



# AMANDLA!

AFRICAN WOMEN IN LAW SPEAKER SERIES

WOMEN TO WATCH  
EDITION

(Vol. 3)



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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)**



# Olatoyosi Alabi (Nigeria)

Partner, Olaniwun Ajayi LP, Nigeria

## WHY LAW?

One day, my mother bemoaned the fact that she did not study law as her father used to say 'all lawyers are liars'. I was a bold, daring, and determined child and upon hearing that 'lamentation', I impulsively took a self-oath to be the lawyer 'that does not lie' and ran with that determination, against all odds.

## PROUD MOMENT

My proudest professional moment was when I was admitted into the partnership of my firm, Olaniwun Ajayi LP, in 2014.

## HINDSIGHT

I may have been more strategic about my choice of profession, and / or my choice of specialization when I was pursuing my Masters .... I would have towed my passion rather than my instincts. Nevertheless, I believe all things have worked together for my good.



## Olatoyosi Alabi (Nigeria)

Partner, Olaniwun Ajayi LP, Nigeria

### CHALLENGES

Not surprisingly, with marriage straight after school, my journey as an associate in legal practice was riddled with the pressure of balancing career building with the more important, personal family pursuits. I have been very fortunate to work in institutions that are gender blind in the true sense of the word, but I wish I could say the same for the larger society, notably government agencies, where, I discovered the power of masculinity (both in physical form and simply by a touch of oratory testosterone in feminine physique) in commanding respect and in opening needed doors, and the need for a double dose of sobriety, working on national assignments, to hedge against the risk of gender insensitive jokes (smile!). Back in the private sector, not all firms maintain gender neutrality; to my chagrin, my male colleagues have sometimes had to be my heralding voice, to command respect from other lawyers.

### STRATEGIES

I recall a t-shirt in the 70s/early 80s, with the inscription: “a woman has to do twice as much as a man to be considered half as good...fortunately, it’s not difficult”. Looking back at the proposition, and at mine, my mother, and grandmother's God-attained resumes of success, there is no gainsaying that the much-needed time and energy for career building, gives way to family pursuits. I have however learnt that the opportunity for career goals never lapses and the fulfillment of the attainment of family pursuits, propels one for rebuilding the suspended career attainments. I have also learnt that prejudices are not peculiar to gender, but quite glaringly, extend to ‘age’, and, sadly, ‘creed’. My mantra is thus: be the best of YOU at all times, and in line with the pillars of my firm, believe that there are no human limits or boundaries; you can be a God-standard beyond all.





## Olayemi Anyanechi (Nigeria)

Managing Partner, Sefton Fross, Nigeria.

### WHY LAW?

My desire as a child was to be a scientist, to make novel discoveries, solve real-world problems and create technological innovations that changes lives. I initially studied for a BSc in Chemistry but changed to law because studying core sciences in a Nigerian University in the early 90's fell short of my expectations – the equipment were dated and actual experiments quite limiting for a keenly hopeful aspiring scientist like me. So, I decided to study Law, a social science where I could work on real life problems affecting humans in a real life context, which satisfied the scientist in me.

### PROUD MOMENT

When Sefton Fross won the ESQ Award for Oil and Gas Team of the year in 2014 . The Firm was just a year old, thus very new, very young and already making great strides. This confirmed that hard work and dedication is indeed the key to a successful career.

### HINDSIGHT

I often wonder at the impact I would have made, had I completed my Chemistry degree and gone for a Master's degree abroad in Applied Sciences. I However, I love being a lawyer, and believe I am making impactful contributions and changing lives, one word at a time.



## Olayemi Anyanechi (Nigeria)

Managing Partner, Sefton Fross, Nigeria.

### CHALLENGES

As a child, my mother taught me that to succeed, you must be twice as smart, competent and resilient as a man. This lesson has been the driving force of my entire career. Even in a changing world, expectations from male and female leaders differ – a man is expected to be decisive, assertive, authoritative and powerful, while a woman with the same qualities is seen as something unsavoury. Many people (even other women) would still rather do business with men than women, and when they do involve women, they expect them to defer to men. Many still get intimidated by the inner strength, courage and determination of a strong woman. These issues permeate the entire workspace infrastructure, from staff to suppliers, colleagues and prospective clients. Remaining true to womanhood while refusing to fit into the mould cast for me, is the true challenge of my career.

### STRATEGIES

My father taught me that hard work, dedication and integrity are the key attributes to a successful career. My mother taught me that to succeed I must be strong, dare to be different and fight for what I believe in. These lessons have shaped all my strategies for survival in the professional world. First in servicing clients, the key goal for me is not money, but client satisfaction – if you do an excellent job, you are committed to your client, you are reliable and clients trust you, money will come. Build a strong foundation – let people know who you are, what you stand for, what principles guide you. In so doing, you build a reputation and your reputation determines the brand of your business. If you stay the course and do the business long enough, people will look for you and this reputation will generate business for you.





## Olayinka Oladeji (Nigeria)

Member of the International Arbitration Team, Hogan  
Lovells International LLP Munich, Germany.

### WHY LAW?

Looking back, I will say two major influences framed my decision to study law: (i) I grew up in Nigeria at the peak of intense military oppression, infringement on free speech and human rights. My role models were smart outspoken lawyers who criticized the government of the day. (ii) The other influence was from an encounter with a lawyer who defended my family in court after a horrible incident. It was only natural for me to follow in the steps of these "superhumans" who were working tremendously to make the world a better place.

### PROUD MOMENT

I have had many proud professional moments as a lawyer. In my current role, I am quite proud of the work I do with the German-African Practice Group and more thankful for a team that allows me to bring my "whole" identity to work.

### HINDSIGHT

I have had some curveballs thrown at me. However, I cannot think of any decision/action that I would have done differently. I have accepted those curveballs as lessons rather than mistakes.



## Olayinka Oladeji (Nigeria)

Member of the International Arbitration Team, Hogan  
Lovells International LLP Munich, Germany.

### CHALLENGES

As a woman in law, I frequently struggle with the need to maintain work-life balance without compromising work output or neglecting the home front. While men also strive for work-life balance, women in law, due to the tasking and unforgiving demands of the job, always find ourselves at the forefront of the search for this equilibrium.

Another professional challenge I grapple with is representation. As a woman of African descent living in Europe, I do not see a lot of people who like me in many rooms. That is why we cannot overemphasize the need for diversity in all corners of the world. To overcome the representation gap, we must take advantage of mentoring opportunities - vertically and horizontally.

### STRATEGIES

i) Leverage agile work structure: I think it's imperative to seek and take advantage of flexible arrangements that are agile and effective to get the work done.

ii) Build mental resilience: I think this is a crucial, rather underestimated quality. The legal profession can be a challenging one. The average lawyer is trained to leave no stone unturned and with this attention to details comes, hailstones in form of feedbacks. We must build the mental strength to weather stormy seasons.

iii) Embracing alternative trajectories: We must all accept the proliferation of alternative paths/trajectories outside of traditional legal careers. With the level of disruption that our daily lives and industries have witnessed in recent times, it is high time all lawyers, especially professional women, embraced this change. Now more than ever before, there is a need to extend our skills/services to these non-traditional paths.



## Omnia Taher Gadalla (Egypt)

Assistant Lecturer in the Faculty of Law and Shari'a- Al-Azhar University, Cairo Founder of Her Honor Setting The Bar Initiative.

### WHY LAW?

Reading the biographies of influential people like Ghandi, Abbdy, O'connor, Mandela, and Ginsburg inspired me and I was impressed by the impact of studying law on those characters and how it empowers them to take the lead and enriches their mentality. I believed that it informed them of how things work and change, how they absorbed the spirit of the law and justice and devoted their lives to the noble ideas they had no matter what risks they encountered their way. I also belong to a big family where most of its members studied law and work in different legal fields. I used to hear their discussions and different views and it was very interesting and I was curious to know more and asked many questions.

### PROUD MOMENT

When I was appointed in the academia and became sure that I will teach law and my message will be delivered to empower young female students who belong to socially or financially disadvantaged class and are restricted even in their dreams by misconceptions and stereotypes in a male-dominated community.

### HINDSIGHT

I would have eliminated my options instead of working on different plans in parallel to guarantee most of my options in case anything changed. Further, I should have been more focused on preparing myself and boost my potentials to start my post-graduate studies abroad after graduation.



## Omnia Taher Gadalla (Egypt)

Assistant Lecturer in the Faculty of Law and Shari'a- Al-Azhar University, Cairo Founder of Her Honor Setting The Bar Initiative.

### CHALLENGES

I have encountered "for males only" statements many times. Most importantly, it happened after graduation, when I was prevented from applying to the judiciary due to my gender, like all other Egyptian female law graduates. I refused to remain silent and decided to start "Her Honor Setting The Bar" Initiative in 2014 to combat this historic flagrant discriminatory banning.

I was also told that "Being a female lowers your chances to work as a junior associate/lawyer in law firms. You can't stay up late. You will get married, have kids, and take maternity and child care leave....etc". Being veiled was another obstacle for working in some of the top law firms and multinational companies in Egypt.

### STRATEGIES

Stay determined and don't let a day pass by without investing in yourself and add to your knowledge. Law is ever-changing science and it interacts with other sciences that affect the law in return. It is also a comparative science and makes you learn from other country's experiences. Being updated and aware of what's going on will make you knowledgeable, confident, distinguished and empower you for higher positions/advanced steps. Further, increase your network. It will allow you to share and benefit from exchanging experiences from different practitioners in different legal systems that widen your horizon and produce opportunities.

For women in particular, don't let people decide for you what you are able to do and what you are not. Believe in yourself and close/block your ears from those who underestimate women's capabilities and trapped in stereotypes. Take the opportunity, go for the exposure, explore your potential, and prove them wrong. Along the way, love yourself as a woman, be aware of the extra challenges you encounter, and accept yourself in all your ups and downs.<sup>8</sup>



## Osai Justina Ojigho (Nigeria)

Country Director, Amnesty International, Nigeria.

### WHY LAW?

I decided to study law to help people. My motivation came from a school career day when a well-spoken lady spoke about her work. She was a lawyer. I admired her so much, her confidence and the way she made her presentation. I decided then that I would love to be a lawyer. Many of the things she said you needed to study law were things I enjoyed doing, such as reading. I also found the study of law fascinating, the courtroom drama, the oratory of closing speeches and the wisdom of solving cases based on facts, logic and justice.

### PROUD MOMENT

When we got judgment in the Dorothy Njemanze v Nigeria case at the ECOWAS Court. It took two funding proposals, four years and a belief that we would get justice. The case is a rallying point for challenging gender-based violence using the Maputo Protocol.

### HINDSIGHT

One action I would have taken is to do my PhD. I had three opportunities that I did not pursue because of time, funding and childcare. With hindsight, I could have managed it if I had asked for more help. I hope to still achieve that.



## Osai Justina Ojigho (Nigeria)

Country Director, Amnesty International, Nigeria.

### CHALLENGES

Most of the challenges comes from a position of assertiveness and expectations. As a woman, I believe many of my colleagues in the profession and at work have certain expectations which are formed from cultural and religious upbringing. I find that sometimes, I have to constantly assert my position to be heard and to be taken seriously as an expert in my field. I have a natural disposition to be gentle and some take this as weakness so when I act in a firm way, my intentions are misunderstood and I have been labelled negatively as being aggressive, stubborn or difficult. As a professional woman, I believe there is a lot of expectations to be excellent in all areas of life and many times one is judged harshly if one area (usually family life) is not doing so well. Managing my health, work and family is also a balancing act.

### STRATEGIES

The legal profession is still quite sexist. In Nigeria, for example, some still refer to women as 'brothers' and say that "there are no women in the bar". So women lawyers need to be confident in their abilities and exhibit their femininity in ways they feel comfortable with. I work in the development sector and as a leader, I am accountable to delivering the organisation's goals for our beneficiaries. There is a lot of demand on your time and if not careful, you blur the line between work and personal life. One way, I manage this is to have a set time where I disengage from work physically and mentally. I have a circle of trusted friends who are leaders and we support each other with advice and to network. I also create time to exercise and take care of my well-being.





## Rose Waithera Njoroge-Mbanya (Kenya)

Senior Partner, R.W. Mbanya & Co Advocates, Kenya.

### WHY LAW?

I wish that I could say that I studied law because I had a deep seated conviction to assist others access justice. The truth is that I acted in a school play in High school and was cast as a lawyer, the only words that I uttered in the entire play were "objection! your honor!" I loved my role and people said it suited me very well. Thus grew my interest in court litigation. With hindsight, I can confirm that I have always wanted to be a voice for the voiceless and to find solutions even in situations that seem complex.

### PROUD MOMENT

My proudest professional moment was when I was recognized in the category of 'Lawyer of the year 2019' at the Nairobi Legal Awards. It was unexpected and I was humbled and honored by the peer recognition. It reinforced my belief in honoring my client's story and bringing the best version of myself into every situation.

### HINDSIGHT

I would have undertaken my masters degree immediately after my undergraduate studies and before getting into family life. Undertaking my MBA program in 2018, whilst running the law firm, caring for my family, undertaking my various leadership roles was extremely exhausting!



## Rose Waithera Njoroge-Mbanya (Kenya)

Senior Partner, R.W. Mbanya & Co Advocates, Kenya.

### CHALLENGES

In the past, as a young lawyer, the main professional challenge that I faced was lacking confidence and second guessing myself. Even when everyone around me told me that I was good at what I did, I could not fully believe them because I did not believe in myself. I have been able to surmount this challenge. The major challenge that I now face revolves around time and the need to maintain a healthy family /work life balance. Juggling a family, a law firm and the various leadership roles that I have, and wanting to excel in all of them can be a real challenge, I feel sometimes that there is never enough time.

### STRATEGIES

Being true to yourself, knowing your strengths and competencies and how to use them to bring value to the profession and to your clients; knowing your weaknesses and how to mitigate them. Preparing well and being clear about the solution that is needed so that your energy is focused. Adopting a collaborative and not competitive stance with other colleagues in the profession, it is not a fight, it is a call to serve justice. Being confident and constantly reminding yourself that you have every right to have a seat at the table. Caring about your well being, keeping healthy by exercising, eating well and finding time for relaxation and meaningful relationships even outside the profession.



## Rosine Antoinette Bela Eyebe (Cameroon)

Technical Expert on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in  
Conflict - Central African Republic.

### WHY LAW?

I decided to study law because as long as I can remember, I have always been passionate about Justice and Peace. For me, studying law was a way to contribute to making the World a better place.

### PROUD MOMENT

I am proud of many professional moments. The proudest one was when I signed my first contract as Associate Legal Officer at the international Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. It was my first contract with an international Court and the result of many years of hard work.

### HINDSIGHT

Looking back, I only feel grateful for my itinerary so far and would not change anything, because every step I took in my professional experience, every decision I made, good or bad, led me to the professional woman I am today. And I am proud of that woman.



## Rosine Antoinette Bela Eyebe (Cameroon)

Technical Expert on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in  
Conflict - Central African Republic.

### CHALLENGES

As a woman professional in the legal field, I have faced many challenges. Some of them happened during meetings where I expressed my opinion in front of colleagues and the management. It happened sometimes, that my ideas were not taken into account by the management, but the same ideas expressed by a male colleague later were considered brilliant. These experiences have never deterred me from expressing myself and making my voice heard when I have the opportunity to. Another professional challenge has been how to reach the balance between my professional life and my personal life. As professionals, we do not all have the same conception of what this balance should be and how we can make it happen. Sometimes, it has been challenging to be part of a team where we had different family status and different understanding of how to achieve work/life balance. However, in general, I manage to juggle between both thanks to a good sense of planning and communication.

### STRATEGIES

We all have different aspirations in life. One thing we should always preserve is our authenticity. Nobody but us should define our goals and limits. As professionals, we should not be afraid of making mistakes, because we learn and grow through them. Focus, hard work, perseverance and faith are keys to success. Acquiring good networking skills and practicing them in a healthy way is also useful.



# Sanyu Annabelle Ndagire (Uganda)

Assistant Legal Officer

## WHY LAW?

I was inspired to study law by my mother, Judge Julia Sebutinde, whose career progression, work ethic, and impact on Uganda's justice system motivated me from a young age to pursue a career in law. I also desired to contribute to justice for victims of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Growing up in Uganda, I heard and read too often about the plight of victims of conflict and human rights abuses in my country and across the continent. I wanted to be part of the change that would give them a voice and justice.

## PROUD MOMENT

While on my feet during the trial of Dominic Ongwen before the International Criminal Court. I did so as part of the Prosecution team in the first international trial that sought accountability for heinous crimes committed against thousands of Ugandans by the Lord's Resistance Army.

## HINDSIGHT

I would have taken up more professional development opportunities (employment and courses) earlier in my career.



## Sanyu Annabelle Ndagire (Uganda)

Assistant Legal Officer

### CHALLENGES

Implicit biases premised on my gender and being a person of colour are the most distinct that come to mind. Sadly, as a human race we have a long way to go before we'll totally break or rid ourselves of these stereotypes and prejudices. But speaking up and against these biases (whether we experience or witness them) is a starting point to normalizing gender and racial equality in the workplace. Seeking out and supporting or mentoring fellow women within your firm/organisation, particularly women of colour, is equally important to create a safe environment for ALL women lawyers to thrive in.

### STRATEGIES

1. Seek mentorship inside and outside of your organisation. Your mentors need not be within your profession or discipline.
2. Keep networking and don't stop!
3. Develop your mind, your skills and your soul.





## Yusra Suedi, Ph.D. (Tanzania)

Public International Law, University of Geneva.

### WHY LAW?

My initial choice for law was arbitrary and based on deduction as opposed to a calling or an intentional decision. Navigating the packed program of undergraduate classes ranging from administrative to tax and divorce law, my jaded teen self quickly regretted my choice of study and sincerely questioned what the purpose of the law even was. It was only when I took my first Public International Law course that I realized that to me, the law exists to serve a purpose greater than ourselves, to resolve global issues and to advance social justice. In that moment, my law journey began.

### PROUD MOMENT

Submitting my PhD manuscript. The task of wrestling years' worth of infinite words and ideas into submission – against the background of life's quotidian adversities – was arduous. Completing it was a testament to my willpower and fueled me with the belief that I could overcome any challenge.

### HINDSIGHT

I would have spoken up in moments where I felt disrespected. I occasionally let certain offenses slip under the radar for fear of “causing a scene” or making anyone uncomfortable. I now know that discomfort is at the crux of any positive change.



## Yusra Suedi, Ph.D. (Tanzania)

Public International Law, University of Geneva.

### CHALLENGES

As an academic in Public International Law, I often witness daily disproportionality in female representation holding senior positions in my field. At the United Nations International Law Commission, where I worked for five years, two out of thirty-four members were women, increased to three in 2018. At the International Court of Justice, where I also worked, only three of fifteen judges are currently female. The dominance of men on expert panels at certain academic conferences has also been noted. It can be difficult to feel a sense of belonging in an industry in which so few people who look like me are authoritative figures. We may feel more inspired, empowered or driven to achieve greatness when others of a similar background, profile or appearance have reached the mountain top before us. Without this precedent, the imposter syndrome can claim us as its victims.

### STRATEGIES

Decide to believe that you are deserving of a seat at the table no matter what your industry looks like. Work hard and always strive for excellence. Do not be afraid to be a trailblazer – many of us will have to be in one way or another. Mentor younger women – they need the moral support on the days where they feel like the black in the ivory, or the pink dress in a sea of dark suits. Lastly, support other women – there is enough space at the table for all of us.



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