

## South Africa - Navigating Well-Being by Rhoda Deers

It's 4:30am, morning alarms ring through the darkened sky, those fortunate begin to get ready for the workday ahead. Thembi is one of them, reaching for her uniform in the dark, its load-shedding once again. Navy slacks, white shirt and her navy overlay the shoulder holders empty as she shoves her maroon nursing epaulets. Anonymity is what she craves, questions she does not want to be answering on her way to work at the local community clinic.

*"How can you study all those years & still travel eTaxi?" "Haibo, you're not a real nurse, where is your money? Where is your car with your fancy job?"*

*"Am a cleaner, that what I said when I was a nursing student being dropped off at university or for hospital rounds...It's still my excuse today...They'll never understand that it's not easy, I don't have money like that"*

Before leaving, she stops by her kitchen; it sounds good to say **her kitchen** After all, its years of saving up for night school to get a matric certificate and then begin her nursing degree at the age of 35 years. 20 years of sacrifice and she can walk into her kitchen to find the breakfast table laid. Her 17-year-old daughter sees that everything is ready for the family. She's been up since 3am studying for her matric mid-year exams, sometimes strangely using her mobile phone to view her electronic textbooks and a candle to write - *load-shedding merging our past and futures*. Well, that's just the sacrifice it takes if she wants to study for a medical degree next year at university.

Thembi is one of many stories of addressing the legacies of apartheid in South Africa, the wrongs that need to be set right. The idea that you can empower yourself through education, improve your socio-economic status and live a better life, it's a narrative that continues to inspire South Africans.

Aadilah's educational journey echoes Thembi although growing up within a working-class family, she still found herself struggling against financial restrictions as she acquired her qualifications in marketing. Working part-time in retail she had to structure her days into focusing on studies, working to cover living expenses and somehow fit in some sleep and social life. Her years of sacrifice resulted in creating a home for children and enabling them to be supported in their dreams and ambitions. However, corporate industry was not an easy place to navigate and she felt forced to conform and accept the identities that society ascribes to her that continue to ring true to the apartheid racial narratives. Both Thembi and Aadilah managed to use these given identities as a form of Identity Capital to right the wrongs through their individual capacities. Perhaps their sacrifice will allow their children to attain a better future?

Nadia and Fatima provides another perspective; each in their own right broke the glass ceilings, only to be torn in the process. Both began their journeys like Thembi & Aadilah, using education to gain leadership roles; Nadia within the financial sector and Fatima within academia. Yet, their sacrifices of placing work above family, mental and physical health ended with excellent key performance areas while damaging their personal and family's Well-being. Recently, each decided to step down from their roles to enter a more balanced

lifestyle. They place emphasis on spending time with family, taking time just to enjoy their homes rather than living out of suitcases and rushing to catch the next 5:45am flight from Cape Town to Johannesburg.

But what about South African youth, the under 30 years? Nearly two decades have passed since the above participants have qualified and began work, yet the socio-economic struggle remains the same for those entangled within the clutches of apartheid racial categories. Lindiwe and Nandi are university students both accepting their fates to enter postgraduate studies rather than sitting at home waiting for replies to job interviews. It takes up to a year, sometimes more, to land an entry-level job these days.

Each year it's a struggle, applying for financial support for your studies...nervously they wait for their financial clearance so they can register for the upcoming academic year. Nandi had to move back to her family home as rental and living expenses became too much. Lindiwe struggles to focus on her research as she constantly searches for job opportunities, you'd think after two degrees she would be able to get a decent job by now.

*"You're underqualified, overqualified or at worst don't have enough experience...How do we get experience for an entry-level job?" - Lindiwe*

Interestingly, they are both passionate about their current research projects, pushing back the old narratives and allowing for Her-stories to be told on their terms. Yet, they resent the idea of ever staying within academia. It doesn't seem to want them; they see no future because still there isn't enough representation within the academic institution. Even after 29 years of democracy, they don't see a safe space and future for themselves as young Black females within academia. With sentiments of feeling like a number to provide diversity, always needing to prove their abilities and work harder than their peers, just to be taken seriously.

It is clear from my participants that Well-being is understood in its broad ideological aspirations. However, to attain Well-being is also a negotiation, an agreement to accept the unbalanced lifestyles so that they may one day attain the elusiveness of Well-being. A question that creeps up within the South African context of Well-being is; how much of this negotiation is an individualized choice and how much lingers within the bigger governing systems, corporate policies and academic institutions? It seems these systems are in place to limit the acknowledgment of entangled historical and contemporary lived realities of South Africans. For me in the end, the ultimate question lingering is how do researchers working within the Global South allow for spaces to explore of these contextualized entanglements of intersectionality within international research projects? For now, I leave it at this attempt to create space for my participants lived stories to be heard at least.

*\*Pseudonyms are used for all participants to protect their privacy.*