in areas where a critical mass of protest and support would be useful to push and advocate for accessibility to the opportunities and privileges to be the decision makers, the mentors and sponsors of the next generation in key industries, the innovators and creators of self-sustaining generative wealth. I cannot do justice to the thankfully increasingly multi-generational 'Black Firsts' and outstanding women. A growing list of writers, journalists, business people, scientists, academics and policy-makers, politicians, medical practitioners, figures such as Sharon White, Maggie Aderin-Pocock, Anne Marie-Imafidon, Sonita Alleyne, Patricia Kingori, Vanessa Kingori, Afua Hirsh, Malorie Blackman, Nicola Rollock, Diane Abbott, Bernadine Evaristo, Reni Eddo-Lodge, Jacqui Dunkley-Bent, Vivian Hunt, Karen Blakett, and younger names coming up (Bryan 2022), like the journalist and writer Candice Carty-Williams, Candice Braithwaite, I could go on and this is just within the UK, I have not touched other regions of the world. So many in the USA including recent stand-out figures like the pandemic fighting Kizzmekia 'Kizzy' Shanta Corbett, the A-I genius, Joy Buolamwini. What of the picture in Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, Australia and NZ, the Middle East, do we have a discernible voice in these areas where the Black female voice of women rooted there is clearly heard? In our Mother continent of Africa, the picture of influential visibility is encouraging if one gives credence to listings such as the 'Top 100 most Influential Women' (Oluwole 2022). It is good to counter the western tropes of the benighted African woman struggling to feed her myriads of children.

A note of caution however, irrespective of whether you are a celebrated First Lady and graduate of arguably the best Ivy League schools in the country- unlike any other first lady in history, the critics and racists will still disrespect you. Michelle Obama is a case in point. It makes no difference how rich you are the criticism will be unrelenting ask Oprah Winfrey. You are just as vulnerable to medical malpractice and misdiagnosis at your most vulnerable stage of life during pregnancy whether you are Beyoncé or Serena Williams.

The reality is that Black women are still undervalued and disrespected. Stories I heard my Mother share whether in the workplace or going through everyday life, do not seem consigned to history when one starts to listen intently

to the narrative soundscape of contemporaries now.

Too many people want you to stay in your lane and not slay in it! And it is a battle to retain quite literally one's sanity in the hostile spaces one has to inhabit and navigate. What would Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Mandela do but fight against the state of affairs as it stands.

Alice Walker's famous lines in the mouth of Oprah Winfrey, from the celebrated book *The Colour Purple*:

All my life I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy. I had to fight my brothers. I had to fight my cousins and my uncles. A girl child ain't safe in a family of men. But I never thought I'd have to fight in my own house.

Sobering but true for still too many women and women of colour. Whether literal or metaphorical the struggle and the fight remain all too real.

## V

The fight is there for instance in the UK academy to make a dent in the stubborn unwelcoming professorial terrain which is overwhelmingly white (cf. Coughlen 2021). Moreover, Black women are underrepresented at professorial and leadership levels in UK universities. According to recent figures published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), just 160 out of 22,855 professors in 2020/21 were Black (defined as Black/African/Caribbean/Black British) with the numbers further reducing for those identified as Black Female Professors<sup>56</sup>.

In America where research shows that Black women are the most educated group in the U.S. with a growing number of Black women pursuing

<sup>5</sup> According to official figures, only 155 of more than 23,000 university professors in the UK are black. It remains below 1%, the same as for the past five years, and is an increase of only 50 posts despite the number of professorships rising by more than 3,000 in that time. At this senior academic level, women hold 28% of professorships, up from 23% five years ago. Of UK professors only 41 are black women, with only 1 Black tenured woman professor of History at time of writing.

<sup>6</sup> Out of 22 855 Professors, 6 510 (28%) were women. This proportion is the same as last year. 160 Professors (1%) were Black, 7% were Asian and 89% were White (Coughlen 2021).

higher degrees, it is even more imperative for Black faculty to be represented. However, many are questioning whether institutions actually want Black faculty, or whether they're simply looking for diversity brownie points.

It seems that within the American context that corporate America isn't designed to champion black female advancement. A report noted:

Black women leaders are more ambitious than other women at their level: 59% of Black women leaders want to be top executives, compared to 49% of women leaders overall. But they are also more likely than women leaders of other races and ethnicities to receive signals that it will be harder for them to advance ... compared to other women at their level, Black women leaders are more likely to have colleagues question their competence and to be subjected to demeaning behaviour (Brownlee 2022)<sup>7</sup>.

One in three Black women leaders says they've been denied or passed over for opportunities because of personal characteristics, including their race and gender. The findings reveal a disturbingly consistent trend among the more than 40,000 employees surveyed. Frustratingly, Black women also ranked last in their experience of manager support – managers showing interest in their career, checking in on their well-being and promoting inclusion—compared to other identities including men, all women, LGBTQ women, women with disabilities, white women, Asian women and Latinas. Similarly, Black women ranked near last in experiencing sponsorship and ally-ship as well as psychological safety.

Dana Brownlee highlights the toxic conundrum that so many Black women leaders face, frustrated by disparate challenges and barriers but not feeling safe enough to voice concerns. Indeed, the persistent racist trope that stifles many Black women leaders is that of the 'angry Black woman'. As a result, many Black women leaders find themselves caught in a dysfunctional, non-reciprocal relationship with the workplace. They continue to contribute to

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<sup>7</sup> 20% of Black women leaders experienced 'having someone say or imply that you're not qualified' compared to 12% for all women and 6% for all men 38% of Black women leaders experienced 'being mistaken for someone at a lower level' compared to 26% for all women and 13% for all men 55% of Black women leaders experienced 'having your judgement questioned' compared to 39% for all women and 28% for all men.

and support organizations that clearly are not reciprocal in terms of looking after their career aspirations and their well-being. This may account for why Black women are the fastest growing demographic group of entrepreneurs in America. However, they still face disproportionate challenges accessing finance necessary to launch and be sustainable (Brownlee 2022).

In the workplace experiences and professional success in many ways remain fixed to the determining factors of gender and race which often leaves darker skinned women relegated to the bottom rung of the corporate ladder. The double-whammy of colour and gender have never proved to be markers of systemic advantage in the corporate world. Disparities and inequities abound. Gandhi, King, and Mandela would encourage that the high ground be taken alongside a strategic fightback. The workplace is increasingly driven by knowledge creators and innovators, skilful navigators between systems, processes, concepts applied to the problem-solving needs of roles that one cannot always pinpoint. Being valued for one's unique or ubiquitous knowledge base is what counts. There is the recognition that the more cosmopolitan and diverse experience and views brought to the table the better. This creates opportunity. If any group knows how to pivot, be creative, flexible and adapt it has to be the African woman, given the opportunity their experience can enrich any working environment.

The question is how to build and retain mental toughness and resilience, safeguarding while empowering Black women to attain the tools they need to attain and then sustain themselves in the ever-changing working environment. The academic Nicola Rollock ventures to share her coping mechanisms in her recent book (Rollock 2022), it follows hard on the heels of other Black academics providing the research and theorisation of the situation that Black women in the British academy find themselves in. Writers such as Deborah Gabriel, Shirley Rose Tate, Heidi Mirza, Sara Ahmed, Kalwant Bhopal and others (cf. SBIA 2022)<sup>8</sup>.

## VI

On the international stage there are still issues for which the African woman must fight to be heard, to sustain visibility and a seat at whichever table of their choice. When will a African woman be numbered among the G7 leaders? I

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. also Bhopal 2018; Bhopal & Myers 2023; Arday & Mirza 2018; The iPaper 2022.

would argue that having a strong geo-political Black female presence is vital given the major challenges that the continent of Africa faces as much for women if not more. It has an exciting future with a young continental population bubbling over with innovation and entrepreneurship. Nevertheless challenges are there, for example the impact of climate change on the youth and the environment, health issues; specific conditions that seem to disproportionately affect black women, why are these not been addressed with the urgency of other health challenges? Who are the decision-makers setting the agenda? Certainly not enough of the African women spotlighted as leaders in the continent. The World Health Organisation needs to be funnelling more of its funding into investigation into the conditions and pathologies that blight the lives of women of colour; diabetes, hypertension, heart disease-the triple killers and severe life inhibitors fibroids, kidney disease, cancers whenever medical stats are wheeled out your heart sinks when they breakdown the stats and map against the outcomes for Black women. Medical racism, or at the very least unconscious bias still blights the care of Black women. Social advocacy requires a consistent and persistence to disrupt the harmful narratives coming out of the mouths of health professionals who should know better. We have got a job to train the trainers.

In Britain of the first half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the maternal health of women of African descent in comparison to white mothers and the outcome for their babies are a cause for concern. Research conducted by the Women and Equalities Committee, found that MPs agree the current Government and NHS measures to address the disparity in maternal deaths are ‘necessary but insufficient’.

Black British women die at alarming rate compared to their white counterparts; theories vary but it is touted that it’s because they reach motherhood with too many pre-existing health conditions. Considering the fact that African women are the least likely to believed when it comes to their pain or symptoms and this is reflected in data, and that they are last to be diagnosed with chronic, life inhibiting, or threatening diseases, this kind of reasoning is suspect to say the least. Even before the shocks of COVID demonstrated health disparities when it came to African and Asian populations, a 2018 report into national maternal, newborn and infant health services revealed Black women are five times more likely and Asian women twice as likely to die during pregnancy or just after, compared to white women. Previous research has suggested this inequality may be partly explained by gestational diabetes, other medical illnesses, previous pregnancy problems and inadequate use of antenatal

care – ‘More research is needed to understand the specific causes of the deaths of women from these ethnic groups’, concludes the MBRACE report<sup>9</sup>.

## VII

Turning to another field, what about ‘new tech’? Artificial Intelligence and the new directives in computer science. It has been reported that over 20,000 black women are ‘missing’ from the IT profession in the UK, according to a new report from leading industry groups. Black women remain under-represented in the information technology sector, and face barriers to progression, such as lack of flexible working, career development support and a strong ‘tech bro’ culture in some organisations, according to the study. Research by the Chartered Institute for IT and Coding Black Females found that, whilst Black women make up 1.8% of the UK workforce, they only make up 0.7% of IT professionals. That means for black women to be truly represented in IT there would need to be 20,000 more within the sector. Furthermore 67% of the Coding Black Females Network - all tech professionals at a range of levels - felt they faced more barriers to entry into the tech industry than women from other ethnicities. Nearly a quarter (21%) believe that current diversity and inclusion policies are having a negative effect in their ability to progress. There is work to be done. The percentage of all women in IT has increased only slightly over recent years from 17% of the IT workforce in 2017 to 22% in 2021, the report found.

Undoubtedly, Black women transform the societies in which they live. In the UK one of the increasingly growing crises in the society is the crumbling of the National Health Service, a ‘free’ health service for all (unprecedented at the time of its introduction in 1948). In all the analyses it is interesting that few give credit to its longevity due in no small part to the thousands of Black and Brown women (and men) that kept it going. Inhabiting the lower and middle level roles across the medical field, with smaller numbers breaking through to the senior managerial hierarchy. A factor in its slow seemingly painful demise is arguably due to the Windrush generation and subsequent cohorts of thousands of Black nurses and female health workers who have retired or left the service for various reasons, and there has been a struggle to recruit and retain staff since. Assessment of the so-called Windrush generation of African Caribbean workers have prompted increasing histories re-examining the transformative impact of

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<sup>9</sup> Known as the MBRACE report. The USA is no better. (See Villarosa 2022; and Geronimus 2023.)

Black women across all the sectors of public life that they impacted with their work (Hogan 2022). It would not surprise you that ugly tales of racism live on though it may look, sound, be felt rather more differently than when my Mother commenced her training and retired in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Turning in another direction, the activism led by women grappling with the criminal justice system and the racist actions of its officers, the incarcerations and disproportionate deaths in custody of Black people, including women, fatal injuries and death (notoriously the cases of Dorothy ‘Cherry’ Groce and Joy Gardner) and disproportionate criminalisation of Black youth; boys and girls – are clear red flags signalling where the struggle continues. Were they living now, it is hoped that Gandhi, King, Mandela, would recognise and champion the fight. In fact, long after his release Mandela paid more than one visit to Black communities identifying with their struggles, for example, the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence being one of many high profile cases that he chose to publicly spotlight in support of the Lawrence family. Doreen, now Baroness Lawrence of Clarendon remains unstinting in her call for the murderers and the police to be held accountable.

## **VIII**

In the UK we do have a problem with violence against women in general, high profile case upon high profile case, and recently a disturbing turn of those tasked with upholding the law; policemen turning into murderous perpetrators. Now with a 21<sup>st</sup> century twist- policemen taking pictures of the dead bodies- a travesty that befell two Black women- and sharing it on private social media channels. As my grandmother often quoted: ‘death and decay all around!’

Given the scenarios above, one can see women of African descent certainly have a struggle on her hands, trying to keep their domestic environs and family members safe while trying to keep her own mental health and sanity intact. The stats on mental health and well-being for Black women are not great (Ferguson 2016). Recently we have seen the continued ‘adultification’ and over sexualisation of Black children. Irrespective of the Black Lives Movement, in London the case was reported of teachers calling police into a school to target Black children. How do we respond to crimes perpetrated against the body of a young teenage girl being stripped searched at school while on her period with only a white teacher and police present? (BBC 2022; Abbott 2022; Quinn 2022). The publicity of this incident revealed the violence against black female bodies which has unfolded under the radar. The nature of the outrage with its attached

shame and violation, and the youth of the victims undoubtedly kept the growing practice under wraps. The road to freedom is indeed long! Delivering this speech, I stand in a land where the legacy of violence perpetrated against African youth during the years of Apartheid continues to resonate generations later.

*A Luta Continua!* Not only in the UK but around the globe, we have seen flashpoints in India, America, the Middle East, Iran, Africa the female body is a site of battle and war; physically, ideologically and metaphorical. We do draw inspiration from Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Mandela, commemorated here. We stand on their shoulders but also on the shoulders of their wives and women of that generation and further back. Irrespective of the complicated relations they may have had in the private sphere with their wives, it is noticeable that when one studies the women there were more than a match to the men in their determination to call for social justice and societal change. Now more women are entering and sustaining themselves in all areas of public life and African women are right there too, no matter the racism, unconscious bias and pathologies of the societies and systems that were not created with them in mind to be part of or lead. Nevertheless, you cannot keep women down. In the celebrated words of Dr. Maya Angelou, ‘*phenomenal women*’ of past, present and future, we salute you, and *Still We Rise!*

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