

# AMANDLA!

African Women in Law Speaker Series

Vanguard Edition

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Institute for African Women in Law



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# WHY AMANDLA?

Amandla is a word that means "power" among the Nguni languages of South Africa. Amandla became a rallying cry against apartheid in South Africa and continues to be a rallying call for social justice.

The Amandla! African Women in Law Speaker Series is a **global diversity awareness program** that aims to amplify the achievements and stories of African women in law. The Series is a collection of short stories on women's achievements, challenges, resistance, resilience, and solidarity. Through this project, we hope to inspire, encourage, and provide hope for future generations of young women across the globe.

Women across Africa have made remarkable strides in the legal profession, yet these achievements are often hidden in global discourses on the legal profession. As a scholar-activist, I constantly encounter discourses and spaces that attempt to erase or marginalize the voice and agency of the African woman. Whether it is in the telling of our history, in decision-making processes, or in mainstream discussions, this erasure occurs in multiple spaces across the profession. From Algeria to Zimbabwe, women continue to play important roles in the fight for social justice.

However, women's sacrifices, bravery, and contributions to nation-building are frequently relegated to the annals of history, rendering their achievements invisible. The silencing of women's experiences finds expression in the "African" proverb "until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter." The Amandla Series aims to disrupt the "hunter's story" by creating a platform for the "lioness" to be her own historian and tell her own story.

The roadmap to achieving the United Nations and African Union gender equality targets must begin with acknowledging the strength, resilience, and contributions of women. To loosely interpret the Akan Adinkra symbol, Sankofa— we should not forget our past, for it guides our future. Through legal narratives grounded in African storytelling, the series makes visible the professional trajectory of African women in law.

Through legal narratives and storytelling, African women in law **speak truth to power!**

J. Jarpa Dawuni, Ph.D.  
Founder and Executive Director

# Legal Narratives

"If the African woman's life experiences and story could only be told in the context of other people's lives and experiences, and not exclusively through her own voice, then how can she be independent of those external filters? Although her existence itself wouldn't be doubted, the objective reality of her identity would be obscured."

J. Jarpa Dawuni, Esq. Ph.D.

**Founder and Executive Director-- Institute for African Women in Law**  
**Quoted in Introduction to International Courts and the African Woman**

**Judge: Unveiled Narratives (Routledge, 2018)**

"Legal narratives are an important tool in telling stories—especially those that would otherwise not get told. Storytelling is a salient part of the African and African-American experience."

Judge Gabrielle Kirk McDonald

**Former Judge/President, International Criminal Tribunal for the Former**  
**Yugoslavia (ICTY)**

**Quoted in Foreword to International Courts and the African Woman**  
**Judge: Unveiled Narratives (Routledge, 2018)**



## Estelle Matilda Appiah (Ghana)

Legislative Drafting Consultant

Former Director of Legislative Drafting, Attorney General's Department, Ghana

Qualified to practice in the UK, Ghana and Lesotho.

Law has been a family tradition since 1902 when my West Indian grandfather George James Christian, a lawyer, came to the Gold Coast as a "Returned Exile" instead of going back to Dominica his birthplace. My mother Essi Matilda Forster was the first woman lawyer in the Gold Coast in 1947. I chose to follow her footsteps as legislative counsel at the Attorney-General's Department, Ministry of Justice, Ghana, where I was the Director of Legislative Drafting from January 2005-March 2011. In that capacity, I was responsible for the legislation of the Republic of Ghana with the status of a Court of Appeal Judge.

The highlight contributions of my career at the Ministry and subsequently as a legislative drafting consultant have included the preparation of social policy legislation that transcends cultural and civil law perspectives. My keen interest has been the preparation of legislation that improves the quality of people's lives, advances their wellbeing and curbs inequality. To that end, I have been proudly concerned with legislation on children, domestic violence, female genital mutilation, affirmative action, mental health and social protection amongst others. It has been rewarding to be involved with crafting these laws. I have published on diverse subjects that include mental health legislation, the property rights of spouses, legislation on Anti-Corruption Initiatives in Ghana, terrorism, the proliferation of small arms, social protection, affirmative action, Climate change and West Indian Patriots in West Africa.

Training and sharing knowledge in legislative drafting has been my strength. My ultimate object has been to draft legislation that is clear, concise and easily understood in furtherance of the Rule of Law. I believe that African Women Lawyers should make it a point to write articles for publication about their legal experience. At international fora I have been keen to share case studies about law making in Ghana to have the voice from Africa heard.



## Eusebia Munuo (Tanzania)

Retired Judge, Court of Appeal, Tanzania.

Former President, International Association of Women Judges.

I was the first woman on the bench in my country in 1970. I joined the Judiciary of Tanzania as a Resident Magistrate and climbed the judicial ladder, gradually jumping no step until I reached the High Court in 1987. In August 2002, I was appointed to the highest court of the land, the Court of Appeal of Tanzania. I served the Judiciary of Tanzania for 42 years and four months. My advice to women joining the judiciary is to focus on your career and maintain your integrity and impartiality. Observe the professional code of conduct and ethics. Although I was the only female on the bench in 1970, by the time I retired in September 2020, more than 30% of the judiciary of Tanzania were women. I encourage women to join the bench and help the community to change discriminatory attitudes and demeaning values.



## Fatoumata Dembélé Diarra (Mali)

Former Judge, International Criminal Court (ICC).

My father, a trader, who was remarkably open-minded, took up the recommendation of a colonial administrator who was a friend of his, and decided to enroll me in school in 1956. My grand-mother had to be made to understand that school was useful. I was saved by my primary school teachers who genuinely wanted me to gain an education. In a colonial society, it is the instinct for justice and equity. For me, there was no doubt about it. I wanted to be a judge. When you grow up in a colonized society, and later newly independent, I was 18 or 19, and I had the conviction that by becoming a judge I would help people regain their rights.

Quoted in International Courts and the African Woman Judge: Unveiled Narratives (Routledge, 2018).



## Felicia Coleman (Liberia)

Co-Chair, Law Reform Commission of Liberia.  
Former Associate Justice, Supreme Court of Liberia.  
Former Chief Prosecutor, SGBV Crimes Unit.

When one has practiced law for many years in various areas, sometimes it gives one the confidence to take on a job or position without thinking about the magnitude of challenges that come with it. Having practiced as a trial lawyer for many years, served as Circuit Court Judge and Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, I was confident to take on any job as a lawyer. However, all of my confidence, knowledge, and skills as a lawyer were put to the test when I accepted the position of Chief Prosecutor and Administrator of a newly created Sexual Violence Crimes Unit in Liberia. This was the most challenging job in my legal career. But with determination to seek justice and provide support to victims of sexual violence, we braced the odds and set the basis for the prosecution of sexual violence in Liberia. Never give up on your desire to become whatever you want to be in this male-dominated world. Women are capable of being anything. Remember you will have to work hard to achieve your goals. There is no easy way to success.



## Florence Ndepele Mumba (Zambia)

Judge, Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC).

Judge, International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY).

First woman appointed to the Supreme Court of Zambia .

I was one of the few African women who entered law school in Zambia when it was still not readily accepted that women can qualify as lawyers and work alongside men. Some of my friends discouraged me, saying that some male students in the law school were failing because law studies were difficult. In my class, I was the only girl. I always faced teasing from the male students and some of our lecturers who felt that I was in the wrong class as they did not expect women to qualify as lawyers. Today law schools are open to both sexes; the distinguishing factor is competence. in some African countries today, women have been appointed to the highest judicial office, as Chief Justice or Presidents of different court types.

Quoted in International Courts and the African Woman Judge, Unveiled Narratives (Routledge, 2018).



## Foluke Awolalu (Nigeria)

President, Customary Court of Appeal, Osun State, Nigeria (Current Position).

Former High Court Judge, Osun State Judiciary.

Former Deputy Director, Ministry of Justice, Lagos State.

I started my career with the Ministry of Justice Ibadan Oyo State Nigeria as a State Counsel and later transferred to Lagos State Ministry of Justice. The transfer made me lose seniority relative to my mates. This led to discouragement, and I even considered resigning from the service. Wise counsel from my family and my then-boss made me stay in the job. Faced with many challenges, I was undaunted and determined to excel and remain focused on reaching the peak of my career. By divine intervention and hard work, at a point, I had a double promotion, which encouraged me tremendously. Also, by God's grace and divine intervention and the drive to reach the top coupled with encouragement from my husband, I showed interest in being a Judge in my State of origin, Osun State, rather than my husband's State of origin, Ondo State. Miraculously at the first attempt, I was appointed a Judge in Osun State Judiciary. Again nine months to my retirement after 17 years as a Judge, I was elevated to my present position as President, Customary Court of Appeal, thus getting to the very peak of my career.

Hard work, justice without fear or favour and the fear of God have been my watchwords and account for my success on the Bench and the various landmark rulings and judgments I have delivered. To be a successful career woman, it is imperative to be a successful family person; one needs to strike a work-home balance that engenders the support of their spouse and children, within a wholesome spiritual/religious life. Jurists need to humble themselves and win the love, respect, and support of their family to make a success of their career. I have had a very supportive husband and understanding children who, at every stage of my career, especially on the Bench, had to endure spatial distance for several years. An adaptive approach enabled me to have meaningful social bonding with my staff without sacrificing the professional demands for meaningful and productive work.



## Funke Agbor (Nigeria)

Partner, ACAS-LAW, Nigeria.

First female maritime lawyer to become a Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN).

There is nothing particularly remarkable about my professional journey, and I don't think I was disadvantaged in any way that I recognized. I was fortunate that going to school and achieving a degree in law from the University of Lagos and being called to the Nigerian Bar for me was part of my plan. I did not battle any extraordinary odds, but taking a break in transmission to become a wife, mother, etc.-- that was a challenge. Taking the extra step to become a Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN), and the first female maritime lawyer in Nigeria to become a SAN, in a field of mainly male and younger lawyers, was a real test - of a shortlist of about 50 applicants, there were only two women, and we both got through. I have learned that in the process of moving up any professional ladder, do not be afraid to ask for help. Someone will say yes!

As soon as you set a goal for yourself, the challenges to achieving that goal will immediately materialize. Life will always happen and could be the catalyst that drives you forward or sets you back. Be intentional and choose to regard the challenge as one to propel you forward and over the obstacle. Be humble (you cannot know everything), and ask for help where you think you can find it. There will be a champion to advise and guide you.



## Hairat Balogun, OON (Nigeria)

Life Bencher, Body of Benchers, Nigeria.

First Woman General Secretary of the Nigerian Bar Association.

First Woman Attorney General- Lagos State.

The first talent or determination I cultivated was independence.

Independence in words, thought and deed and the cultivation of a personal approach with the necessary mindset that I must start as I intended, and go on to the end. For instance, learning the Rules of Ethics and building relationships with other lawyers (Junior or Senior) and clients was important. I had to be bold but not rude, simple but not crude. Stick to your point without being offensive.

I was elected the first female General Secretary of the Nigerian Bar Association in 1981 (still the only woman lawyer to have held that post till date). We had six names on the Ballot Paper. Four male candidates had stepped down before the day of election leaving one male and myself as candidates. All effort to persuade the man to step down failed and he polled only six votes. I believe it was my activities over time within the Association including attending and speaking at meetings and conferences in the North, South, East and West of Nigeria that won the election for me. I did not engage in any person to person campaign. I had built up a reputation as a "Bar man" and had male and female friends from every part of Nigeria and had appeared in all Courts of the Capital Cities of Nigeria and had become a true professional.

I believe that all human beings are equal. Some of us have a large dose of a particular talent than others, it does not mean others are inferior. It is our duty to pull each other up, when you pull others down, you reduce your own level to that of a weak person.

Be very sure of the Truth and Justice in all points of view and always say "Heavens will not fall". Your determination will win others over to your side. I always encourage everyone to have a mentor from whom you can take advice and alongside whom you can measure your success. If you receive approval for some task you have performed, keep that performance as a blueprint. As part of your character you will be known forever as "Consistent" --- not such a bad title if you can look up the meaning of this word. Certain talents endure for all times, honesty, firmness, kindness..... cultivate and exhibit them wherever you find yourself in life. They will always defend you.



## Hauwa Ibrahim (Nigeria)

International Human Rights and Sharia Law Attorney.  
Winner of European Parliament 2005 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought.

When I was a child in the small village of Hinnah, Gombe State, Northern Nigeria, I saw for the first time a woman with a graduation mortarboard and gown. The image of that young woman—educated, confident, and worldly—was burned into my conscience and became my living dream. It is neither normal nor customary for a woman of my community to harbor such a dream in a culture that does not fully encourage equal development for men and women. The story of this passage from young dreamer to mature barrister and solicitor has been presented in periodicals and in the media, so I will only provide some citations for the curious. I cannot help but stare at times at my image in a photo taken a few years ago, in a cap, a gown, and colorful hood that represent a Masters in Law. Only a short time ago, it seems, that was the photo of a confident, educated, worldly stranger. Now, it is me, and it can be you too.



## Hlaleleni Kathleen Matolo-Dlepu (South Africa)

Current Chairperson of the Legal Practice Council of South Africa.

Current Commissioner of the Judicial Services Commission of South Africa.

Past Co-chairperson of the Law Society of South Africa.

I grew up in a rural village where I witnessed one of the great injustices of the Apartheid regime: forced removals. At the tender age of three years old I was taken, along with my family, from the home my grandfather built with his own hands and from the beautiful, fertile, fruit orchards I once roamed, to a dark, desolate, and arid place where we were forced to live in tents. In my teenage years I witnessed the Soweto Uprisings where my peers rebelled against the Apartheid government for forcing their oppressive language as the main medium of instruction in schools. These two incidents made me acutely aware of injustice and made me determined to do something to achieve justice for those who have been disenfranchised. These events, among others, motivated me to pursue a legal career. In the early stages of my career, I saw that there were few opportunities for women attorneys. This encouraged me to establish a woman-owned firm that focused on mentoring emerging women attorneys. This has been and continues to be my passion to this day.

My advice to other Women in Law is to firstly be comfortable in your identity and secondly to set clear goals. Competition is healthy but it shouldn't form the basis of your career. Always leave the door open behind you for other women to enter.



## Ifeoma Enemo, Ph.D. (Nigeria)

Dean, Faculty of Law, University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus.  
Deputy Vice-Chancellor, University of Nigeria.  
Head, Department of International and Comparative Law,  
University of Nigeria.

In 2007, I was appointed the first female Dean of the Faculty of Law, University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus, after 47 years of its existence. I was confronted with a great task and challenge of leading the Faculty through the National Universities Commission (NUC) accreditation exercise. This was critical to its continued existence, having lost accreditation in 2005 with adverse consequences. Another failed accreditation would have attracted the sanction of closure of the Faculty by the NUC. The thought of a possibility of closure of the oldest law faculty in Nigeria, under my watch, as a woman, sent shivers down my spine. I put leadership qualities to work; focus, clarity of vision and mission, transparency and accountability, team spirit, hard work, commitment and dedication; and mobilized all staff successfully. The NUC Accreditation result was a FULL ACCREDITATION to the Faculty! A woman did it!! Determined to be a change agent where ever I am.

“I am a woman and cannot pursue my dream career because it is reserved for men; I cannot be a leader among men;” these are thoughts that must be seriously jettisoned. It is not easy being in the minority, but those qualities of a dynamic woman should be brought to bear: passion, determination, kindness, and integrity. Women can bring their experiences and perspectives on board. Believe that you can. Our gender/sex is not a disability. We must overcome the discouraging stereotypes, anxiety, self-doubt and fear that come with negative thoughts. We can acknowledge our fear and determine to put an end to it. Running away from responsibility because of fear may mean we have only taken a short cut to meet it. Success should be our desire. However, success in any endeavor of life has a pathway; discover it, follow it, and achieve it! Choose today to be reborn.



## Isabelle Sokolo-Boni (Côte D'Ivoire)

Partner, Bile-Aka, Brizoua-Bi & Associés, Ivory Coast.

Joining an internationally renowned law firm and rising through the ranks until being made a partner years later, was not a dream or the ultimate goal, but loyalty and commitment forced the destiny. The challenge remains enormous in a male-dominated environment where women are often considered less competent. "You have to believe in it," a senior colleague in the profession used to tell me when I was preparing for the bar exam, and it remains till date, my leitmotif to go far.

The spirit of commitment and responsibility must prevail at all times, i.e., practicing the profession as if we were the last resort and not relegate oneself to the background by thinking that there may be someone wiser to correct one's mistakes. In law as in medicine, our clients entrust us with their lives, and we are responsible for saving them from any situation; for instance, when they are facing detention, provide them with the best advice to compensate their damages, avoid the pitfalls of a tendentious transaction, etc.



## Jamesina Essie King (Sierra Leone)

Judge, Court of Appeal, Sierra Leone.

Commissioner, African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.

The 11 years of civil war and post conflict reconstruction in Sierra Leone brought to the fore the need for gender justice and to address pervasive inequalities and violence at all levels in our society. It has been a long struggle and I sometimes feel overwhelmed and wonder whether it is possible to achieve true peace and development. I know we are not alone and it is a global challenge. My work as an enforcer of the law has also made me to realize that every time litigants access the courts it is one step to justice, sustainable peace and development. I am happy to see that more women are accessing the courts to enforce their rights. Insecurity anywhere leads to insecurity everywhere. We need to continue pressing on to make the world a safer and peaceful place for everyone.



## Josette Kadji (Cameroon)

Counsel, International Criminal Court (The Hague)  
Founder, Josette Kadji and Associates (Cameroon)

I was called to the bar in 1985, then I ventured out to set up my own law firm, and it has been 35 years since then. At the time, I was young, yet I understood the importance of my role as a female lawyer in the development of my country and our society. There were many challenges I had to overcome in the early years as a young woman lawyer, especially since it was still a largely men dominated profession. However, building my credibility wasn't my only concern. In growing my firm, I also had to ensure that the team I put together understood how our work could positively impact our society and thus, we should use that platform in the best way possible.

Eventually, I worked my way up and became among the first female lawyers to work at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in Arusha, Tanzania. I started there as Principal attorney in 1997. Working in the international criminal tribunal is no short of a trial (no pun intended) as one can easily imagine. My toughest case was the "Butare trial" which started in 2001 and took 10 years to conclude. In that trial, a group of government officials, including one woman, were accused of genocide. It was the first time a woman was found guilty of genocide by an international court.

As counsel at the International Criminal Court, I'm currently part of the defense team of Charles Ble Goude, in the president Gbagbo's case. Working as a lawyer in the international arena is a challenging job, but one that I love to do, and I give it my best each day. Coming from Cameroon to the International Criminal Court has been a journey. Looking back on those 35 years, I can say that the influence of female lawyers has increased exponentially in Cameroon, and also in the international system. But more needs to be done to connect more women from Africa within these spaces.

I'm convinced by the spirit that has guided women warriors in Africa, that we can continue the legacy of our mothers, and to push the future generation. To young women in law, I want to say: stay focused, do not doubt yourself, look in the mirror each day and say, "if these women in law did, so can I!"



## Joyce Aluoch (Kenya)

Former Judge and First Vice-President of the International Criminal Court.

Second woman to be appointed a Judge in Kenya.

When I completed my secondary education, my father chose law as a career for me, without prior consultation. I therefore studied law and subsequently joined the Kenyan judiciary as a Magistrate and rose to become a Judge of the Court of Appeal. In 2009, I was elected a Judge of the International Criminal Court and served for 9 years. I learnt to juggle life and work early in my life having been married whilst still a law student. Being a wife, mother and student was so challenging that I learnt to survive by hard work, resilience and focus. By the time I began my judicial career, I was ready to "face the world" having learnt the virtues of discipline, leadership and integrity which helped me to succeed in my professional trajectory. Looking back at my life after so many years, I am always thankful to my late father for his choice of what turned out to be a wonderful and fulfilling career. I am proud that I did not let him down!

Looking back at my long career and experience as a judge, I would like to share my views on what I consider important with other women in law. First, understand that success is subjective, in that your hopes and dreams for yourself and your career will always be your own as no one can figure these out for you. Second, make your goals attainable and do not spend too much time pre-planning your future and dismissing some opportunities as not being part of your plan. Life is unpredictable so there is no harm in deviating from a plan if either circumstances or your personal goals change. Third, be careful not to let anyone else influence your worth as someone else's perceived success has no impact on your life. Do not waste time comparing yourself with others. Care more about making yourself happy instead of trying to impress others.



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