

Meet Lehlogonolo Machaba, Miss SA's first openly transgender contestant

 By Ruth Cooper

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Lehlogonolo Machaba recently made history as one of the first transgender women to openly enter and be selected as a Miss South Africa contestant.

The 26-year-old fashion graduate hails from Oskraal, Lethabile in the North West and works as a model booker at Invade Models and is the founder and owner of the DeMollies fashion brand. In her spare time, she volunteers at a local LGBTQIA+ centre, helping young people complete university and job applications.

We got in touch with the inspiring Machaba to chat making history, beauty pageants and championing LGBTQIA+ rights.



Photo Credit: Neville Dikhoru

❏ *Congrats on being selected as one of the top 30 contestants in Miss SA 2021! It must feel quite amazing to know you are one of the first trans women to openly compete in Miss SA. What was your response when you heard you were one of the top 30?*

It was so surreal, it truly felt like a dream. I'm still getting used to it and the response from the public has made it even more exciting as I never thought anyone would respond to my being part of the top 30 like they did. And being the first trans woman to have made it this far in the contest ever gives me hope that we're moving in the right direction as a nation.

❏ *How do you feel acts like this are contributing to the acceptance of the transgender and LGBTQIA+ community and their rights?*

We have a very long way to go as a nation to a point where everyone can be fully themselves without fear of being judged. This is a great leap by the Miss SA organisation and it truly does contribute to some level of acceptance and the idea of people knowing that we do exist and that we are all beautiful and are as many women as any other type of woman. And that the LGBTQIA+ community also deserves to live without fear of being murdered or discriminated against just like everyone else.

“ I am proud to announce that I have OFFICIALLY made it to the [#Top30](#) of [#MissSA2021](#) thanks to all of you. This journey has been nothing but a great one and all of you have made this worthwhile. I am the first ever TRANSWOMAN to make it to top 30 and promise to advocate. pic.twitter.com/vehzid3wuK— IG: @Lehlogonolo.Machaba (@De_Lehlogonolo) July 6, 2021 ”

📌 **What would you hope to achieve if you won Miss SA?**

I would hope to use this platform to continue advocating for my community. To raise awareness on the ongoing murders of people in the LGBTQIA+ community and ostracisation we live with on a daily basis. My hope for this country is for the killings to stop and I believe that by educating, advocating and having people like me at the forefront as a form of representation, regular folk will get used to the fact that we exist and hopefully start treating us with the respect we all deserve.



WATCH: Miss South Africa 2021 top 30 contestants announced

7 Jul 2021



📌 **How do you feel beauty pageants have evolved over the years? Vastly, being the first trans woman to make it this far on the Miss SA contest proves how pageants are also trying to be inclusive and, hopefully, through this win other small pageants can include women of every shape and expression.**



[View this post on Instagram](#)





A post shared by Lehlogonolo Machaba (@lehlogonolo.machaba)

📌 ***What would you say still needs to happen when it comes to the acceptance and understanding of the LGBTQIA+ community in South Africa?***

There should be bills that advocate strongly against anti-LGBTQIA+ murders and hate crimes. There should be more representation in the media rather than cis-gay men.

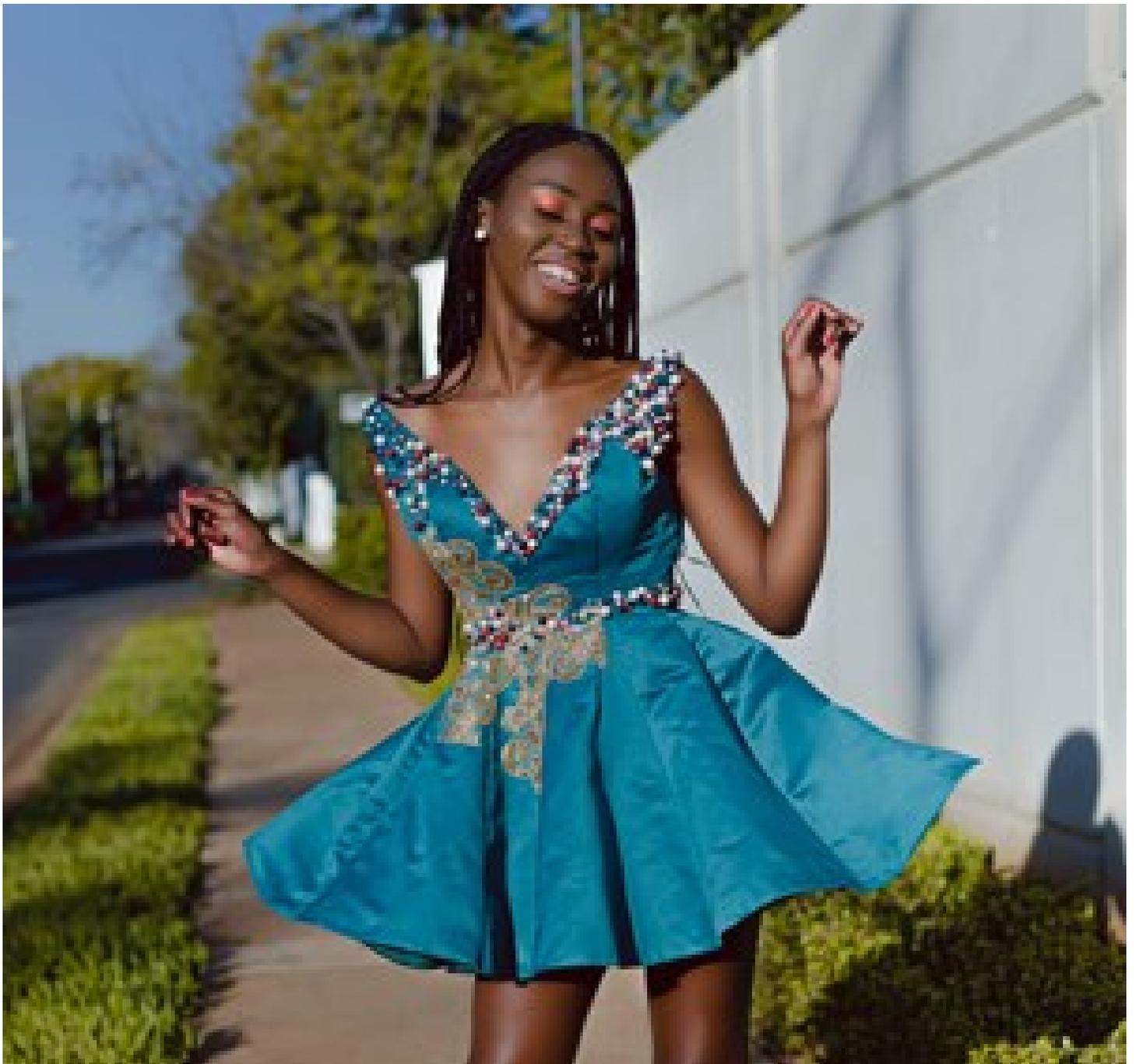
📌 ***What would be your advice for young people who identify as the opposite sex and may be thinking about transitioning?***

Take your time, get help, find organisations like OUT and get as much information as possible.





Photo Credit: Neville Dikomo





▣ **Are there any female figures who have had a particularly positive influence on your life?**

My mother is a great inspiration to me. She has been through a lot and always found a way to rise up and provide for us as a single parent. Also transgender actress and activist Laverne Cox – who continues to break the glass ceiling, having been the first transgender woman of colour to achieve many accolades and has stood her ground through all the hate.

▣ **What's your hidden talent?**

I'm very good at cooking; the kitchen is my happy place.

The pageant will take place on Saturday, 16 October at Grand West Arena in Cape Town and be simulcast live on M-Net (DStv 101) and Mzansi Magic (DStv 161) at 17:00. It will also be live-streamed on the My DStv app.

International audiences tune in via the online platform at [misssa.live](https://www.misssa.live).

ABOUT RUTH COOPER

Ruth is the production manager at Bizcommunity. ruth@bizcommunity.com

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