

You strike a woman, you strike a rock (Part 1)

 By [Philippa Clayre](#)

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Sixty-two years ago, they signed a petition. Sixty-two years ago, they marched to Pretoria with that petition. And sixty-two years ago after leaving the petition at the door of the prime minister's office, they sang as one, "*Wathint' Abafazi Wathint' Imbokodo*" - you strike a woman, you strike a rock.



Tylor Maje, junior copywriter at JWT. Image supplied.

In the six decades since we've understood the immutable power of the 100,000 women's signatures and the 20,000 women who managed to join the march on that historic day in August 1956, what inspirations do the young women in South Africa take forward with them, for a better future for all women in South Africa today?

We raised these questions with Bongeka Masango in Mirum Cape Town; Tylor Maje in J. Walter Thompson Johannesburg; and Nwabisa Mda at J. Walter Thompson in Cape Town to find out.

Breaking the mould

"You have to contribute to opportunities arising, or there can never be a platform for dialogue to even begin," says Tylor Maje, junior copywriter at JWT. Born and brought up in the heart of Soweto, as she gazed at the tall, immovable Soweto towers, they inspired her to carve out a career in the area she was most passionate about, writing.

On leaving high school but failing to get into university, Tylor's dream of becoming a writer had begun to fade. Instead, she worked as a temp for a number of companies in and around Johannesburg, one day landing at JWT. Here Tylor discovered the world of marketing communications and it fascinated her. On the last day of her temp job, cup of tea in hand, and the morning's reception work about to begin, Tylor remembered Soweto's tall, strong, unfaltering towers.

Gathering up all her courage, she walked into the creative director's office with a book of her own poetry and began reciting a few poems she thought would interest him. "He looked at me and said – shut the door, take a seat and tell me about yourself," recalls Tylor. "Those words changed my life forever. He gave me a fighting chance. Now, I walk into the agency every morning as a creative leader on the rise."

Challenge yourself

Outside her professional career as a digital account manager at Mirum, Bongeka Masango is part of [Pap Culture](#), a YouTube channel that addresses popular culture in South Africa from the point of view of three, young, middle class, black, female friends. The trio is hoping to shift the socio-political/economic conversation in the country, with cool content that can resonate with anyone, anywhere and change the documented narrative of youth culture in South Africa.

"I think a lot of people get comfortable with the rhythm of what they know" explains Bongeka, adding "yet if you want to grow, you have to challenge yourself. For me, that came in the move from JWT to Mirum. Whilst they are sister agencies, the businesses are quite different and I have a lot to learn in the digital space, but it's an exciting journey."

Nwabisa, who is also part of Pap Culture, believes that actress, writer, director, producer and webs series creator, Issa Rae, made an important point when she spoke of the significant value networking across adds to people's development. "This involves looking beside you and seeing who is next to you" says Nwabisa, adding "because as Issa so rightly notes, there are others who are just as hungry as you are."

When you tap into your combined resources, you will find out how you can work together to make things happen, make a difference. Combining each other's strengths, you can do amazing things, go the extra mile together and uncover new angles to existing issues. Which in turn engages you in intuitive conversations that unpack real-life in a thought-provoking way, so you can reclaim your strength, still stay true to your values and yet not shy away from conversations that go against the grain."

Contribution to society

Despite professional success, and the continued rise of Pap Culture, Bongeka wouldn't call herself a contributor to South

African society just yet, but maybe a contributor in training via the youth. “I think the work we do at Mirum is really boosting the possibilities of peoples’ daily lives in South Africa, particularly through tools such as e-commerce and social media. At Pap Culture, we have the great honour and opportunity to be a direct and positive influence on anyone who engages with us. It’s quite a responsibility and we strive to spread good energy whilst starting conversations amongst the youth.”

Taylor is equally reticent. Having started work at the tender age of 12 at a radio station in Midrand, before branching out into TV a year later making guest appearances on shows such as *KTV* on M-Net, and then embracing her theatrical side acting in *Rhythm City*, she became popular in her Soweto neighbourhood, and was able to indirectly influenced her peers to follow their dreams. “When I finally became a junior copywriter and bought a car when I was 19, many women told me I was a reminder to them, not to lose hope, or give up, even in the face of humble beginnings.”

In Cape Town, Nwabisa talks about the ripples one can create in society, which, whilst they may not have a huge impact at a macro level, within the micro-community of the people surrounding you, prove valuable.

“*“After three years working at JWT, and running Pap Culture, I believe now, more than ever, that even with my own imperfections I AM ENOUGH. In as much as I, like everyone in the world, is on a journey to discover what they truly have to offer, my work on building communication strategies in my professional context, and sparking cultural conversations in my personal time, has given me the opportunity to meet incredible people whom I’ve always admired. It has shown me you need to direct your energy and efforts towards the things you can control, no matter how small.”*”

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ABOUT PHILIPPA CLAYRE

Philippa re-joined JWT in 2011 as Head of Corporate Communications for the agency's Middle East and Africa region. Her role involves narrating JWT MEA's diverse range of stories to both internal and external stakeholders, finding innovative ways for the brand's vision, mission and purpose to come alive.

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