

**PROGRAM DATE: 2020-10-29**

**PROGRAM NAME: WOMANITY – WOMEN IN UNITY**

**GUEST NAME: MS CONNIE CHIUME – MULTI-AWARD WINNING ACTRESS**

<b>SPEAKER</b>	<b>TRANSCRIPTION</b>
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 on the line today is multi-award winning actress Connie Chiume, whose career has spanned four decades across film, TV and theatre, both locally and internationally. Welcome to the show!
<b>MS CHIUME</b>	<b>Thank you so, so much, thank you for having me, it's really an honour.</b>
DR. MALKA	Ms. Chiume you have had an extensive acting career, some of your film credits include Black Panther, Lerato, I Dreamed of Africa and you've acted in household TV soapies like Rhythm City, Soul City, Gomora and some of your theatre rolls include You Strike The Woman, You Strike The Rock, Little Shop of Horrors and many more and during the process you've won a Golden Horn award, you've won South African Film and Television Awards for Best South African Actress and an Avante Award for Best Actress. Firstly, how did you discover your passion for performance arts?
<b>MS CHIUME</b>	<b>You know I've always known as a child that I'm carved and wired for show business, but when I was growing up I always thought that I was going to be a singer, but you know, during those days we used to be so discouraged to do that, but I remember I used to have a place at home where I would stand on that bed and sing. During those days Britain, you know, England was big so I always told my parents that you know ma, one day I will go to England. Ya, but it didn't start that way, I had to try other careers before I ultimately did what I thought I was brought on this earth to do, which is showbiz.</b>
DR. MALKA	And what were some of those other careers?
<b>MS CHIUME</b>	<b>When I finished my high school I went to Tembisa Hospital to go and do nursing. From Welkom where I come from to Tembisa, came and tried to do nursing, I was there for two years, then I became pregnant and during those days they were very, very, very strict, once you get pregnant you were not admitted again. So that's how I lost out into being a nurse, but you know, even during my nursing days as a trainee I used to entertain nurses during the concerts and all of that, then after I had my baby I went to Wilberforce Teaching Training where I did my training and instead of two years I was promoted and I did it in one year. So I came back from there to come and teach in Soweto in a school called Leratong, that was in 1976 and '76 we all know what happened in Soweto during the Soweto Uprising, that's when the uprising started...</b>
DR. MALKA	...were you there?
<b>MS CHIUME</b>	<b>Yes, yes, yes, I was a new teacher in Soweto. So we used to go to school and but there was nothing; nothing was happening, we were just coming in and out, you know, and then in 1977, as we were just sitting idle there as teachers, I saw an article from a newspaper that they were looking for dancers, actors and musicians. So there I went to that audition and that's how my show business life started.</b>
DR. MALKA	This reminds me, we had a conversation with the former president of Mauritius, Ameenah Gurib-Fakim, and she said there was like the first act and then the

	second and then the third act; so you were a nurse, you were a teacher and now you're...and then you found the opportunity to go and live out your ambition.
MS CHIUME	<b>Yes, mmmm, yes, that's how it all started and the show that I did my very first show that I did was called Sola Sola, but we didn't perform here in South Africa, we just rehearsed and then we went to Israel and then we went to Greece, that's where the whole thing starts now, on stage.</b>
DR. MALKA	So you did your audition to get into acting and you didn't start acting in South Africa straight away, you went overseas...
MS CHIUME	<b>...no...</b>
DR. MALKA	...to Israel and Greece, that's amazing!
MS CHIUME	<b>Yes, yes, yes and it was my very first audition, I didn't even know what an audition is, but I remember you know, I was so naive and I think my being naive helped me because when I got there they told me that, you know, we are going to have a shortlist of people and then you are also in the shortlist and then we're going to call you later on and tell you to come back to re-audition and I was just, you know, brave enough to say guys, you know, you have to tell me now because I'm a teacher, I can't come in here in and out, in and out. So I think my being naive really helped me because I was cast on the spot.</b>
DR. MALKA	Well congratulations, that's amazing!
MS CHIUME	<b>Thank you.</b>
DR. MALKA	Having walked through this journey over the years, take us through some of the milestones in your career.
MS CHIUME	<b>I think one of the milestones is the very one of me being a teacher, someone who has never been on stage, to be cast in a show that going to be international amongst the likes of Thandi Klaasen who were already household names in South Africa, I would say my debut show was one of those milestones and I had only, then I had only travelled as far as Malawi, let me say in Southern Africa, I had not travelled outside Africa and for the first time I managed to go and see the world outside Africa, during the days of apartheid where for the first time I tasted what freedom is outside my country because at that time in 1977 apartheid was still the thing in my country. So for the first time I'm travelling over there and now I'm free, I can go wherever I want, I can eat where I want, I can go and dance where I want; I think that was one of the greatest milestones for me.</b>
DR. MALKA	How did being a South African citizen but not being able to enjoy the freedoms that every citizen should, but you managed to enjoy those elements by going overseas, how did that make you feel?
MS CHIUME	<b>You know it made feel more sad and angry that, you know, I was free in a country which was not mine, in countries which were not mine, and in my own country I'm restricted to do what I want, to go where I want to go, I'm restricted as to what kind of education I should get, where I should stay, you know, it was really heart breaking to come back to the same, to the same system.</b>
DR. MALKA	Having lived through apartheid, having lived through the changes to be in a country that now is a democratic country, do you feel that we're in the right place to the one that you would have imagined all those years ago?
MS CHIUME	<b>Aye you know, yes we have moved a bit, but I think there's still a lot, a lot to be done and not just in the creative industry but in the country as a whole, whether it's education, whether it's health, whether it's the very freedom of women and women being given the same opportunities, like right now we know we know that we have a very, very high gender based violence in our country; we still have a long, long, long way to go and I feel like the spirit of activism as compared to how it was like in the early 70's until then just before 1994, I feel like that spirit of activism, of being brave,</b>

	<b>of being selfless, you know of sacrificing for things that you believe in, I think that spirit has diminished somehow.</b>
DR. MALKA	In the spirit of activism, how do you feel about campaigns like the Me Too Movement, the Am I Next Movement, in relation to gender based violence and how to drive change that is positive for women?
MS CHIUME	<b>I think that those are very necessary movements, as women we must make sure that we unite and we make our voices heard and because after those movements a lot of culprits were identified and if they are dealt with, especially the very people who have power, financial power or whatever power, if they are dealt with, so I think somehow it will make things better for us as women in whatever careers that we are, not just, like I said, not just in the film and the creative industries but in general.</b>
DR. MALKA	You are so right and obviously those movements did, well not Am I Next, but Me Too Movement was started I would say out of the entertainment industry, but...
MS CHIUME	<b>...yes it was...</b>
DR. MALKA	...we can't be naive that those practices don't exist in other industries.
MS CHIUME	<b>Yes, exactly.</b>
DR. MALKA	I always have a challenge though that when movements start we talk about social media, we talk about all of these platforms that make things accessible, we can spread stories, we can talk about things, but I'm always concerned that perhaps some of them get lost in the noise and the next big idea comes up before we've actually addressed the core topic.
MS CHIUME	<b>Exactly, you know there's always a noise about everything, but it depends now after the noise, what happens, is there action? Like I say, I feel like that spirit of activism, of standing up for our beliefs for our rights, I feel like we are so much concerned with ourselves, you know, or with self rather than concerned with communities, with the world, with people that live around you, we are more at looking at ourselves as people as individuals than, you know, coming together and saying you know what, we have been talking, now let's see what the action is. There isn't really action and I don't have the answers right now, I don't know how we can make ourselves, you know, to stand up again and really fight and face the realities the way we are supposed to, because we post on Facebook, we post on all these social media things, we make a lot of noise and after that, after a few weeks or so it's all quiet.</b>
DR. MALKA	You're right, it is all about being able to drive the action, I think that we have enough awareness has been created about the issue, but now the time is about really driving for concrete change.
MS CHIUME	<b>The action, the action, yes.</b>
DR. MALKA	The media industry as a whole is something which for me is something very, very powerful in terms of the way that women are portrayed and I wanted to ask you, does that influence some of the choices you make with the characters that you play or opportunities that you take up?
MS CHIUME	<b>You know here in Africa we have a challenge of stories. Most of the stories that we portray are unfortunately written by men, but I'm glad that we have a crop of young artists or young writers, young film makers, especially females that are coming up now. So sometimes it's very difficult because we are freelancers, you know, we are not permanently employed anywhere, you know, you are as good as your last job, so we don't have a big choice of choosing what kind of roles you want to choose, you want to portray, and if you do that you stand the risk of not working for a very, very long time. So we do have that challenge, but I have, you know, tried to choose the roles that I play, though I would say honestly speaking, we don't really have much, choice because you're looking at yourself, you're looking at the</b>

	<p>situation, financial situation, you're looking at the responsibilities at home, so sometimes it doesn't give you that big choice and our industry is not as big as the industries maybe in the United States or Britain or elsewhere. So sometimes what's on the table is what's on the table, either you take it or you don't and if you don't, what next, who's going to pay your bond, who's going to look after your kids, you know, we are in that kind of situation here in this continent.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And I think that's a fact that people either don't know or forget, that you are in this industry as a freelancer.</p>
MS CHIUME	<p>Yes.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>How do you cope with that type of aspect, because unless you've got a, for instance if you're on a TV soapie, then you've almost got more guarantees than if you are say pursuing a theatre role because our runs are much, much shorter than, you know, London's West End or Broadway in America; runs go for a couple of months at the best of times?</p>
MS CHIUME	<p>Ya, I mean in the States, even their soaps, you can think of All My Children and all the other soaps, some of the kids started there when they were seven, they are adults now and they are still acting. That's why I'm saying, you know, our industries here in our continent, they are not as big and I don't know whether we don't have enough support from our government, from our corporates; the countries that we are mentioning now, almost 40 to 50% of the GDP comes from the creative industries, something which our continent or people who lead us have not yet recognised but coming back to your question; I must say it has been very, very difficult, you end up having to do everything, you know, like you say some people just stay in theatre, who specialise in theatre, in South Africa it's very difficult for you to can say no, me I'm strictly theatre, me I'm strictly film, I'm strictly TV. You have to be versatile and do whatever you can, you know, and on the side we try and also run some workshops, do some MC'ing there to programme directing, you know there are a lot of things in-between that you have to think of doing because if you're just looking at I'm a TV actress, you are going to stay for a long, long time without a job. So you have to be as creative as possible to keep up, you know, I must confess that there have been times where it was really, really, really dry, then you are in a very, very bad situation, but ya, it's that kind of life, I don't know, people ask me that question all the time, I don't have a solid answer to say okay this is what I did, I have tried to do everything, everything.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Like you said, it keeps you versatile, it keeps you flexible and I would say you've probably got fantastic insight into the entire value chain of logistics and what happens on all facets of your industry. Staying with the industry dynamic and also in terms of opportunities; you were in Black Panther, which grossed 1.35 billion US Dollars in the Box Office, that's a phenomenal success; how do you navigate between local South African roles and going off to film massive Hollywood hits?</p>
MS CHIUME	<p>Humm, [laughs] I had an agent that represents me, may her soul rest in peace, she's the one that I've been working with for many, many, many years and yes I have managed to do quite a couple of international movies, I have done our local movies, TV work and all of that, so Black Panther also came the same way, through her, where I went to an audition not even knowing that I'm auditioning for Black Panther, I was told the show, the film is called Motherland, so when I went there I just did my best, you know, and there was men auditioning for the same roles that I was auditioning for, so I was like wow, what's happening and they said no these people don't mind if it's a man or a woman, whoever is best or whoever they choose to take, that's the one. So, I have not had a problem or a</p>

	<p>challenge because that was not my first international movie, though it was the first to be shot in America, most of the international movies that I did I did them here at home. So when I went there I went with all the confidence, you know, that, you know, I was chosen amongst many, because they looked for this character around the diaspora and they chose me and I said you know what, if it's God's time, it's God's time, because it doesn't necessarily mean that I was the best out of all those people, I'm sure there were many other good actresses, but it just happened to fall into my hands.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>That's an amazing achievement of being in such a big blockbuster and standing out as an individual, above men and above women, because they were seeking your talent for that particular part.</p>
	<b>AD BREAK</b>
DR. MALKA	<p>Today we're talking to multi-award winning actress Connie Chiume, we would love to hear your comments on Twitter: @WomanityTalk.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>You've been in the industry for a very long time; as a woman, what would you say have been some of the gender challenges that you've experienced?</p>
MS CHIUME	<p><b>I think the gender challenges are the ones that I articulated briefly about. It's still a male dominated industry and producers, directors, you know, every executive position is still held by men. So, sometimes things, the way we are portrayed, the way it's written, the way it's directed; it's directed and written according to the mind of a man and not exactly how or probably how a woman could have seen the character or could have wanted the character to be portrayed. So ya, those are still the challenges that we have in the industry, I'm not sure if they get paid more than us because we don't talk about [laughs], we don't talk about our fees that much. Ya, I think so and like right now we do have women that are sound people, that are directors of photography and all of that. Gradually things are getting better, our kids are going to school so they are well-equipped, they know what they are doing, we have young people writers, we have young people, especially women, who are directors, who are producing now. So, you know, it's a constant battle that we hope ultimately, as women, we're going to win it.</b></p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And what would be your advice to young women who want to follow in your footsteps and pursue an acting career or another career within the facet of the entertainment industry, whether that is directing or producing?</p>
MS CHIUME	<p><b>Mmm, you know I like what you just said, you said directing or producing, you know our kids seem to be focusing more on in front of the camera people, which is actors and actresses and they are not aware of how many careers are behind. For me I would advise that, you know, if you are attracted to this industry, maybe just do a little bit of research, you know, talk to people that are in the industry, find out what is it all about, what's needed and go equip yourself, go to school so that you can be able to create your own jobs, not to be waiting to be called all the time and there are so many other things that they could do, you know, behind the camera, it's not just about in front of the camera and if you are coming to the industry because you want to be famous, then that's not for you. You must be driven by the passion that's inside your heart, something that's burning you inside to say you know what, every day when you wake up you feel like this is what I want to do, not because your friend is doing it, not because you want to be famous, you want to see yourself on the screen, do it because you are passionate about it and like any other industry, don't be in a hurry to be a so-called celebrity, like today you know people are called celebrities and our kids are just attracted by, you know, things like that, you can see from the social media how people want to be seen. It's not a very easy, it's</b></p>

	<b>an interesting and very nice industry, but it also has a lot of challenges, so that's why I'm saying they must do a little bit of research and get a good education into the industry that they are getting into.</b>
DR. MALKA	I think that is very sound advice and I think that those tips would be widely applicable to a person pursuing any industry, is really getting to know what you're getting into and what the myriad of opportunities there are.
<b>MS CHIUME</b>	<b>Yes.</b>
DR. MALKA	Earlier you mentioned something which I thought was very important, that the perspective of stories that are being written in our continent in particular, tend to be written by men and thinking about that and thinking about one of the pieces of research I came across at the Geena Davis Institute on Gender and Media whose payoff line is "if she can see it, she can be it" and I think that hearing what you said and bearing reflection on this particular statement, that there tends to be different ways in which men and women are portrayed and one of the studies that were undertaken by the Institute took five thousand speaking roles in a hundred and twenty-two family movies and identified that only 30% of those speaking roles were female; so 70% of the voices and the stories that were being heard were men.
<b>MS CHIUME</b>	<b>Mhmm.</b>
DR. MALKA	How do you feel that we can change that; is it about having more female writers, more female directors and being able to feminise the industry more effectively?
<b>MS CHIUME</b>	<b>Yes. There is no other way; it's for us to be able to stand up, to tell our own stories, to be directed by us, because I don't think that men actually really, really, really know us. So as soon as we can have our own writers which are women, portraying us in the way that we are, the way that we want, then things are going to be better. The whole world is just dominated by men, it doesn't matter where you go, it doesn't matter which industry you're talking about we are still dominated. So, it's a process which also needs us also to change our minds, to realign our minds and as Ayanda Borotho puts it, she says "unbecoming to become, unlearning to learn" to unlearn that we can't be depending on men to do things for us. Like you said, if they see it they can do it, there is nothing difficult in us, there are so many stories that we have, but we are not sitting down to write those stories, it's a long process but if we can start from A, I'm sure there is a Z somewhere where we will get to.</b>
DR. MALKA	It almost sounds as though we should create women's unions or women's clubs which can help with those networking effects and be able to drive activism as a collective and not just have these periodic spurts where individuals work.
<b>MS CHIUME</b>	<b>Mhmm that's exactly what we were saying at the beginning, that you know most of the time we stand up at that time when something has happened and we all make noise, make noise and after that we are quiet and if we are serious about it in our little countries or corners or wherever we are, if we can do this as a collective wherever you are, it will make a difference. We have to come together as women, we start maybe small and go bigger towards other countries because it's a common thing amongst women all over the world, we are facing the same challenges.</b>
DR. MALKA	You are so right. Ms Chiume, one of the questions that I ask all my guests on the show who've made tremendous achievements in their respective fields of expertise is about some of the factors they consider have contributed to their success, whether it is a particular person in their life or the aspect of hard work or perseverance; can you tell us in your opinion what would you say have been some of your key drivers?
<b>MS CHIUME</b>	<b>I would say its passion, because if you don't have that passion you definitely are not going to have that hard working spirit or that perseverance. So</b>

	<b>something has got to burn you inside, something has got to wake you up at night to want to better yourself, to want to work harder, to want to improve yourself. So I would say the passion that I have for the industry that I am in and the work that I am doing is that one that has sustained me up to where I am now; the love of my craft.</b>
DR. MALKA	Passion is so important and I think as you said, you know, four decades in and that passion has been paramount for you to get to where you are today.
MS CHIUME	<b>Yes.</b>
DR. MALKA	Thinking back along your life and I know that we spoke about some of your previous careers in the conversation earlier on, please tell us about some of the pivotal moments growing up for you; what influenced you and what made you become the person you are today?
MS CHIUME	<b>I think maybe the family that I was brought in, I had...we were a family... okay my mom, my dad and then they had five, I mean nine children and I was the fifth one and so I saw how my father used to wake up, my father was a policeman, my mother was a domestic worker, I saw how they worked so hard to, you know, to be able to look after us, you know, I don't remember a day when I went to bed without food. We were not rich, we were struggling like everybody else during those days, as you know it was the days of apartheid, but ya, my mother had the spirit of a very, very strong woman, she tried her best for us to have an education, you know, they looked after us. So ya, I remember those days as the beginning of my life and then there were also people in Welkom who were also my role models and during those days the only role models we saw were business people were nurses and lawyers, because during those days in South Africa black people were not allowed to do some of these professions, you could only be a teacher, you could only be a nurse, you could only be a doctor or a lawyer, that's it, so I had those role models that I used to see; then there was Brae Gibson Kente. Gibson Kente was a playwright, a township playwright, who used to come to Welkom to bring shows there, they were performing in Welkom on stages, okay I was young, we were not allowed to go the shows to go and watch the show, but from listening to his music and <b>ya I got my inspiration mostly from the things that I saw around me.</b></b>
DR. MALKA	You spoke about your mom having this strong, indomitable spirit and really, I mean to have nine children to look after, especially as you said, in a period where everybody was struggling and so many limitations were put upon them. Who would you say have been some of the other strong women in your life?
MS CHIUME	<b>As I grew up I realised that there are also women like Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, I also realised that there are women like Cicely Tyson, the actress from America, I also realised that there are women who are sitting there at the station selling vegetables or whatever, who are educating their kids and they are taking them through universities and all that. So like I said, I don't have a particular, I had so many women that have inspired me from my young days up to now as I'm sitting here, who give me courage every day to say you know what, it's not over until it's over.</b>
DR. MALKA	One of the things that I wanted to ask you earlier and you've just reminded me on this almost amalgamation of strong women and being able to draw on multiple influences and help guide your life, is what were some of the most memorable characters that you've played?
MS CHIUME	<b>I think the first one would be Mohllohadi; Mohllohadi was a Sesotho drama of a business woman whose husband died, you know there are also still those tendencies in Africa where after you've worked hard with your husband, when your husband dies and the in-laws, you know, they just want to come and possess your stuff and they say they belonged to our son, so this woman Thakane, it was her name, she stood her ground and said no</b>

	ways, I have worked so hard with husband, this is what I accrued together with my husband, so you are not taking anything from that. So for me she was a very, very strong woman who fought for her rights and we know that those practices still happen here in this country. Then another one I could say is Stella that I played doing Zone Fourteen, she was a very powerful woman, the only problem with her was that she was also dealing in drugs, but I like the fact that she went into a male dominated industry of soccer and she owned a soccer club, a very, very powerful soccer club that she had, it was called Stella Stars and she had to go, you know, all the way and fight her way through to be able to, you know, to own the club and then I think Mamokete that I also played for nine years in Rhythm City, a humble woman who also loved her family, a person who didn't have much but she was very pivotal in helping the community, around the community she was very active in whatever way the community needed her. Ya, those are just some of the roles that I think that I was very happy to play together with others of course.
DR. MALKA	They're incredibly diverse, from everything you've said, Stella is at one end of the spectrum to the character that you played for nine years, being this humble woman, very, very different.
MS CHIUME	<b>Ya, ya Mamokete was very humble, she was just an ordinary woman selling stuff at home, she had a spaza shop, but anything that happened in the community she would be there for her community.</b>
DR. MALKA	Miss Chiume it's been such a pleasure talking to you today, as we close out the conversation, can you share a few words of inspiration that you'd like to pass onto young women that are listening to the show?
MS CHIUME	<b>I would say, you know, be proud of who you are. You have been created for a purpose and that purpose must come to pass. Don't be afraid of challenges, challenges are always there, so if you fall, stand up and start walking again and make sure that whatever you choose to do in life it's something that you are passionate about, something that you love. Don't sell yourselves for anything, trust yourself, trust your talent, trust your instincts and don't look down upon yourself, you are special, you are such a special person, every one of us is special, you are the queen, so live your queendom, don't give up your dignity for anything else. Just keep on walking until you achieve what you want to achieve.</b>
DR. MALKA	Great words of motivation and I have a new favourite word "queendom" thank you for sharing.
MS CHIUME	<b>Thank you so much.</b>
DR. MALKA	It's been a pleasure having you on the show today.
MS CHIUME	<b>Thank you it was a quite a pleasure for me too, thank you so much for the good work that you are doing, I hope we are really planting seeds into many women that are listening here and like we say, let it not just be talk shop, let it have a fruit that the seeds that we are planting here, gets fruit.</b>
DR. MALKA	Yes indeed, here's to the future of women and here's to another forty years of your career.
MS CHIUME	<b>Thank you so, so much.</b>
DR. MALKA	<b>PROGRAMME END</b>