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PROGRAM NAME: WOMANITY – WOMEN IN UNITY

GUEST NAME: SONJA DE BRUYN SEBOTSA – CO-FOUNDER & PRINCIPAL PARTNER OF IDENTITY PARTNERS

| SPEAKER | TRANSCRIPTION |
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| DR. MALKA | Hello, I'm Dr. Amaleya Goneos-Malka, welcome to 'Womanity – Women in Unity'. The show that celebrates prominent and ordinary African Women's milestone achievements in their struggles for liberation, self-emancipation, human rights, democracy, racism, socio-economic class division and gender based violence. |
| DR. MALKA | Joining us in studio today is Sonja De Bruyn Sebotsa, Co-Founder and Principal Partner of Identity Partners, an investment advisory and financing firm; she is also a non-executive director of RMB, RMI Holdings, Discovery Group and Remgro; she also chairs a midmarket fund at Ethos Private Equity and she joins us for our segment on Women in Corporate South Africa. Welcome to the show! |
| SONJA | Thank you very much Dr. Amaleya it's such an honour and privilege to be here, I'm looking forward to our discussion and also good day to your listeners. |
| DR. MALKA | Likewise and I think kicking straight in, you started your career in investment banking at Morgan Grenfell Corporate Finance; later Deutsche Bank in 1996, you were previously Executive Director of WDB Investment Holdings from 2002 to 2007 where you led several large BEE acquisitions including Bidvest, FirstRand, Discovery and Anglo Coal in Currently you're a co-founder and principal partner of Identity Partners which is an investment advisory and financing firm and non-executive director. Finance is not a stereotypical profession for women so firstly, what made you choose this path? |
| SONJA | Okay so we can come back to the point about the role that women play in banking and finance more broadly, but to your question around what made me choose this path personally was that in the latter part of my studies in the early 90's I studied law and obviously given the dynamics in our country I tended towards human rights law etc., although obviously commercial law taught all of that were part of the core subjects but actually having come home then in 1993, which as you know was the transition year to our 1994 elections and with the constitutional negotiations taking place in Kempton Park, etc., it was top of mind for me that although they were negotiating probably what was then lauded to be the best constitution in the world and the most forward progressive Bill Of Rights, so South Africans would have you know entrenched rights which were the best in the world theoretically. However, I then realised then in my early twenties that in fact for our people to enjoy those rights we actually needed to be able to access them and economic access was likely to be a big hindrance to that and so what if you could live in any suburb thereafter; what if you could send your child to any school; if you couldn't afford it what would our democracy actually mean and so I then realised I probably wanted to learn more and do more in the economic landscape because that would be the next frontier after you know having fought for and won our political freedoms.. |
| DR. MALKA | ...exactly and... |
| SONJA | ...and that was really what took me into the world of finance... |
| DR. MALKA | ...and in that, having access but not being able to afford it.... |
| SONJA | ...yes and the access is facilitated by economic access, you know, although |

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| | we're talking about a number and a range of rights. So that's the fundamental basis on which on top of the law I then I was fortunate to be able to get a scholarship to study business and economics at a master's level. |
| DR. MALKA | And another point that you raised when you were giving it from your personal perspective... |
| SONJA | ...yes... |
| DR. MALKA | ...you also said we're looking at the role of women in banking, in Africa... |
| SONJA | ...yes because I wanted to say in positions where large transactions are executed, such as in corporate finance, such as in capital raisings, project finance, private equity etc., you're absolutely right, there is a dearth of women. However, if you look at women in the banking space overall, as in retail banking as well, as employees, there are many, many women, you know the numbers are very decent from a retail lower ranking employee point of view and so there is this disjuncture between oftentimes how financial institutions or a lot of institutions behave as in our clients are majority women, banking clients you know like any..all other retail clients are majority women; women are the ones who make decisions about how the household disposable income is spent, often they are the times on deciding on the grocery basket, the school fees, etc., etc., however institutions don't manage themselves to address this women's market appropriately, likewise the bulk of employees you would probably find as bank tellers and so forth are likely to be women, but again, in terms of how as financial institutions we engage with our employees and make sure that there's sufficient upward mobility for them, I'm not sure we acknowledge you know that "womanity" aspect as part of our employee base. So it does depend on which pockets of the financial sector we're speaking about but overall it is absolutely appropriate to then say what can we do to have more women making decisions at the top in decisions making positions, both from an internal executive point of view, from a non-executive point of view, more external than dependent and both from a policy environment point of view to the extent that you know you have regulatory aspects that impede women's financial participation and to make the whole financial sector more inclusive. |
| DR. MALKA | And what would you say your role was in the WDB Investment Holdings... |
| SONJA | ...yes... |
| DR. MALKA | ...how that played out? |
| SONJA | Yes, oh gosh that was a very exciting time of my career, I was so fortunate to be involved with a team in the early 20's when there were many BEE transactions that were coming into the market, especially because you were getting more clarity around the BEE codes and what companies needed to do and being a women's investment company that was essentially owned by a trust which did projects in the rural areas, especially micro finance, to uplift women; although our transactions were commercial transactions the proceeds were going to the projects for poor rural women, we were really in an ideal space as a BEE partner especially where the companies were seeking women participation and hence, you know, some of the companies that you mentioned in designing their BEE deals, you know, wanted to include WDB so we were not the only BEE partner in most instances, we were part of a consortium, but it gave us a seat at the table. I do believe that women speaking as shareholders gives a different authority to that voice and especially you know of course around the boardroom table and in those instances Dr. Amaleya, you can picture in the early 90's there were not many other women around the boardroom table but it was a start and a |

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| | trigger for a transformation...a broader transformation discussion within those companies. |
| DR. MALKA | And there you've got representation of women sitting at the table but also in terms of the benefits that you're trying to generate, it was really to help rural women and they account for approximately still today 50% of our female populace.... |
| SONJA | ...yes... |
| DR. MALKA | ...so by being at the top you're able to cascade through the line to ensure that they benefited... |
| SONJA | ...yes, you're right it's a two-way flow. |
| DR. MALKA | ...and whilst we're talking about having a seat at the table, women occupying leadership roles I think is important for a number of factors, one I think it influences younger women to consider non-typical positions as suitable career options and secondly to also overcome the stereotypical thinking in society where people are dictating in saying this is the role that a woman can do and this is a role that she can't do, so by having this inclusivity and having women in leadership they break boundaries. |
| SONJA | Yes definitely, so if we want to see change we definitely have to have more women in key decision making roles, you know, it was so gratifying that the first African country to have a woman heading up the Reserve Bank their central bank was South Africa, in the form of Gill Marcus and she was the first chairman of a major banking group as you know of ABSA, but it did take a Gill Marcus being the chairman to appoint a Maria Ramos to be the first woman CEO of a major banking group right.... |
| DR. MALKA | ...and she's still the only one... |
| SONJA | ...yes and she's still the only one and then transitioning from Gill Marcus to Wendy Lucas Bull, so you know, the same example I often give it was a Cheryl Carolus chairing up SAA that appointed a Siza Mzimela to be the CEO of SAA and you know oftentimes people think that women don't collaborate well or don't support each other enough, I totally disagree with that and so these role models coming to your point about whether or not young women feel that they have options across the spectrum of careers, I think in South Africa we're very fortunate that there's enough ventilation o women's issues and the fact that the playing field should be level that I do hope more and more young women with confidence step forward into unusual spaces. I also believe from an investment point of view and it's something we try to do in our company as Identity Partners, it's important for women to be investors, equity shareholders, participate in financings in places where you normally do not find women, so as such we have a mining and resources division, we enjoy getting involved in the infrastructure space particularly rail and transport, power and energy, so yes you know obviously they're the easier areas to get into that traditionally women have been invited into such as you know the catering contracts or potentially cleaning contracts but your point about access; you were speaking about from a career point of view, I also think as women entrepreneurs there needs to be this multiplicity of options that women feel that they can go after. |
| DR. MALKA | And to pursue careers where you've got greater opportunity of increased revenue and not being demarcated to get that stereotypical thinking, this is the catering function... |
| SONJA | ...it should be in the box. You know I was involved with an NGO on the advisory board called "New Faces New Voices", it is one of the projects which is under the auspices of the Graca Machel Trust in her quest to bring women into, she calls it "amplifying voices" and one of the challenges we |

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| | <p>had there was we were trying to promote this message about women's empowerment on various platforms and to your point about increased revenues, accessing bigger projects, we always found ourselves being bucketed into either the micro-finance space or the SME space, that when we're talking women entrepreneurs we're speaking SME's and yes there is space for that, there's scope for that, I mean many large businesses today started off as an SME so yes, there is that journey of growth but we did find it challenging you know even with the sort of let's say kudos that came to our NGO "New Faces New Voices" of affiliation to the Graca Machel Trust, we were still always trailed downwards and our job is to also make sure that women trail upwards, that we grow into bigger employers, we get involved in the actual corporate activities, you take agro-processing, women are very prevalent in the agricultural space.....how many companies do they own, you know, that are in that space, I could give so, so many examples. So what you touched on about bigger projects, bigger revenue bases, bigger revenue streams, we also need to include that in the empowerment commentary around women.</p> |
| DR. MALKA | <p>And if you don't think big then your opportunities are...they automatically become limited because the picture becomes smaller and by having those bigger visions that's where you've got greater dreams to realise.</p> |
| SONJA | <p>Yes and like you said society wants to bucket us, it wants to keep us in these smaller sized pockets. You know oftentimes when we have these BEE forum debates, whether it's ABSA ...through ABSA or working committees etc., the whole talk around the 100 black industrialists, you've had about DTI promoting black industrialists and there need to be 100 by X number of years and in those forums I always ask what's the target within that 100 for women and if we don't make it 50 you know what is it going to be...25, so on what basis, but if we don't include women as a target we will find that the 100 black industrialists are all men. Industrialisation is a big opportunity, becoming an industrialist is a big ambition and yet we somehow don't ensure that we've created space for women in that.</p> |
| DR. MALKA | <p>Thinking along the nature of BEE, if we didn't have quotas for BEE we wouldn't be in the position that we're in now to see that transformation taking place...</p> |
| SONJA | <p>...yes...</p> |
| DR. MALKA | <p>...and I relate the same thing from a woman's point of view; unless we have targets that we're trying to achieve we are not going to see a shift in numbers because people are going to continue to hire or appoint individuals that look like them, that sound like them...</p> |
| SONJA | <p>...yes exactly...</p> |
| DR. MALKA | <p>...and when we talk about quotas I firmly believe it cannot be anything less than 50% because the second it's less than 50%, for instance there was a long period of time where they were talking about 30%, that means that you are legitimising 70% acquisition towards men if we're saying that, which is why I think it has to be 50%.</p> |
| SONJA | <p>This is true. When we speak about quotas and the achievement thereof, I think one of the let's say elegant outcomes of all our BEE legislation and codes is that as you know there's been obligatory thresholds around involving broad based groups; women, the disabled, youth you know and those sorts of categories and so I think women were able to participate in opportunities because it was part of the codification at the time and you know I'm speaking back sort of more than 10 years now, the reason being in those early days other geographies, European jurisdictions etc., who are also grappling with the women's issue, probably...we probably find that</p> |

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| | <p>we're ahead of them and you know as you know for example our parliament was one of the most forward looking in terms of allocations of seats for women so we were fortunate that we got swept up and included within that but I do think the whole world is grappling with how do we make our companies more diverse, leadership in those companies both exec and non-exec and to your point about the 30% threshold, as you know in the UK the Davies Commission has given that recommendation and that is now what most UK companies, especially listed have to target towards, which is the 30% so I agree with you, it's far from the 50% but I think part of the rationale was that there's been some human behaviour studies that in order for any group in which is the diverse grouping or the other, the not grouping to have an effect, it doesn't count if you just appoint one woman onto the board but as soon as you have two or three you know there's a grouping of this diverse aspect that's making a contribution, then you start to see a change, so you know perhaps part of the presumption is that it should be at least 30%.</p> |
| DR. MALKA | <p>Look 30% is better than nothing so at least it's a start in moving forwards and this is something which I've looked at consistently so over the years Business Women's Association do a study on the percentage of women across boards in the JSE and they indicated in the last one from 2015 that on JSE listed companies women accounted for 29.3% of exec managers, 21.8% directors, 9.2% chairpersons and only 2.4% of CEO's, yet our population grouping is well over 50% in terms of representation, so I wanted to ask you; you have been successful within the corporate space, you have managed to get onto boards, you have established or co-founded your own company to participate in this space; how do you think we can improve the representation of women?</p> |
| SONJA | <p>So you know as I said before I think so much of it comes with women being able to have a seat around the table, whether it's as key decision makers so that they can open doors and promote other women and they can give their male colleagues a real sense of the challenges of a particular environment that may be holding back the promotion of other women colleagues, this has to be done consciously and I think for that conscientiousness to come through it needs to go beyond the fact that it is a moral good and that it is philosophically in a country like ours, especially you know having hard fought equality, that it's a basic fundamental human right etc., I think most people it would appeal to them on that basis and they would agree with it. But the conscientiousness of them actually implementing change and bringing about transformation, corporate transformation, I don't mean racial transformation and economic transformation; I think action could then be triggered when they understand the business case. The business case being to your point about the numbers in terms of the population, the populace and what that does to you know whatever sector contribution, you're probably familiar with all the indices you know there's a McKinsey report that goes out...study that goes out, there's a Deloitte's Woman's Survey, there's a World Economic Forum Economic Survey. I think Goldman Sachs came out with a report a couple of years ago which said that most companies had their GDP's dampened by at least .5% because they were not harnessing their women population sufficiently. So you know when you start to understand the business place, that in terms of performance of businesses, the indices that I've referred to all have different metrics so whether it's dividend growth, whether it's earnings growth, whether it's from the point of view of profitability all the way from revenue line you know down to the bottom line, but it's been proven that more diverse management teams produce better results and they have better performing companies. And so in the corporate space the</p> |

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| | commerciality of it, I think the more that that's understood and unpacked for selfish reasons I think more and more companies will start to behave differently. |
| DR. MALKA | It's great that we've got the empirical evidence because I think when you've got something like that it always substantiates and validates claims and perhaps it's about putting it into a business case frame because that becomes a format that people within the corporate space are used to and they can acknowledge and they can see how these measures play out but I guess the other challenge is that in scenarios like this you're asking one gender grouping to relinquish power to another and that individual still has a family to support, he has attained whatever assets he has and his material wealth and also his personal ambitions, so it is a fine balance and a delicate situation on how we redistribute or rebalance the diversity in the workplace. |
| SONJA | Yes and perhaps as you're saying people are not going to do this for altruistic reasons but perhaps if there's an understanding that actually the cake will be bigger, we'll have a bigger pie to share in, so my piece, my portion even as a man is going to be decent and at least the same, if not better. What I've also noticed amongst some of my male peers is oftentimes many of them, especially who have girl children, have ambition on behalf of their daughters and they do want the world to be a better place for their daughters; more fair, more equal and so to be honest I haven't heard the reticence verbalised in the fashion that you've said but you know one can hardly expect people are going to be that frank about you know only taking care of their own back pocket etc. So I do think that you know once we have more honest and forthright conversations, our male peers do get it, we have great male champions, we've had great male champions in the political space in the past and I do find in some of the corporates the will is there, oftentimes the challenge is the activity set to really bring about a different mindset with management teams etc. |
| DR. MALKA | And I suppose another factor to consider is the way our world is changing, so in terms of enterprises and businesses and in the past we tended to play and trade off of scarcity, scarce resources, making things, your unique value proposition was because you were the only one that had access to this, but now if you look at how everything has become democratised, particularly in terms of new industries and we've almost created this surplus and abundance, especially in the information age, an access so this is going to be creating more opportunities and this is going back to the point where you were talking about a bigger piece of the pie as opposed to having a smaller piece, that the pie is getting bigger and I think that increasingly as our world is changing we're moving towards this abundance approach. |
| SONJA | Yes and if the mindset could follow that it would be great and also if we could ensure there's very, very forward thinking programmes for young women to also wish to be part of this new economy of knowledge industries, of you know probably even job roles and job profiles that we haven't yet fathomed and I think our creative side probably lends itself well to that. |
| DR. MALKA | Absolutely. |
| DR. MALKA | Today we're talking to Sonja De Bruyn Sebotsa who is Co-founder and Principal Partner of Identity Partners; she also chairs a midmarket fund at Ethos Private Equity and is a non-executive director of RMB, RMI Holdings, Discovery Group and Remgro. We would love to receive your comments on Twitter: @WomanityTalk. |
| DR. MALKA | We spoke a lot about leadership, a lot about role models in a way and one of the things that I wanted to ask you was I think that female role models are important sources of influence, not only in the way that women see themselves by being |

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| | able to identify with these individuals; you mentioned Gill Marcus, Wendy Lucas Bull, Maria Ramos, but also in terms of how men perceive women because they are seeing the successes that these women are being able to achieve, so given that, how do you see the role of female leadership whether it's in the business space, academic space or political environment for that matter? |
| SONJA | So I think first of all women as leaders, once they reach those positions, I think there has to be an understanding that it's been on merit. That it hasn't been by virtue of that person being a female and that she possesses and displays all the leadership attributes, if not more, that are required for her role and function. Having said that though, we obviously speak with a different voice as women and we have a contribution to make which potentially manifests itself in a different way which is all additive to the other male leadership around us. So definitely there's the role model effect and there's the affirmation that comes for younger women seeing women in these positions and maybe for other women within the organisation to feel that the organisation can cater for their long-term ambitions but there's also the form of leadership that comes with not necessarily that woman being a CEO yet, you know, or being the chairman yet. So in other words, you know, it's this concept of until the system catches up with us let's just get on with it, so let's lead where we are, wherever you find yourself be an activist in that space whilst you're on this leadership path so it may not well be a leadership type of role that comes with a big title but as women we should all be conscious to be activists where we are. You know this notion of activism and you talked in your intro about having apolitical freedom, this year is the 100 year anniversary of the Suffragettes having attained the votes for women in Britain and when we think about...I mean it's been 100 years and so in some ways we've made a lot of progress but in other ways over 100 years are we still having the same sorts of conversations, right? So this notion of activism and leading in forwarding women's issues, we need to do that everywhere, women are in leadership wherever they are. |
| DR. MALKA | There's two things that come to mind; one - for a long time I think women in leadership roles were essentially trying to compete against male counterparts so they weren't bringing their womanness and their qualities and attributes, they were representing masculine values and almost trying to emulate men but now we've seen a difference, we've seen that women are allowed to be women and bring their whole selves to those environments. Then the second key area when you spoke about was the movement of 100 years the suffragettes where women had the vote which I think it's shocking when we look at the period that we are in 2018 and 100 years ago the world was very different for women but given that I'd like to chat briefly in terms of the 1956 march and the fact that your mom was one of the pioneers in that and yet that's even less than 100 years ago... |
| SONJA | ...this is true... |
| DR. MALKA | ...and so it's still very much part of our generation on trying to address these types of situations where women are not equal. |
| SONJA | So okay what you were speaking about in terms of women taking on male attributes in order to feel that they can lead or leading in a very sort of male style made me think about this joke, I don't know if you remember they used to say Margaret Thatcher was the only man in her cabinet...bec...you know it took that style of leadership for a woman to you know to be able to get to where she is but I do think in general management speak you know academic studies do highlight the benefits of what they call soft power or what they call servant leadership and the fact that you know |

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| | <p>it's not always the most extraverted format that works from a leadership style point of view. So I think all of those attributes, whether they're in a male or in a female do show that there is...that there's a female side of leadership which is valuable to organisations and so women, yes, we don't need to take on what we are not...obviously I think authentic leadership is what today's companies require and appreciate and that authenticity you know comes through in the person, be they male or female. And then reflecting on the 1956 march I think that's why even in our opening commentary we both noted my interest in this area is very much rooted in being grateful for and acknowledging our political freedoms and what our forebears and parents, you know fought for, which includes you know, what women activists in the 50's fought for and marched for but then it is our responsibility and the baton does you know pass on, it falls to us to take the struggle forward and you'll recall, you know, we've talked about some of the successes we've already had in South Africa; male champions like President Mbeki who you know had a woman vice president etc., moving it forward still in this political sphere mainly and yet private sector and corporate has to catch up, usually on the back foot. And so it's really with that in mind that one then says we can't get complacent, we can't be complacent and to my earlier point I really believe that wherever we find ourselves, you in your spaces, me in mine and the listeners in their spaces, they should be activists for the empowerment of women.</p> |
| DR. MALKA | <p>I think it's a wonderful expression "being an activist in whatever space you find yourself" and the truth is that if we become complacent it means we're going to regress. On the academic side, you mentioned earlier that you hold your LLB and you had that from...you received the degree from London School of Economics, you also earned an MA in Economics and Business and I wanted to know if you could please expand a little bit more on achieving your academic qualifications and the reason I raise this is there are a lot of young women who may be listening to us today who may be at that crossroads in their life where they're thinking should I pursue this route or should I further myself with my academic education and may not be certain in terms of the role that academic degrees will play in their future, so if you could share how did academics change your life and what role did they play for you?</p> |
| SONJA | <p>So I think you know from a personal point of view when I registered for the M....sorry, I'll start again. I think from a personal point of view when I registered for the LLB I was interested in the knowledge of the body of law and not necessarily because I saw myself standing in court arguing cases, but rather the rigour that came from the study of case law having to re-dissenting and assenting opinions, having the discipline around studying precedent cases and how that rolled forward into strengthening arguments in a current environment, also besides the writing discipline that would come with it and the research, verbal articulation of argument which one would have to do in debating and mooting and so it was that roundedness that appealed to me and I just make this comment because as an 18 year-old I mean we haven't figured it all out, I didn't know what really I wanted to do but at the...you know the law was a good subject to read for and so for young women not to pressurise themselves that they have to have it all figured out, but I think as long as they go with their gut feeling and the leaning in terms of their talents and passions and what they enjoy in the right direction. You know sometimes things come along as you go along and that's a prelude...remember I explained as to then why I realised okay the blind spot is business and economics, let me go and study more of that. The reason the rigour is important and why I knew there's a blind spot let me study more on that and therefore for young women, you know, when</p> |

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| | they have that curiosity to pursue it is in the kind of work you and I are talking about that we need to do to empower women, it's back to that old adage that you know that when you're new in a space you're the newbie, you can't come in and challenge an environment on the basis of no knowledge, right?... |
| DR. MALKA | ...now knowledge, no experience... |
| SONJA | ...yes and therefore at least have the theoretical academic knowledge, even if you know perhaps haven't had a chance to get the experience, there is that saying that unless you really know the rules thoroughly, how are you going to bend them? How are we going to make it work for example for our developmental environment or for wanting more financial inclusion, so we have to at least start with the you know the hygiene of the theoretical and academic basis for the then pursuit of what we want to change. |
| DR. MALKA | And it changes things from being just an opinion.... |
| | ...yes... |
| DR. MALKA | ...to something that is substantiated with that rigour behind it. One of the questions that I ask all my guests on this show who have made significant achievements in their respective fields of expertise is about some of the factors that they consider have contributed to their success, so some people speak about hard work, perseverance or a particular person in their life who has influenced them, could you share with us some of the key factors that you think have driven your success? |
| SONJA | It's humbling, I'm not sure I've achieved success yet but you know on the path there I would very much say my upbringing in my family and my parents. I'm very grateful for their contribution in my life from the point of view of acknowledging that their circumstances were very difficult, they were refugees in exile in Zambia but notwithstanding the difficulties around us, they always supported us, the importance of school and study you know was ingrained in us and also their own personal discipline and sacrifice and later in life I came to understand humility because even as a child growing up I didn't have an idea of the contribution that my mother had made from the point of view of her activities in women's emancipation, the women's march etc., and it's only hearing it from outsiders and other people when we came back home that we started to understand more of their contributions. I also think having the whole circle of trying to be healthy physically, mentally, spiritually, etc., that balance that we all seek for, it's important to try and maintain that and in my case my spiritual life is very important to me, I believe in God, having a faith that one can return to after maybe you've been beaten up over a deal or some transaction negotiation, you know, that doesn't sort of shatter yourself worth when you go through a failure in business so that's been very helpful to me and then I think my friends, my sisters as I call them, the sister groups, where we lift each other up, we understand the challenges we're going through in our careers, in our personal lives you know having that sisterhood that is cheering you on is also very, very important and as I said before I believe women are much, much greater collaborators than people always suspect women compete too much. So broadly those would be some of the factors which then translate into what you alluded to which was you know the value of perseverance, hard work, resilience, tenacity which I think I got from those environments growing up. |
| DR. MALKA | And you mentioned that you grew up in Zambia so effectively you were growing up in exile. |
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| SONJA | Yes. |

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| DR. MALKA | Can you share with us a few of the pivotal moments in your life growing up? |
| SONJA | So there were a few occasions; there was an exile community of South Africans who were very fortunate that the Zambian people welcomed us so warmly, they treated us so well and Zambians were so good to us that even when we used to arrive at the airport, you know, as a child sometimes we would go on camping trips and then come back as a group, they treated us as diplomats, although we had refugee passports we had a special queue which was faster than the other queues etc., so it was this dichotomy of knowing that you're a displaced person where you are so you are obviously on the fringes of that society, you're not in the mainstream of that society but at the same time that society embraces you so well. We went to good schools in Zambia, we had an exile experience but there was that solidarity that came with it and oftentimes I reflect on that now when we are back home about how underappreciated the sacrifices of our neighbouring SADC states, the sacrifices they made for us, how underappreciated it is by ourselves and I get very sad when you think about the trauma of the xenophobic attacks etc., given the long history and support in many of the states. My example is simply Zambia but there are examples in all of the examples in all of the countries around us and yet we haven't reciprocated. |
| DR. MALKA | So it was a revolution for everyone, it wasn't just South Africa in isolation... |
| SONJA | ...yes and I mean their economy suffered, you know, literally there was investment that they didn't receive; affiliations/alliances also had economic effects on those countries but they bore it willingly. |
| DR. MALKA | It's a tremendous sacrifice, really it is and I guess that, I guess that's the spirit of Africa. |
| SONJA | ...yes... |
| DR. MALKA | Now lastly as we close out the conversation today could you please share a few words of wisdom or inspiration that you'd like to pass on to younger women that are listening to us today? |
| SONJA | So thank you for the opportunity. I haven't thought about it long and hard but instinctively I would encourage all young women to really appreciate the value of who they are, to understand the wonder of being a human being, a female alive at this time with more and more opportunities becoming available to them and more and more deliberate efforts to include them and involve them in things and so for them not to shirk back from the potential of who they are or who they can be but to really embrace themselves, embrace the opportunities around them, equip themselves. I always say especially my 7 years with Deutsche Bank working here and internationally, that was like getting my toolkit into my rucksack and that was going to be like my rucksack for life with pulling out various elements from my toolkit as and when needed. So equip yourself, empower yourself, don't shrink back, go for those opportunities and reach out for help, advice here and there. Don't be shy, don't be foolish, don't be afraid of making mistakes; mistakes are part of learning and to really ja, just go for it. |
| DR. MALKA | Great words of encouragement thank you for sharing. |
| SONJA | Thank you, thank you for the opportunity. |
| DR. MALKA | Thank you. |
| SONJA | Thank you very much. |