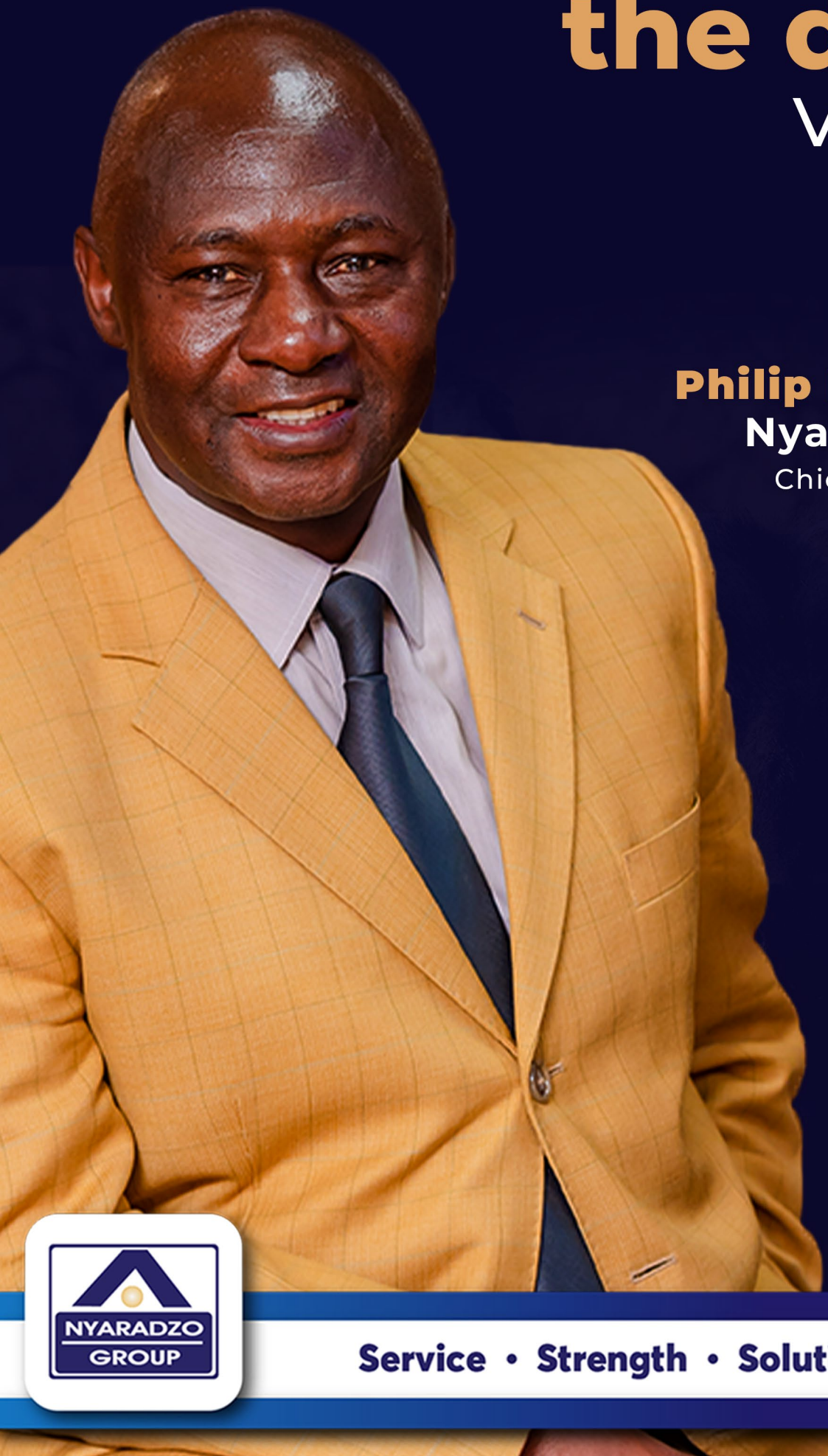
Connecting the dots...

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Three women, and their decisions that shaped the lives of generations...

Once settled in Maungwe the descendants of Gunguwo, became royalty. In seventeenth century Zimbabwe, the population of the country must still have been in the tens of thousands. At independence in 1980, after our first census, statisticians told us there were seven million people, countrywide. The 2012 census gave us a new number, fifteen million, which is double our population size at independence. Because there weren't that many of us back then, finding a place to stay, especially in the villages must have been fairly easy, even for vassals, let alone for those of royal class.

For the descendants of Gunguwo, it was a walk in the park, once they made their choice of where to settle, given they were the rulers of Maungwe after 1625; Chief Ruredzo even had one of his sons named Mataranyika - distributor of the land. All they needed was to make a choice of the place and boom, they would put up camp and settle!

Because Maungwe has so many beautiful places and it was an area of their jurisdiction, with little to no restrictions on the royal family, it is said that my grandfather Kurauone Kurai Mazikana, for whatever reason had decided to relocate from Gwangwara village under Kraal Head Rukweza, to Gurure, under Kraal Head Mpambawashe both of whom are of the Nyati totem and descendants of the great Gunguwo and therefore cousins to my grandfather.

It is widely known that one of the key strategies Mambo Makoni employed to protect his territory and cement his reign, was to place his trusted lieutenants in strategic positions. The wise chiefs would anticipate disputes and find ways of dealing with them, way ahead of time. One of the strategies they employed was carve out areas within Maungwe that they placed under the charge of descendants, sons-in-law or those who were considered to have made significant contributions in the advancement of the interests of the Chieftainship. So areas such as Rukweza, Mpambawashe and others are administered by descendants of Gunguwo. My grandfather must have been comfortable in choosing Gurure as a place to relocate to.

While staying in Gurure, one afternoon Kurauone Kurai Mazikana Mataranyika would leave his wife and children to catch a breath of fresh air, as well as catch up with the trending news of the day over a mug of the local brew

at some local meeting place, with friends, as was his routine. He must have left home after the completion of one or two chores, as was expected of men of the house, before bidding his wife and children goodbye, promising to come back later. The common place they gathered, they called it "pandari" which was usually the residence of the brewer. The local brew, they called it "seven days", which was the period of time it took to get it ready for drinking. There were known households where the nice and proper one was made, the thick one with the correct balance between a slight sweetness with some zing, that foamed with froth on the top, which appeared as if it were icing on a cake. In South Africa they call it Umqomboti, the African Beer, which the legendary "Princess of Africa", Yvonne Chaka Chaka sings about in one of her popular songs.

Unfortunately for my grandfather, at the "ndari", was a snake in a suit, hiding in the grass of the crowd. He must have been seething with so much anger that, for whatever reason, he had had enough of Kurauone Kurai Mazikana and had chosen this day as the D-day. He waited patiently like a predator in camouflage, stalking its prey, ready to pounce at the slightest opportunity.

It is said that back then, such snakes in suits, predators of the wild, who wanted to cause deliberate and premeditated harm, moved around with crocodile bile, in liquid or whatever form, which was their weapon of mass destruction, which they cunningly laced into food or drink, usually the traditional brew, whereupon their unsuspecting victims would drink. On this day, my grandfather Kurai, would be the targeted prey. When he arrived at the "ndari", the perpetrator must have smiled within.

In one big gulp of his favourite drink, innocent as he thought he was and without giving thought to the risks that come with petty jealousies and village conflicts, Kurauone would take in the crocodile bile poison that would decimate his intestines.

As soon as he took this one big gulp, he would start groaning and moaning in pain calling names of all his ancestors as he foamed on the mouth. Those around him could do little to help, as medical help was not easily accessible, much as they tried. In no time, Kurauone Kurai Mazikana Mataranyika would lie lifeless on the ground dead.

Burial arrangements would soon be made and all traditional rites including the distribution of his assets would be done. By the time he died, my grandfather was married to his childhood sweetheart Sophia Madigiri Chinyama, with five children; three girls, Majecha, sixteen, Sabina, six, and Calista, three. The boys were Tongai, twelve, and Steven Tapfumaneyi, my father, who was twins with Sabina.

His elder sister Masodzi and half sister Ziganga had since been married. Masodzi to Lazarus Mapaya Mujegu of Nyatwe in Nyanga of the Humba totem. His half sister Ziganga also known as Maingeni originally married to Mapupa Magosha of the Chirandu totem, was now married as second wife to Mudyachuma Kaisi.

When Masodzi had got married, she had taken with her their youngest brother, Johanes Mhanamana to Nyatwe in Nyanga, after the death of their father, Chakadeyi. Johanes Mhanamana was himself now married to the Mudondo family, leaving no-one within the family to inherit Sophia, his sister-in-law, as per tradition. Besides, Johanes Mhanamana must have been having his own troubles raising a family he had started.

Without much in terms of options, after the death and burial of her husband and after realising, that was the end of the road for her as a member of the Mataranyika family, Sophia would pack her bags, taking the children with her to her home in the then Chiduku Tribal Trust Lands which is 40km South west of our village in Rukweza.

At the time of her brother's death, due to communication and transport challenges back then, Masodzi had not been able to hear about the sad news, let alone attend the funeral of her late brother. Once she got the news, Masodzi would make the long journey from Nyatwe in Nyanga to Rukweza, hitchhiking along the way, but mostly walking on foot all the way.

On arrival, she would be met by her half sister Ziganga Maingeni. Her second name had been given her by her mother, second wife of Chakadeyi. As a result of the fact that she had come as an inherited second wife, Dambudzo, the first wife, was not amused nor fond of her. Thus Chakadeyi's second wife would give her daughter Ziganga this second name; Maingeni, as a statement of complaint, (why hate me when it was Chakadeyi's choice to have me as his second wife, not mine).

Masodzi would spend a few days with her half sister taking in the news of how her brother had died before making her next move which was to go to the Chinyama household to negotiate the taking into her custody of her brother's children. Because Ziganga was now married to Mudyachuma Kaisi, after the death of her first husband, Mapupa, it is to the Kaisi household, Masodzi would come.

After gathering the facts, Masodzi would take the road to the Chinyama household in Chiduku, on a mission to retrieve, her brother's children, her blood and the family's jewels.

Upon arrival at the Chinyama homestead in Chiduku, Masodzi would offer her condolences to her brother's widow and her family before presenting her case of wanting to take into her custody, all four of her late brother's children. Now only four, because her sixteen year old niece Majecha, she was told, had left home to look for employment within the surrounding farms and nobody knew where exactly she was. From then till now, Majecha or her whereabouts remain an unsolved mystery.

Sophia must have tried to reason, citing the fact that Calista was still too young at three, to be separated from her mother, but Masodzi would have none of it, stating that it was the tradition and values of the Vaungwes not to have their descendants looked after by their in-laws. "We wouldn't burden you with looking after your girl child's children who in this case still have paternal family and relatives. "Vana vedu havachengetwe kwatakabvisa pfuma," she declared, before packing their bags. Tete would hit the road, taking all four of the remaining orphans of her brother Kurauone, including the three year-old Calista.

Feeling victorious and with all she wanted in the bag, her late brother's orphans, Tete would decide to pass through Rukweza in Nyazura, to give feedback of what had transpired to her half sister Ziganga, before embarking on her long and arduous journey back to Nyanga.

On her arrival at the Kaisi household in Nyazura and after updating Ziganga, her half sister, Maingeni would suggest that instead of Masodzi taking all four of Kurauone's children, she would be happier if twelve year old Tongai was to remain and stay with her. "Tongai can stay with me, helping with minor household chores, while I send him to the local school," Tete reasoned.

Masodzi would agree with her half-sister's logic, consequently taking with her, only three of her late brother's children, the six year old twins, Steven Tapfumaneyi and Sabina and the three year old Calista.

Tongai would grow up in the Kaisi household going to the local school and helping his aunt with her household chores.

By the time Sekuru Kurai died, Nelson Mutemajiri Magosha, Tete's youngest son by Mapupa was a grown man and married with four of his eight children having by then been born, the girl, Mary, married Hunda and sons, John Mafi, Gilbert and Paul Takorera. The age difference between Tongai and the two younger boys, Gilbert and Paul Takorera was not that much, so they would grow up more as friends than cousins.

As Tongai was growing up going to school and helping Tete with her minor household chores, as per plan, one of Tete's two sons by Mudyachuma Kaisi, Aaron Kashiri would hit good fortunes, starting a coffee and tea business near the Nyazura train station.

Aaron Kashiri Kaisi, father to Elisha Matinenga Kaisi, grandfather to Kelvin Kaisi and Diana Samukange, "Amangwenya", would be the early village messiah, hiring most of the village youths, giving them jobs at his tea and coffee outlet, including my uncle Tongai, whom he taught to drive so he could do local deliveries as well as occasionally drive to Mutare to pick up critical supplies in case of delays in delivery.

Back then, the popular mode of public passenger transport was the train. All those who wished to travel to either Harare or Mutare would commute to Nyazura whereupon they would catch the train. Right up to the time I was going to school in the village, in the seventies, the train remained the most popular means of transport. In Harare, we would catch the train at 8pm on its way to Mutare, arriving in Nyazura at midnight or early hours of morning the following day.

Those wishing to travel to Mutare from Nyazura by train would catch it then, as those of us whose destination was Nyazura would disembark. Along the way from Harare, we met the train from Mutare at Eagle's Nest, past Headlands meaning it would have passed through Nyazura around about 10pm.

Therefore the tea and coffee shop, that Aaron Kashiri Kaisi established made sense for travellers particularly during winter time, when they needed a cup of tea or coffee to keep them warm, before boarding the train having had to come sometimes as early as by day, so they didn't miss the chance to travel.

Once he was able to drive and also when there were signs of strain on the tea and coffee shop business, my uncle Tongai would leave for greener pastures, getting a job as a driver with Clan Transport. My uncle always knew he had two sisters and a brother who were staying with Tete Masodzi in Nyanga. He considered it a burden on Tete and must have been committed to working hard so that he would one day relieve Tete of the burden of looking after his siblings.

Once he had accumulated sufficient savings and after working for a few years, Tongai would make the long trip to Nyanga, so he could bring his siblings back to the village. He knew that even when Tete had made the bold decision to take all three of his siblings into her custody, she didn't have adequate means to look after them, more so, enough to send them to school. By bringing them back to the village, he would be able to give them a better life, while at the same time sending them to school. So my father and his two sisters would be brought back to the village and to the Ziganga Kaisi household.

Tongai would send his young brother, my father, back to school, at the same time teaching him to drive. He also sent Sabina and Calista to school but in no time, the girls would choose marriage over school. Sabina got married to Bornface Mukwekwe of the Simboti totem, while Calista got married to Ethrage Ziumbe Mberi of the Moyo Chirandu totem.

Steven Tapfumaneyi would decide that since he was now able to drive, it was time for him to get his driving licence to which Tongai agreed, financing his lessons. As soon as my father had his driving licence, he would choose work over going to school, getting a delivery job with Clan transport.

Sometimes we never take time to look back, so we can have a better understanding of how far we have come. By looking back and connecting the dots, we get to see how different our life could have been, were it not for the heroics of those who came before us, it is on their shoulders that we stand.