

Gauteng attorney's piece on 'Ukuthwala' earns top honours

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"One of the fundamental ideals set out in the Preamble of the Constitution is the attainment of a society based on social justice. This ideal will remain a pipedream if the dehumanisation, sexist exploitation and suffering of black women and girls under patriarchal tyranny are allowed to continue under the guise of custom, in particular Ukuthwala."

These were the sentiments of Diana Mabasa, a Johannesburg-based attorney, notary and conveyancer whose article, *Ukuthwala at the intersection of race and gender: 'black girls matter'*, recently scooped the coveted 2015 LexisNexis Prize for Legal Practitioners. The award recognises the best article by a practising attorney published in *De Rebus*, the Law Society of South Africa's official journal of the attorneys' profession. Sponsored annually by leading content and technology solutions provider, LexisNexis South Africa, the prize consists of a Lenovo tablet, as well as 12 months' free access to LexisMobile, a new and innovative portable digital reference application for loose-leaf titles that allows users access to the entire loose leaf.



Diana Mabasa

Mabasa was born and raised in Mahikeng but moved to Johannesburg to attend high school. She went on to study at the University of Witwatersrand, where she graduated with a BA LLB LLM. She has 16 years of experience as an admitted attorney.

In her article, she questioned why South Africa still tolerated patriarchal social structures and harmful cultural practices that cause and reinforce inequality, which disempowers young girls by robbing them of an education, dignity and freedom. The article further emphasised the continued importance of intersectionality – the study of overlapping or intersecting social identities and related systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination – in any law, together with policy initiatives for black women and girl-children. Mabasa said this could "be an effective strategy to combat oppression and to bring about social justice".

"In the coming-of-age of our democracy the time has come to demand just such an approach for the simple reason: race matters, gender matters, and black girls matter," she said.

The piece was endorsed by the South African Women Lawyers Association (SAWLA) of which Mabasa is a member. Mabasa, along with fellow members, is passionate about the contribution of women toward transformation in the country's legal sector. "As SAWLA, we are committed to the eradication of gender discrimination and we encourage women to participate in leadership structures within the organised profession to bring about change," she said. "We strive to remove barriers by highlighting the challenges women practitioners face within the legal profession."

Entries are now open for 2016 submissions to the LexisNexis Prize for Legal Practitioners. Interested attorneys are encouraged to send in an article not exceeding 2,000 words in length and should comply with the general *De Rebus* publication guidelines. The article must be published between 1 January 2016 and 31 December 2016.


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