

AGENDA FEMINIST MEDIA
SCRIPT: GIRLHOOD IN SOUTHERN AFRICA
DURATION: 12'09''

INTRO SIG TUNE

RELEBOHILE A: Girls these days are experiencing a very different kind of childhood. A more traumatic childhood than we did... a more traumatic childhood, generally, than boys do; and so for that reason, I think the area deserves more targeted scrutiny.

NARRATION: That was Dr Relebohile Moletsane, director of the Gender Development Unit at the Human Sciences Research Council, HSRC.

RELEBOHILE G: I don't think we are really prepared to be parents of girl children who grow up today because we grew up in a very different era and so I don't think as parents we're really prepared adequately to deal with the issues our daughters have to deal with.

INTRO: Hello and welcome... My name is Dineo Mphalele. Join me as we explore girlhood in South Africa.

RELEBOHILE F: Our parents in the sixties/seventies – when we were girls – they would worry about whether we will get pregnant before we get married. Now, pregnancy is bad but what we worry about is that our children will get raped; our children will get infected with HIV; our children will be exposed to a violent crime and be violated... and so the issues are much more pronounced for girlhood these days.

NARRATION: The present-day experience of the girl child in South Africa is as diverse as the country itself. Dr Moletsane explains that although there have been enormous social, economic and political advancements; girls from poorer households remain the single most vulnerable group in our society today.

RELEBOHILE E: In a poor household with three children, the first child to be taken out of school because there is no money to send them to school is often a girl. The argument being that if you educate a boy, then the boy will look after the family when they are educated. In some instances, with the view that the girl should get married as soon as possible and the money from the *lobolo* used to take care of the rest of the family. So poverty impacts on girls' schooling; on girls' lives; and on the vulnerability of girls to HIV infection and to gender-based violence.

NARRATION: While gender based violence and discrimination are constant variables for girls across the board, the extent to which they occur is strongly determined by issues of race; class; and ethnicity.

RELEBOHILE H: My daughter has lived a very privileged life because of social class. She has gone to schools where she was assured of a good education and she hasn't had to deal with the same issues of poverty, of lack of safety in terms of transportation to and from school, of violence in and around school which poor children have to contend with in rural and township schools. So in terms of social class alone... and of course, social class tends to interact very much with race... so most white children – not all of them but most of them – as well as children of middle-class Black people... will grow up where they are assured of a safe environment in which to go to school, in which to grow up, in which to be children.

They are really protected in the sense that they are assured of meals and we sometimes even over-indulge them and they are assured of having access to resources. So race and social class tend to interact in those terms.

NARRATION: Let's turn our focus now to two women who are generations apart...

CLIP 1: My name is Imaan Jane Bijou... I was born in 1997. I am 13... Wayida Mohammed. I was born long ago – 2nd April, 1966.

NARRATION: Imaan and Wayida were both raised in urban, middle class families. As a 13-year old girl, Imaan is part of South Africa's 'born-free generation' – a term which refers to youth born after 1994.

IMAAN 9: You could call me 'born-free' but I'm just born me!

NARRATION: Wayida, on the other hand, grew up during the Apartheid-era. Imaan struggles to understand why Wayida continues to place such great emphasis on race.

IMAAN 7: The way I'm brought up is different than aunty Wayida. They suffered and it was according to racial activities but I believe that you have to forgive, forget and move on. We might be coming from certain races, religions and we all come together. We're South African. That ended in 1994. We're way over that.

NARRATION: Although Imaan understands that poverty condemns girls to a life devoid of vital rights such as access to education, health and social security, she cannot make sense of why poverty remains one of the most significant factors adversely affecting their development and well-being.

IMAAN 10: Change your mind; change what you think about... If you don't feel good about something, leave it alone – push it aside. As Beyonce says: "to the left, to the left..."

WAYIDA: No I am a lot more practical, Imaan. I think that with you people, you can go to any school although economically, it is not always possible. You should be free to live anywhere, free to join any group but it's not in reality... down on the ground. If you are reflecting on children in a rural setting, it's not about waking up one morning and making up your mind to be positive. You can – and we have know so many stories about people who grew up in abject poverty with absolutely no light ahead of them who managed to transcend that – and those are special stories. But we can't be preoccupied with that. I know that James Allen wrote this book: *As a Man Thinketh* and I also belong to that school of thought. I think that what you think is pretty much what you are but I think to get to that point... and what you are dealing with communities who don't have access to simple, basic things like running water; then just getting your next meal is something that you ponder on and when you don't have the proper nutrition, when you don't have access to the proper food; how is your mind biochemically, in terms of your physiological processes... how do you even get to a point where you can muster up enough energy to think? The socio-economic situation is such that there are so many factors that set the agenda. It's very difficult for children to just be positive and try and transcend their circumstances when they have got to be adults before they are even children. They cannot explore their childhood fully. Everything seems set against them. Our class system is so entrenched that to move from one class to another is almost like having to be born again. We haven't work hard enough in our country yet to ensure... and I know that government has many programmes and that has its own challenges... but how do you reach a point in which every child has access to basic nutrition; a basic education; just the basics.

NARRATION: Wayida relays a story that illustrates the extent to which poverty stifles childhood...

WAYIDA 11: Perhaps the saddest thing for me one day was speaking to children who come from the flats. Now that flats are these low-cost housing. You know, before when you spoke to children, the wonderful thing about children is they always dream. When you ask who can paint or who can sing, they're almost pressing each other down; running; and putting up their hands to say: "I can paint, I can sing!" and "what do you want to become when you grow up?" "I want to be a policeman, I want to be a doctor, I want to be a President!" and you know, a while ago, I was in a situation where there was a party for these children for Christmas and we were all just talking and laughing and asking children what they want to become... you know, there were so many of them who sat there tight-lipped. These were all primary school kids. I was so sad. I thought we've reached a point in our civilized community in which children are not even prepared to venture a dream anymore. The sad reality of their lives is such that the desperation and the degradation and all the social ills that go with it dictate what they think and they won't dream. They look at you almost skeptically when you ask them what they want to become because they can't – in their immediate environment – envision or picture a life different to that and the role models eventually become the children that somehow managed to move beyond that in the form of drug-dealers eventually making it big and they drive big German cars and they wear the labels of the day. You know this is a township environment and they then identify with those figures and it's sad but the normal established channels aren't that welcoming.

NARRATION: HIV and AIDS also pose a serious threat to the development of young girls. Dr Moletsane tells us that it is mostly the girl child who carries the family burden when one or both parents contract the virus.

RELEBOHILE C: In the context of HIV, many girls – particularly in poor households – are often called upon to perform adult roles and so they lose out on their childhood. They often don't have a girlhood in particular and so they tend to be just thrust upon womanhood too early in their life, so they lose out.

RELEBOHILE D: If you look at the statistics in terms of infection, you realize that girls are more vulnerable than their male counterparts. Girls as young as fifteen/fourteen form the top of the infection statistics in South Africa and in Southern Africa, generally.

NARRATION: Imaan Bijou brings us to the end of this programme. She says young girls need strong allies. They need forums to adequately and freely voice their concerns and they need adult guidance.

IMAAAN 12: Some children don't have the confidence yet. So the teachers actually need to build up the confidence and that is something I don't see. Although in some households, say maybe in the context of my mother and my aunts, they teach us to speak up. They speak up themselves but in other households, they're so quiet and they keep to themselves. There's a certain basis that you need. You need that plain root. We need the inspiration but they need to take the first step before we take the three steps ahead.

OUTRO SIG TUNE