“When I was growing up,” Khethi Madima says, “they always talked about how wonderful the university was.” Hearing one’s parents reminiscing about their student days might not appeal to all of us, but Khethi clearly paid attention to the words of her father Taki and mother Tshidi. “That was why I was drawn to Essex,” she says. “Taking a closer look at the Centre for Psychoanalytic Studies sealed the deal. The staff and faculty were incredibly helpful, and the programme itself was exactly what I was looking for.” She graduated in 2011 with an MA in Psychoanalytic Studies – a day her father describes as “the proudest moment of my life” – but the full story of the family’s association with Essex begins back in July 1987.

**South Africa – apartheid years**

Taki was then at the University of Paris on a French government scholarship, reading for a DEA (doctoral thesis) in Human Rights. This was in the latter years of the apartheid regime, and he and Tshidi had taken undergraduate degrees at one of South Africa’s under-funded blacks-only universities. “I received a call from the United Nations Education and Training Programme for Southern Africa (UNETPSA),” he says, “offering me a scholarship I had applied for a year earlier.”

UNETPSA had been established in the 1960s to counter the effects of apartheid by providing education and training opportunities abroad. Given the sheer number of black South Africans, and the limit to the funding available, you had to be both an exceptional student and lucky. Taki, it seems, had both factors on his side. “I was accepted for the LLM by Edinburgh and Essex. Essex had a fully fledged Human Rights Centre. It had Malcolm Shaw, Sheldon Leader, Nigel Rodley, Kevin Boyle, Carolyn Hamilton, Francoise Hampson and a host of others – all passionate about Human Rights Law and doing fantastic work. So I made a good choice!”

Khethi was around 18 months old by this time, so the whole family came to Colchester – where Taki completed his LLM in International Human Rights in 1989, followed by a PhD in Law in 1993. Tshidi graduated in 1991 with a BA in Accounting and Financial Management, adding an MA in the same subject a year later. “Coming from South Africa during the apartheid era,” Tshidi says, “I was impressed by the way things were organised and the friendly staff in Accounting and Economics.”

“They came to Essex in the 1980s from apartheid-era South Africa. Two decades on, their daughter graduated from a university they both knew well. Essex Effect meets a remarkable family”
Focused on studies
Taki and Tshidi both worked part-time to support themselves, and their lives were somewhat different from those of most of the students around them. “I was 31,” Taki says. “I didn’t socialise much!” Tshidi agrees: “I had a purpose. I focused on my studies. We went to the SU bar for a meal occasionally.” They were adamant that Khethi’s time here would be different. “She had it easier than I did,” says Taki. “Having to work would distract from her studies, so we supported her – but it was worth it.”

Khethi seems to agree. “I had a wonderful time. I lived at Matthew Quay, with amazing flatmates. We became our own little family. The social life was a welcome distraction, especially when we were all writing our dissertations.” That was only one way in which her life was different, of course. “I was raised in a democratic society. I have so many more opportunities now than my parents ever did at my age.”

The new South Africa
Both her parents agree, though, that there is much more to achieve in the country where they live and work. Taki is a Senior Counsel with chambers in Cape Town and Johannesburg, while Tshidi recently formed her own investment company focusing on Africa. They both agree that there has been change – indeed, both embody it – but, Taki says, “Change for who? The face of abject poverty is still black”. Tshidi points out the “lack of schools, clinics, water and proper housing, especially in rural areas” as well as “a huge disparity still between white and black salaries in the corporate world”.

The whole family, though, is grateful for the opportunities Essex gave them. “I loved it as soon as I set foot on campus!” Khethi says. “There were people from all over the world in one place. My parents told me: at Essex, you were guaranteed a good education and a great experience – and I agree. I made some of the best memories of my life here.”

As Essex Effect goes to press, Khethi is starting her training with the South African Psychoanalytical Association, and completing a proposal for the PhD she hopes to do here – and her sister may be on her way, too. “I’m proud to be a second generation Essex graduate,” Khethi says, “and I hope that in the future my children will be the third.” The Madima family’s links to Essex look set to continue for some time yet...