

As the progeny of struggle veterans, Shauwn Mpisane was thrust into the limelight at the dawn of democracy. Since then, she has become a tenderpreneur deluxe, who has recently courted the attention of the taxman

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Lows of the HIGH LIFE



Paddy Harper

None come to mind more quickly than the Mpisanes when it comes to lavish lifestyles and in-your-face conspicuous consumption

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The tombstone unveiling on August 8 2009 of Dumazile Flora Mkhize, the mother of Durban bling queen and tenderpreneur extraordinaire Shauwn Mpisane, was an all-ANC affair.

The Mkhize family home at Umbumbulu, south of Durban, was packed with ANC leaders and activists.

Bheki Cele, then the new SA Police Service commissioner, was holding court, hat and all. KwaZulu-Natal Premier and ANC chairperson Zweli Mkhize led the procession of participants in a traditional ceremony from the air-conditioned marquee to the rather bling tombstone. President Jacob Zuma was meant to attend, but didn't.

The unveiling was a family ceremony aimed at honouring Flora, who founded Mpisane's Zikhulise Cleaning, Maintenance and Transport while still a serving Durban councillor in 1997.

She died in 2008. The black, green and gold turnout does, however, hit at the depth of the political relationships into which Mpisane has tapped to generate business valued at R1.1 billion from local and provincial government since 2005. This despite a series of criminal charges and a tax-fraud conviction in the same year.

According to her own court papers, filed as part of a bid to have her fleet of confiscated luxury cars released by the asset forfeiture unit, Mpisane's current contracts include: a R13.9 million deal to renovate the provincial education office at Durban's Truro House, a R482 million low-cost housing tender at Umlazi with the eThekweni municipality, a R176 million housing contract with the KwaDukuza municipality, and school and clinic contracts with the public works department valued at nearly R50 million.

Mpisane and her former metro police officer husband S'bu are arguably Durban's most opulent couple. The city has its fair share of well-heeled and well-connected tenderpreneurs, but none come to mind more quickly than the Mpisanes when it comes to the lavish lifestyles and in-your-face conspicuous consumption.

Other prominent struggle

children based in the city – including Zuma's son Edward – flaunt their wealth, but none in the way the Mpisanes do.

When the couple renewed their vows in March 2011, they threw a series of parties that lasted an entire weekend and ran up a price tag well in excess of R1 million. Their fleet of luxury vehicles includes a Rolls-Royce Phantom, a Bentley, a Lamborghini and Ferraris.

Shauwn's court appearances have also been blinged-out affairs, with the couple dressed up to the nines and accompanied by bodyguards and entourages of business associates, friends and hangers-on. She favours aquamarine accessories at court, including her famous heels, while S'bu's

taste runs more towards conservative suit-and-tie outfits.

Their palatial sea-facing home on Addison Drive in La Lucia, the city's Millionaire's Mile, has been the scene of a series of A-list parties since the millions started rolling in, with their New Year's Eve parties being among the most popular in the city.

When the asset forfeiture unit swooped on their assets last month, they seized a total of four properties in the city's most affluent suburbs.

In an earlier interview with City Press, S'bu defended their spending, saying they had earned the money and were spending it in the local economy rather than abroad.

Mpisane is currently facing charges of tax evasion for which she stands trial in May. She is also charged separately with trying to bribe a state witness. Two weeks ago, she was arrested again on 53 fraud and forgery charges for allegedly using forged documents to qualify for public works contracts.

Opposition parties claim the tenders are a result of her relationship with the ANC eThekweni region – whose councillors run the city – and the province.

Mpisane's political connectedness, however, predates her mother's involvement in the ANC at the council level. Both her father and brother were ANC activists and both were killed by police at the height of the political violence in KwaZulu-Natal in the early 90s.

Mpisane's father was Sipho Joel Mkhize, a highly successful businessman. Her brother S'busiso was an ANC activist who was also involved in a series of robberies.

In February 1992, the IFP's central committee member for Umlazi and a feared warlord, Winnington Sabelo, was shot dead in his supermarket in the township.

Sabelo had spearheaded the IFP's campaign to have all Durban's townships incorporated into a bantustan and its attempts to crush popular protests. He was, at the time, involved in peace talks with the ANC.

The then KwaZulu Police suspected S'busiso of the killing and raided the family home. They found a firearm belonging

to Siphso, who was then arrested and taken to the Umbumbulu police station where he was killed, seemingly in retaliation for the Sabelo murder and his ANC membership.

S'busiso, nicknamed Billy the Kid, spent the next six months in a brutal war with the KwaZulu Police in the south of Durban, using RPG7 rocket launchers to take out police vehicles in ambushes.

He was killed by the then SA Police in a fire fight in Isipingo near Umlazi after they drove an armoured vehicle over the house he was holed up in.

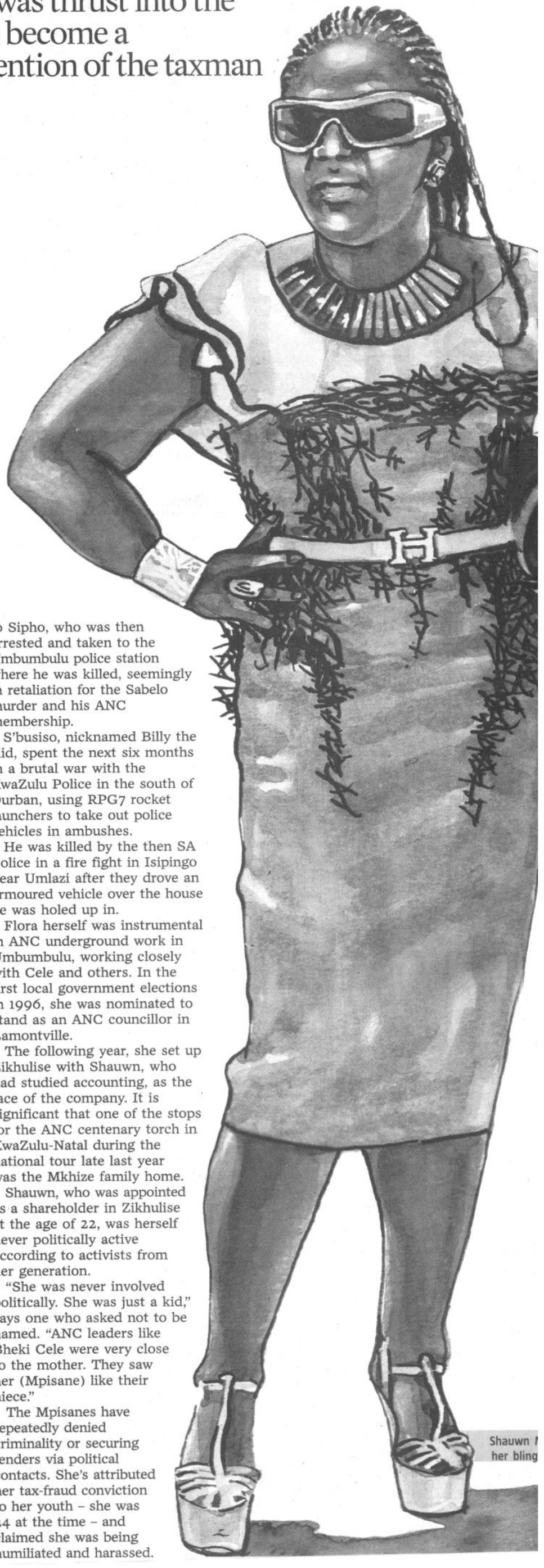
Flora herself was instrumental in ANC underground work in Umbumbulu, working closely with Cele and others. In the first local government elections in 1996, she was nominated to stand as an ANC councillor in Lamontville.

The following year, she set up Zikhulise with Shauwn, who had studied accounting, as the face of the company. It is significant that one of the stops for the ANC centenary torch in KwaZulu-Natal during the national tour late last year was the Mkhize family home.

Shauwn, who was appointed as a shareholder in Zikhulise at the age of 22, was herself never politically active according to activists from her generation.

"She was never involved politically. She was just a kid," says one who asked not to be named. "ANC leaders like Bheki Cele were very close to the mother. They saw her (Mpisane) like their niece."

The Mpisanes have repeatedly denied criminality or securing tenders via political contacts. She's attributed her tax-fraud conviction to her youth – she was 24 at the time – and claimed she was being humiliated and harassed.



Shauwn / her bling