

Planting the Seed

Emerging Student Voices

Creative Writing

Short Stories
Opinion Pieces
Poetry



A Durban University
of Technology
Writing Centre Initiative



PLANTING THE SEED EMERGING STUDENT VOICES

This creative writing book is a project of the Durban University of Technology—Writing Centre.

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Thank you to all *Writing Centre* tutors for working with the student writers.



The Durban University of Technology Creative Writing Competition Book is published in honour of the late Professor Thengani Ngwenya who was an ardent champion of student writing development. Professor Ngwenya was part of the Writing Centre's annual writing competition since inception in 2013.

PLANTING THE SEED EMERGING STUDENT VOICES

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CONTENTS

Foreword.....	9
Introduction.....	15
2015.....	19
Essays/Opinion Pieces.....	20
Poetry.....	30
Short Stories.....	36
2016.....	49
Essays/Opinion Pieces.....	50
Poetry.....	69
Short Stories.....	75
2017.....	99
Essays/Opinion Pieces.....	100
Poetry.....	113
Short Stories.....	121
2018.....	131
Essays/Opinion Pieces.....	132
Poetry.....	141
Short Stories.....	146
2019.....	161
Essays/Opinion Pieces.....	162
Poetry.....	178
Short Stories.....	185
2020.....	201
Essays/Opinion Pieces.....	202
Poetry.....	214
Short Stories.....	220
2021.....	233
Essays/Opinion Pieces.....	234
Poetry.....	242
Short Stories.....	247

FOREWORD

Graham Stewart

* * *

In her acceptance speech as the first South African to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, Nadine Gordimer touched on the essential value of writing, both for the individual and for her society. Her words go to the heart of the achievements of the prize winning DUT students whose writings appear in this book.

... We spend our lives attempting to interpret through the word the readings we take in the societies, the world of which we are part. It is in this sense, this inextricable, ineffable participation, that writing is always and at once an exploration of self and of the world; of individual and collective being. (Nadine Gordimer, Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech, 1991)

Creative writing is a form of magic. Not the superficial magic that modern technology churns out in a tsunami of glib, disconnected fragments on our phones, but a true magic: engaging us in authentic explorations of our own and others' cultures and identities through the sheer joy of storytelling.

Why creative writing at university? As an example of higher education that lacked cultural depth, a university colleague of mine liked to quote the example of a student he encountered in an advanced science course in Britain. The student was from Central Asia, and had a postgraduate qualification in mining. When quizzed, the student admitted that their entire curriculum back home was packed with very specific

information on the qualities of rocks, sophisticated mining equipment and related technology. That's all. Students there learned little or nothing of the literature, music, history or culture of their home country. They had been trained to a high degree of expertise, but in a very narrow way. These students were little more than finely-tuned cogs in an industrial machine. How equipped were they to best judge how to contribute their knowledge in a social context? What was the significance of mining in their history and its potential to improve the quality of life of the people and their environment?

I am an African. I cannot be proud of my culture and heritage if I fail to cohabit. My hopes are senseless if I ignore the plight of the discontented. That is what African culture is about, not airbrushed folklore and enervated attempts to label some as more African than others. (Golden Nyamapfene, 1st Prize, Essay - DUT Creative Writing Competition 2015)

The Writing Centre at Durban University of Technology prides itself in fostering enquiry and critical thinking, integrity and professionalism, diligence and accountability and commitment to equality of opportunity: the hallmarks of a good citizen. The Writing Centre aims to draw out each person as Nadine Gordimer says, in an “exploration of self and of the world; of individual and collective being”. The Centre started as a small but enthusiastic enterprise at City Campus, but soon caught on among students across all faculties as the value of its activities grew clearer to users. It thrives on participation and collaborative learning, and evidence abounds of its positive impact on students' writing and reading skills. There's a double advantage here: better course performance and improved student community participation and responsibility.

The Writing Centre promotes both academic and creative writing among students. Creative writing and critical reading intertwine to create a “gymnasium of the mind” (Costello 2013: 1133) where students train their intellects using words and ideas that lead to clarity of thought, imaginative idea-building and logical reasoning. These, of course, are the very skills needed for academic success, good citizenship and social responsibility. Beyond the essentials of daily tutoring and mentoring, the Writing Centre established an annual competition for student creative writing, and I had the pleasure of serving on the adjudication panel for several years. I was consistently impressed with the quality of student contributions, and the ingenuity, social awareness and verbal brilliance of the entrants. How appropriate then to publish a permanent record of winning entries as a homage to those who are represented, and an inspiration for students today.

I have to tie my shoes, lest the shoelaces of
despair cause me to trip and fall,
Lest the voices of the cynical and the naysayers
stop me in my sprint.
Please, just let me tie my shoes
Because today I've made the decision, to take
this journey,
Out of the woods, of mental slavery ...
(Siboniso Ngcobo, 1st Prize, Poetry - DUT
Creative Writing Competition, 2016)

Creative writing provides us with a perspective on how others behave and react, and to vicariously experience the moral space they inhabit. To look at our own society through the eyes of Zakes Mda, Lewis Nkosi, Alan Paton or Mbulelo Mzamane is to find ourselves immersed in the lived experiences they conjure with words. The Writing Centre's

annual creative writing competition opens a space for students to discover their own authentic voices, what Martha Nussbaum calls the narrative imagination: the ability “to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of someone different from oneself; to be an intelligent reader of that person's story [...] including the many ways in which social circumstances shape emotions and wishes and desires” (Nussbaum 1998: 10-11). We cannot be truly critical unless we are able to locate the importance of something within the context of others’ backgrounds and social roles. So, while the narrative imagination is essential for creative writing, it extends way further into any type of writing: in business, industry or public life. Once you successfully engage the reader, and convey your meaning with clarity, you can apply this as much to a short story as to the presentation of a science project.

This book is published in honour of the late Professor Thengani Ngwenya, African literature scholar and unfailing champion of student writing development at the university. From the inception of the annual writing competition, Professor Ngwenya gave generously of his time and expertise, and the contents of this volume bear witness to his dedication over the years.

My best wishes to the students, writing centre staff and leadership who have made this volume speak to the success of writing excellence at the Durban University of Technology.

African literature is about a place most people have not visited, even in imagination. It is a place worth getting to know. The sights and sounds are unique. The rain beats heavily on tin and thatched roofs. When rain stops, a small bird begins to sing in a mango tree. Then people come out, talking. On their way, they meet

others and stop for a while to talk some more. The conversation may be in any of the eight hundred languages spoken on the continent, but it is undeniably African. In the spoken word may be found the quality that some African writers have called the genius of African civilisation. And in the spoken word there is magic. The spoken word, always fresh, is the source of all African literature. History will judge us if we shut that door to the world.

(Nkosinathi Mkhize, 1st Prize, Essay DUT Creative Writing Competition, 2017)

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INTRODUCTION

Gift Mheta

* * *

Chinua Achebe, a prolific Nigerian novelist, poet, and critic who was generally regarded as a luminary figure in modern African literature, died on the 21st of March 2013. Following his death, Chinua Achebe's life and literary achievements were celebrated in different ways across the globe. The Durban University of Technology Writing Centre decided to honour this distinguished scholar of African literature by conducting a creative writing competition in his name. The competition was conducted to promote both academic and creative writing among students. The broad theme for the competition was tradition and modernity and the sub-themes were identity and self-representation, rural-urban divide, pan Africanism, colonial encounter and its consequences, post independent Africa, gender, culture and society, and redefining traditional African culture. This competition was the genesis of many creative writing competitions at the Durban University of Technology (DUT); it has over the years grown in leaps and bounds, and this volume of the competition's winning entries bears testimony.

The competition, which has become an annual event, resonates with the DUT ENVISION2030 Strategic Perspective 1: Stewardship Objective 4: Creativity for the inspiration of innovation and entrepreneurship. It is an initiative aimed at producing well-rounded graduates – graduates who are not just fashion designers, engineers, biotechnologists, somatologists, accountants, IT technicians, dental technologists, etc. – but graduates who are also creative and effective writers, graduates who can identify the

challenges bedevilling their society and write about how such problems can be tackled.

Since its inception in 2013 to date, the competition themes have been carefully selected to provide students with an opportunity to engage with issues that matter to African society. It resonates with the call for decolonisation of universities and curricula. The importance of carrying the decolonisation agenda forward is well-summed up by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o who unequivocally states that

Education is a means of knowledge about ourselves...After we have examined ourselves, we radiate outwards and discover peoples and worlds around us. With Africa at the centre of things, not existing as an appendix or a satellite of other countries and literatures, things must be seen from the African perspective... All other things are to be considered in their relevance to our situation and their contribution towards understanding ourselves. In suggesting this we are not rejecting other streams, especially the western stream.

The competition therefore has provided DUT students with the platform to think and write critically about what it means to be an African. It allows them to appreciate and question African traditions, values, fears and aspirations. Above all, the competition provides students with a voice on critical topics such as education, human rights, peace-building, unity, social justice, democracy, gender-based violence, non-violence, dialogue, service delivery, civic engagement, love, and so forth.

This volume curates the winning entries of the DUT annual creative writing competition structured chronologically from 2015 to 2021. The winning entries are presented from the first prize winner to the third prize in the essay/opinion piece, poetry and short story categories respectively. Sixty-three entries are included in this book.

This book is aimed at anyone who loves reading. It is the outcome of a collective effort by the annual creative writing competition task team at DUT. Through this volume, we hope that budding writers will be inspired to write more. In the words of Eneke the bird in *Things Fall Apart* “Since man has learned to shoot without missing, I have learned to fly without perching”. Keep inspiring many readers through creative writing. Do not stop.

We hope you will enjoy reading and using this book, and look forward to your comments on how we can improve it for future editions.

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Associate Professor Gift Mheta is the Writing Centre Manager at the Durban University of Technology.

2015

ESSAYS/OPINION PIECES

1ST PLACE

My sister's keeper

Golden Nyamapfene

* * *

I care. That is my culture. That is my pride. When an innocent Mozambican, whose only crime is that he was not born here, is dragged to his death under a police van, that threatens my human rights. For my language and my creed is of little value if I cannot be the justice for those who have been wronged and bruised unjustly.

I speak truth. That is my culture. That is my heritage. When hundreds of young girls are driven into the desert to serve the barbaric needs of warlords and extremists, that matters to me even when they are not my blood. For my sworn allegiance to the woman who bore me is contemptuous if I cannot speak up and be the strength of the meek.

I believe in equality. That is my culture. That is my pride. When tens of men are gunned down for demanding fair compensation for playing a pivotal role in the development of our nation, it disgusts my inner spirit, even when they are not my father. For if I do anything less, it would be a betrayal to the fundamental conviction that all men are born free and free they shall breathe their last.

I am committed to conservation. That is my culture. That is my heritage. When the wild is ripped of its kings, horns, and skins by greedy opportunists, that threatens the future of my children, and grandchildren. For if I forsake the sand and other creatures that walk on top of it, nothing else will tell the tale of the great men and animals that walked this earth.

I am generous. That is my culture. That is my pride. When millions of orphans go for days without food and safe drinking water, that makes my life poorer, even when their ordeal haunts them a thousand miles away from my doorstep. For if I cannot be the shoulder for those who are out of the reach of a brighter day, my hopes of a blessed future for our nation are void.

I am an African. I cannot be proud of my culture and heritage if I fail to cohabit. My hopes are senseless if I ignore the plight of the discontented. That is what African culture is about, not airbrushed folklore and enervated attempts to label some as more African than others.

2ND PLACE

Sally with a voice

Salina Ramadhin

* * *

There really is no small act of courage. Courage is something that helps us overcome the fear that holds us back. If it fills us with doubt and scares us to death but you still find a way to face it, trust me, that is courage. Most of us do not really think of ourselves as being great or being brave but in actual fact we can be much more than that. Every single step that you take towards something that scares you, trust me, that is courage. I have not fully understood the importance of courage and resistance until things started to go from 'fresh as a daisy' to a 'nightmare in hell' in my life.

From the time I could remember I have always been a happy go lucky child filled with smiles to make anyone's day. As the years went by the love in my heart grew and my infectious positivity spread faster than any disease. I was content and happy within myself, and I had peace of mind. Little did I know that life had a big surprise for me. I believed life was all roses and sweet peaches. When I got accepted into college, I got a dose of reality. Things happened, the kind of things you would only see in movies or watch in documentaries. Those things happened to me. I was falsely accused of things I did not do and so this had a detrimental effect on my personal and mental health. I was completely shattered. I felt like an abandoned piece of bubble gum under a high school desk in the presence of company who did not acknowledge my presence. My self-esteem got damaged, and I believed that I was bad because both the accusers and the people who believed the accusations made me feel that way. I was under

their jurisdiction and never completely in control of myself and my life. I started to doubt myself and felt very uneasy in the presence of everyone around me.

I always wondered how I hid in my fear, hid in my darkness. By darkness I mean a safe place where I hid my pain from the world, I would just sleep to shut the pain, as well as everyone else, out. The answer was simple, I was depressed. I could not describe the feeling of pure emptiness and torture that lay beyond the pain. I could not fathom my sadness. Instead of taking these issues up, I let it eat away at me slowly until I could not recognise myself anymore. It is so easy to give up. It is still easy to put the blame on someone else but the easiest thing to do is nothing at all. We all have ups and downs that lead us to feel victimised. We all have our pain threshold, and some situations activate memories that overwhelm our being. If we do not get our way we make a fuss, if we tell a lie we hope it will be fully accepted, no one really likes to look anything less than perfect. To be honest there was a time when I did not want to be anything less than perfect, but I soon realised that it was impossible.

To me courage is not just bravery; it is actually understanding my deepest fears and still trying to go on when I feel petrified. It is telling the world my story instead of hiding beneath a blanket of perfectionism. It is letting my guard down no matter what I am going to face next. It is being vulnerable in the situation that frightens me. I have been picked on many times for being different, for speaking up when others did not want to, for pushing myself beyond the limit when people told me I could not achieve much and I realized that all these little acts that did not stop me from living my life, which is how I was being courageous. Courage does not have to be a heroic act or something big; it is the little things like putting your pride aside and apologizing to someone or even something

that others would not know about. My biggest critic was not a person or people, it was the little conscience inside that I listened to.

The most difficult moment I have experienced this year was when I had to fight those negative thoughts that have challenged the way I perceived myself and revealing who I really am underneath all of the negativity inside. I did that by recalling some of my positive traits and qualities as well as understanding my personality better. The bravest thing I ever did was to admit to myself that I was troubled, that I was scared and that I needed help and choosing to live every time I wanted to die. I was a very confused young lady, but I now know that coming into direct contact with and confronting those feelings that made me feel inferior, that right there is courage.

Sometimes taking a stand and having a voice you become hated, mocked and sometimes even punished but most of the time this doesn't have to be fact, it could all be in your head. I know what it is like to feel stuck and to feel like there is no other option. When people look at me, they see a happy, bubbly girl that enjoys life with no regrets. What they don't see is how many scars and cuts are behind this smile that never chooses to die. I will not let my struggle become my identity and I realised that I could thrive even when I am in this depressed state. I never gave up because much more is possible when it seems impossible and much more becomes incredible when there was seemingly no hope to begin with. But there is...

3RD PLACE

Redefining African Culture

Njabulo Nhlakanipho Shezi

* * *

To redefine or reinterpret African culture and African history is to redefine humanity itself. Scholars, together with people around the world, would all agree that Africa is the cradle of civilization and with that being said there is a responsibility to preserve and prolong African culture and African history. To only label or associate Africa with the colour or paint which is black is incorrect, as Africa is a consciousness, Africa is all colours and Africa is all people.

Africa is a woman whose beauty is in the mountains, the valleys and trees. Her confidence echoes through the deserts making other continents jealous. Her warmth is like that which is displayed by a mother to her newborn infant. She is our mother. Africa is a continent of complex cultural diversity where the Ubuntu values of humility and hospitality form the fabric of our wonderful continent. Our dance, our rituals and our chants make us who we are. We are a people of tremendous bravery, and we are in tune with ourselves and the times in which we live. The land we occupy was and still is, in some parts of the continent, ruled by kings, chiefs and queens.

In our early developments as a continent around the late 13th century we adopted a consensus form of government, and of course with all the characteristics of democracy, individualism and freewill. As a continent we have been blessed tremendously in terms of our agricultural landscape. We have always been people who grow and maintain crops for the

purposes of feeding ourselves or for industry. Even before colonialism we were self-dependent in terms of food security, our schooling, our industries and cultures. The fabric of our continent is purely defined by our past but will continually be shaped by what we as a people do in the future.

The very identity of Africa as a continent and of Africans as a people is designed from pre-colonial history but not pre-colonial cultures. We have always owned and embraced our cultures and ethnicities. Throughout recorded history Africans have unfortunately been exploited. We as a people have been exploited during the unjust era of slavery, the continent itself has suffered at the hands of oligarchies whose sole mission was and still is to rob the continent of its minerals. Our economy is growing rapidly, second only to Asia but having said that almost half of our people are living under poverty and this for me is worrying. As Africans we own almost sixty percent of the world's productive land but ironically our continent is riddled with unemployment and poverty.

Africa continually faces a constantly changing global environment; particularly in the mid-1990s, where we saw enormous global trends emerging; one would recall the internet for example. This created a new economic landscape particularly for already emerging countries such as South Africa, Nigeria, and other north African countries. An important feature of the mid 1980s and the early 1990s was the emergence of the globalisation of the global economy. Global growth in terms of communications and technology has facilitated international trade and finance, and the constant movement of capital and industry. Unfortunately, as a continent we have urgent issues such as increasingly indebted public sectors, little cohesion between the public and private sector and also corrupt government officials. All these negative factors have influenced a decline in direct foreign

investment and as a result our economies are stagnant and are certainly growing below par.

What of our wonderful continent? The continent has hosted a number of renowned events and one which comes to mind is the FIFA world cup where we showed to the world our spirit of unity and delivered a successful tournament. With that being said most recently locals from predominantly north of the country have been involved in xenophobic attacks towards our brothers and sisters from all over the continent. Murders in Africa reflect social frustration and unrest towards the powers that be. This is embarrassing as during times of hardship here in South Africa political leaders such as the late Nelson Mandela sought refuge outside the country, and they were warmly accepted.

The continual radicalisation of Africa in the past forty years by various leaders has yielded growth in some countries but also in some countries the powers that be have certainly, from an administration point of view, run their respective countries to the ground. Even for developing countries the growth has been minimal and there have been high levels of inequality. If Africa is to play a major role in the global economy we need to define, integrate, and maintain policy which is favourable for prospective investors. There is no doubt that as a collective of countries we still have a lot of work to do. However, the future does look bright.

How does Africa find relevance in the 21st century? How do we redefine Africa so that it remains relevant not only to ourselves but also to the world? We need to reform the curriculum in our schools so that we teach the children of revolutionaries such as Steve Biko and Martin Luther King just to mention a few. We need to be at one with our churches and integrate them more into society and to continue to

embrace our cultures and traditions. We also need to work with one another whether it is economically, socially or politically. We need to continually come with our own solutions for the problems that face our beautiful continent.

The late Nadine Gordimer once said, “Perhaps the best definition of progress would be the continuing efforts of men and women to narrow the gap between the convenience of the powers that be and the unwritten charter”. This statement, for me, speaks to the future and to the youth of Africa to continually grow Africa and subsequently eradicate poverty, unemployment and underdevelopment. Africa is being redefined and our story will continually be reinterpreted and will find relevance for many more years to come.

POETRY

1ST PLACE

I am not, but I create

Nonhlanhla Mthembu

* * *

I am an atom
I am a cell
I am a note of music
I am a root of a Marula tree
I am not, but I create

I am that stone that killed Goliath
I am a donkey Jesus rode
I am a foundation of the Mandela Bridge and seven wonders
of the world
I go by unnoticed
I am a shadow, merely recognised.
I am not, but I create.

I am a thread of cotton
I am ink, a piece of paper.
As small and little as I am, I create greatness.
I am not, but I create

I let things be
I let things flourish
I nurture beauty,
But never become part of it or IT
I am a maker, moulder and magnifier
I am a mother of all careers
A jack of all trades
Yes, I am a teacher!
Yet I am not, but I create.

2ND PLACE

While You Were Sleeping

Paballo Ntobaki

* * *

While you were sleeping, I awakened my soul from its slumber.

I turned on the light towards my innermost being,

To see the scars you've inflicted on me.

My mind's eye opened to see the ugly colours with which you painted me.

Gone was the beauty which first drew you to me.

You ravaged it, like a carnivorous brute, you found no rest 'til your appetite surfeited.

I arose to see the battered face, which scarcely remembers any gentleness from your touch.

You made it familiar only with the fury of your fists,

Simply because you are a man, and I, a woman.

My darling, the wounds you inflicted on me are more than just skin-deep.

So, while you were sleeping, I decided, "Enough! No more!"

No more of your torment, of your tyranny, ever taking never giving.

I'm worth more than the bunny chow and coke with which you courted me.

In the darkness of the night, while you slept, my mind was renewed.

No more listening to the unsound wisdom from oppressed women of old,

With their beloved consolation: "Qinisela mntanami, umendo unzima"

(Persevere my child, marriage is difficult)

That is a heritage I will not take, my progeny will not suffer
the same.

The time for action is in the here and now,

For, like the title of Nardine Gordimer's book, I decided there
is 'no time like the present.'

Though the fear of blazing these trails encroached me, yet
trudge on I did

I did, while you slept, and when you awoke, I was gone....

3RD PLACE**The Slums.....My Queendom*****Anele Hlongwane****** * ***

The slums
were a place I had learnt to call home
without a care in the world I knew this was where I belonged
despite that I lived to take short breaths.

They asked: "how are you doing?"
I said: "I am breathing"...daily routines would be pursued as if
we were missing nothing
while I knew that inside, my organs were drowning...in tears
tears that I never cried.
I never did cry but proudly wore a crooked smile,
behind it a story as long as the river Nile.

The slums...my queendom
I was a queen in my own right
The law was: THE BODY IS A CANVAS
hence, each day I gracefully wore a gown of ink
on my skin.
I was a walking kaleidoscope, a two-legged gallery
I cared not for religious fanatics
as far as I was concerned God had reincarnated into me.
I was the god queen.

The slums were my turf
where I had ruled over the cluttered skwatta camps
I had lead battles of catfights and verbal disputes
and, I always rose undisputed
I wore a shining armour visible only to my eyes
I was not afraid

The slums
the place that had embraced me
before I became queen
Before I became queen, I was a woman
who unfortunately fell madly in love with another woman
she had encaptured me with her slim waist and thick back
her white teeth and pure speech
she asked: "how are you doing?"
I said: "I am breathing.... only for you"
I loved her in all the bad, in all the good
to when I grew defiant to my African roots
I challenged the law of Moses
I was THE WOMAN... until I had been disowned
with the fear of being to death, stoned.

The slums provided to me refuge.
I had been beaten by society
lashed upon by the crippling power of a mother's tongue
and in my quest for vengeance
I stumbled upon redemption and repentance
in the form of a green plant
The plant, a new escape
the reason why I had lived to take short breaths
crush...roll...pull...puff and repeat.
A new void had been created to affiliate it, I inaugurated
myself
ruler of a land to which only prison was its freedom
I was a self-proclaimed queen
You may ask: "how are you doing?"
and you will read that I am no longer breathing
the soil now eternally hugs onto my bones
the bones of a queen, within the SLUMS....MY QUEENDOM

SHORT STORIES

1ST PLACE

The Mystery iPad (Part I)

Siphesihle Mthethwa

* * *

Early morning just as the sun was rising, Phetha heard his mother singing in the back yard below his bedroom window. She was in high spirits and jolly. It was as though she was in her early youth. Phetha understood her mood though, as last night's party was a huge success. All his friends and neighbours came in numbers to welcome him back from school and to congratulate him for his outstanding matric results that made the front page of every newspaper in January. Phetha was indeed an excellent fellow, and it was his first time ever to leave the neighbourhood and his home town for so long.

MaMhlongo went the extra mile to make a success of her son's home coming party. She successfully managed to get all his classmates present and asked them to take control of everything and she kept an eye on things to make sure everything went accordingly. Speeches were given, songs were sung, there was dance and most of all poetry. He loved poetry and one of his former classmates, Nqobile, blessed him with a poem he could not forget, even when she was done, he still recalled the lyrics of her poem...

*Words have been spoken,
Decisions have been taken,
It has all been proven
As it had been in heaven,
Striving for excellence,
With nothing more than patience,
Well done Phetha...*

He slept like an infant and very happily too. The success of the party was what made his mom this happy. She was busy clearing the yard when Phetha approached her, "Sawubona Ma, having a good time I see" he said as he helped her clear the yard. She then told him about an iPad she found after the party. The iPad belonged to Nokuthula Dlamini, one of his former classmates. He decided to take it with him since they planned to meet in town before she left.

He got ready and headed off for town. Sundays were always down and boring, there was less activity and very few people going to town. Phetha spent almost an hour around his neighbourhood as if he was a tourist being driven around. The taxi was looking for more passengers since they couldn't leave with only a few people. For Phetha this was irritating, and he could not help but think of how it would be to be with the beautiful Nokuthula in town, plus he was a hero now that he was returning her iPad which had gone missing. He sat there in the taxi admiring the iPad in his hand and was excited that he was going to meet her; it would just be the two of them. While he was busy planning his day with Nokuthula, thinking where they might go and chill, "Botanic Garden, at the orchard...", he smiled at his thought as the taxi reached his destination.

Phetha got off the taxi near the Early Morning Market, carrying the iPad in his hand, very eye catching and flashy with its diamond glittering case. He dialled Nokuthula to find out where she was, as he was walking passing the vendors heading towards the robot. He was still on the line with her when he saw strange faces looking directly at him on the opposite side of the road where he was heading. He looked around and found there were hardly any people around. He told Nokuthula that he had to hang up and he did. One scary

looking guy emerged behind and patted him on the shoulder, he looked at him and what he saw was the fire burning within his red fierce looking eyes, with a scar from the left eye to the corner of his mouth. He wore a stinky long coat, and he too was stinking of marijuana. He started speaking in a threatening tone, “You rich kid, your life depends on that big shiny phone of yours. Give it up and walk away. Make sure you don’t look back.”

Phetha’s stomach started to crumble, his knees turned to jelly. He looked around and saw a little crowd of people quickly fading away. The robot changed for him to cross, and his villain spoke again, “there’s nowhere to run, you see them?” he said pointing to the other guys on the other side of the road. “If you try to run away and cross the robot, they will catch you like a mouse captured in a mouse trap. Save yourself and surrender this big phone of yours and we can part in peace and you in one piece, or...” he showed him a sharp and shiny bush knife hidden under his coat, and the guys on the other end of the road did the same. “If you try to be brave, you’ll go home in pieces and in a coffin.”

Phetha felt tears burning on his cheeks. He thought of Nokuthula, how would she feel if she found out that he gave up her iPad? How would he even get the money to buy another one for her? His bursary did not give him cash and even the book allowance was not enough to cover the cost of this beautiful iPad he was about to lose. He thought. His phone rang. It was Nokuthula, and from the screen he saw in the reflection that the man was not paying attention to him but to other guys. It was now or never. The call gave him a little courage and he remembered that he was an athlete and often entered cross country competitions and he was sure these men would not catch him if he ran. He glanced at the man out the corner of his eye and he was sure of one thing.

He was running away. He pushed the man aside and started running back towards the Early Morning Market.

He heard the man calling behind him and he did not look back. He reached the robot and saw another guy who looked and wore clothes like the guys who were after him. He tried to cross the robot coming over to him from the Market, but the robot changed to red and there was a long truck crossing. Phetha shielded himself with it as he crossed opposite the truck. He kept eyes open for whoever was on his way and coming towards him. He ran for his life, for the iPad and for Nokuthula's trust. He looked back for a second and found that the men were coming. He ran without ceasing his pace and headed for Moore Road. He saw a taxi and headed for it but before he could even reach it, the men were there, so he passed the taxi and ran. The streets were almost empty and where he was now was a part of town, he didn't know but he kept running, as long as he saw the taxis, he was confident that when he has lost these men he would get to a taxi and head back to town. Later on, he was very tired and he was still running; he kept a distance from the men who never gave up. Before he knew it, he saw a billboard written Umlazi Mega City. He couldn't believe his eyes. He ran up the bridge and decided not to take the main road anymore and he was tired. He took a short local route and passed a school, he reached a little road and started searching for the taxis. From distance he saw the men emerging under the bridge.

As tired as he was, not knowing what to do now, a car passed him, and it was playing a song by Marry-Marry. The song was playing the chorus as the car passed and he sang along drawing the last bit of breath... "I just can't give up now! I've come too far from where I started from... Nobody told me, the road will be easy and I don't believe he brought me this far, to leave me..." He was only jogging now, he was dead

tired, and he started asking around for taxis and to his luck, an old woman told him where the taxis were and that during that time of the day, there were hardly any taxis coming to this side. It meant that he had a short yet very long journey to take again to the taxi stop and it was better this time because the route was steep, and he was going down. His villains were approaching nearer but they did not see him even though they were following his lead. There were many houses here and he was using them to hide himself as he was going down.

He finally reached the taxi stop, a few taxis were there but he just missed the one going to town. Another old woman approached him and said to him, if he was in a hurry, he should take the taxi that was going to Mega City; he would find a taxi there. Phetha did not hesitate but got in and chose the back seat and sat in the middle and luckily the taxi was full and departed. As it was leaving the stop, the men reached the rank and the taxi passed them. The wind blew their coats a little and the blades of their bush knives flashed but much to their disappointment, they stood for a moment and the taxi with Phetha was out of their sight. Phetha sighed with relief to himself and said in his thoughts as he looked again at the iPad, “the run was worth it, and if I were to go back to school again, I’d write an essay on the theme, the day I will never forget – The Mystery iPad.”

2ND PLACE

The Price of Free Words

Dale Munatswa

* * *

She watched the sun as it sank gracefully, rolling down slowly from a crimson, sullen background to the rocky, mountainous horizon. Its rays stung the skin even more than before. Sumeya was on the thin side of the mountain range. She was in no man's land.

She jerked her feet powerlessly from left and right to stretch, for she had been lying, tied up at the back of a truck for days. Her knees were evidently giving up as her tripod punishingly pressed her from side to side in the rocky desert.

The plain got finer as the journey closed ahead and the ambiance slowly grew abuzz with the noise of brigades of flies, black and green.

Dead bodies of women and children lay everywhere. The few people that survived crawled on the bloodied sands and mourned endlessly beside their loved ones. Mama iSha, one boy shouted helplessly to wake his long-passed mother.

Sumeya could see that they were almost at the infamous torture bunker that housed Ansar Dne, a radical terrorist group that had spurred violence in Northern Egypt and slain thousands in the first fortnight of summer. The smell of the dead grew thicker and from her red ears, she could hear men shower each other with welcome. Alhan wa salhan, they greeted. She was immediately dragged into a mud house upon arrival.

Sumeya Moonsamy had travelled from the Cape flats of South Africa to tell the truths about the violent extremism that had cost the lives of innocents in Egypt. In her 90-day stay, she had penned an investigative report that revealed the government's reluctance to stamp out the horror. Her powerful real time coverage on Al Mashriq TV had drawn unprecedented global attention and praise for her bravery along with her colleagues.

At her first breath in the quarters, Sumeya was forced to her knees by a blow from the back of a hunting rifle. These were amateurs she thought. So young, but they could take a life could they not? Her life. One young man assembled the tripod, armed the camera and clutched in his hand was a script detailing Sumeya's trumped up crimes against the people of Egypt.

She had a unique bravery for the search of the truth in the darkest ends. Now Sumeya was entangled in every journalist's nightmare. She was captured and imprisoned by Ansar Dine in Cairo. Her crime was writing the truth.

Blood gushed from her upper lip as she struggled for strength on her knees. Sandals hit her face back and forth and she was without chance to breathe. Her eyes drowned in the dust and no more could she feel her hands.

This was the end, she reckoned. "The simplest freedom fundamental to any people did not exist in these walls," Sumeya had written earlier. There was neither freedom to speak the truth nor the right to speak one's mind. Her fears swelled but she could not shame herself. She knew all this would come at the price of her life.

Sumeya said her last prayer in her heart. She prayed for freedom and beseeched the Lord to fill the hearts of the hardened with sweet peace and reason. Her journey was ended. Gone simply for speaking the truth.

3RD PLACE

A Dare to Stand

Wonderful Mhuru

* * *

Daunting silence quenches the very shadow of a whisper as Nani's tears proliferate, melting the Louis Vuitton silk jersey she had received for her birthday last week. Stripped of her integrity, her most prized treasure, she weeps in a desperate attempt to end it all. "Should I, shouldn't I?", she thought to herself, her mind racing at the speed of light, unknowingly breaking all the laws of physics in an instant. She stood on a very thin line, the verge of life and death. With the wind and her weight against her, a stupid move would have easily sent her plunging to her unrelenting fate.

No longer than a week ago, a gorgeous lady in a green scarf, Nani stood tall looking her best with someone she had come to love with all her heart. She had a funny way of dressing, what others would normally call "colour blocking", she would turn into a masterpiece, a characteristic not appreciated by many. Amy, Nani's girlfriend, was a bit more gangster. Growing up on a farm with her grandparents and boy cousins, Amy developed a tough, rough boyish personality which she maintained and perfected as she grew up. Hand in hand as always, they would walk, there was no way of denying that these two were in love, or so they thought. Nani and Amy had been friends since kindergarten, they practically grew up together. Though not having a lot in common, their relationship with each other got polished and furnished by the day. Following speculations from friends and family, Nani and Amy finally confessed their love for each other was greater than friendship and that they had already started dating. This

decision was not well received, especially by their parents though no one openly rebuked them. In times past, this would have been taboo as the very thought of homosexuality would be detrimental and highly punishable.

Nani worked at a fast-food restaurant just so she could earn extra cash on top of the pocket money she would receive weekly from her parents. It was a Saturday and Nani was working the evening shift. Since she knocked off at eight o'clock, Amy would come pick her up and thereafter head to the Sawnschire cinema. It was a night unnaturally still and hot, heavy with the unseen menace of a building storm. "Ping, ping", the automatic alarm clock bell rang, indirectly conveying the "time's up" flare that most of Nani's co-workers had been waiting for the whole day. Nani lurched out into the driveway and stood in anticipation, awaiting Amy's arrival. An unprecedented smile from ear to ear unveiling a dazzling array of perfectly aligned white teeth would show whenever she saw headlights coming round the corner, turning into a gay grin as substantial amount of time elapsed.

Suddenly, a loud vibration erupted, sending shock waves down her nerve impinged spine. With an alienated giggle, she laughed, realizing that it was her I-phone ringing as she had placed it on vibration mode. "I can't come anymore, am out of gas", Amy cried, with a fitly compassionate voice lurching from the other end of the phone. Faced with this situation, Nani had to act quickly, she would either hitchhike or walk home since it was just seven blocks to her place, a walk-able distance. Since it was late and no one seemed interested to stop for her, she decided to walk home.

Along her way she ran into all kinds of different people, the so called "rulers of the night". She ignored the stares, the pointing, the whispering, the occasional catcall. Nani preferred

walking in solitary places and rarely walked in public so conspicuously because she knew this was the treatment to expect. At a distant she saw figures of well-defined men, as she drew closer, she recognized a face, Jimmy, a guy who she had rejected because of her relationship with Amy and he had despised her ever since.

Unperturbed, Nani continued her journey as she was halfway to her homestead. Tension rose when Jimmy turned to follow her and knowing the kind of person he was, Nani was not surprised. Since it was a poorly lit street, Nani held aloft a torch, which illuminated the wristwatch in her right hand and helped to define the road ahead. Jimmy stealthily pursued the girl he had once vowed to love with all he had. Nani tried to increase her pace to no avail as Jimmy was now closing in fast. “Stop lesbian”, cried Jimmy. The ground shook as Jimmy and his counterparts ran after Nani crying “Kill the lesbian”. Nani ran hell for leather, abandoning everything in her possession, rendering it useless, I guess.

As soon as Nani felt a cold, brisk hand wrap around her arm, she knew she was in trouble. Jimmy had a knife hidden in his back-pocket. With deliberate slowness, he pulled it up and placed the edge of it against her face with sinister gentleness. “Let me be”, she cried. Jimmy shrugged, a smirk visible on his face in the moonlight. An hour or two later, Nani found herself standing at the edge of the bridge, anterior to its protective bars separating land and the great Swanshire river. A resolution was at hand; either to let go thereby quenching the hope for a change in her community through her influence or dare to stand and be courageous for those who might be otherwise abused and taken advantage of in the same manner in future, because of their sexual orientation.

2016

ESSAYS/OPINION PIECES

1ST PLACE

Why would you hurt my sister?

Adryan Ogle

* * *

Why would you hurt my sister? Why would you shred every last bit of her dignity? In a "man's world" she is already fighting for a place, already struggling to make her voice heard and her life count and yet you have the audacity to harden her struggle, to deepen her anxiety and to scar her for the remainder of her days. She didn't choose to be your victim. She didn't choose to feel the sentiments that you had thrust upon her - the hurt, the anger, the shame and even occasionally, the uselessness.

You didn't realise that as you forced yourself on her, into her, you took a little more of her dignity; the one thing she was told to hold dear as a young woman in this volatile world. In that dark quiet corner, you proceeded to rob her of her worth and happiness. As your hand covered her mouth and you yelled at her to shut up, she was to accept what was happening to her and for those moments, you even forced her to embrace it, threatening her life if she refused. So, she wept somberly as she lay there and took your punishment.

Punishment... for what exactly? Why did she deserve this? Why did this beautiful paradigm of loveliness and warmth have to be punished? You felt that she did, clearly. You felt that she needed to be emotionally and mentally wounded till the day that she leaves the earth and kisses the dew once again. So, tell me why? You call yourself a man, but you're no man! Men don't hurt women, they protect them.

In her limpness she looked up and whispered a prayer as you had left her at last. The days turned into weeks. She never really was herself and they all wondered why she changed. Such a happy, optimistic woman was now dreary and morose - a forlorn expression imminent on her face any given time. As a result, she cried herself to sleep many a night, her poor pillow stained with tears; her diary, pained with the tale of her sad, sad fortune. You, you vile product of a corrupt society, you sleep on cotton buds of perfection. She is not my sister because we share the same mitochondrial DNA, we are not related genetically, but she is my sister because she is of this land, the same land that I am of. This secret strangles her soul and suffocates her heart and takes its toll on her. She realises this effect, and so, with much reluctance she speaks. It takes her two years, but she does eventually tell them. She mourns her lost dignity, her comfort and serenity and peace of mind. She mourns but she tells the tale. She tells the atrocious tale to the young girls who are growing up in the same perilous world.

It would be easy to say that I hate you, for that is the most probable thing to do, but what I need to understand is that you are borne of an inverted and perverted modern society that is struggling to uphold morality and sanity. You are a byproduct of this twisted chemical reaction. Your misogynist father who had forced these ideals upon you didn't help either. Being an observer of patriarchy was a contributing factor to your abhorrence of women.

Hate is easy, but I don't choose it. I pity you, I suppose. I pity that you allowed this society to rob you of your morale and judgment - that you succumbed to its diabolical grip. What I can say is that I hope your daughter, that little three-year-old running around in her grandmother's garden, doesn't experience the terror which my sister has. My sweet, resilient, strong and unsurmountable sister.

2ND PLACE

Redefining African Culture

Sakhile Gumede

* * *

The idea of redefining and reclaiming African culture has been at the forefront of African literature, particularly from the early 1960s onward, following independence from the chains of colonial rule. The purpose of this paper is to closely explore the topic 'Redefining African Culture' within the broader theme of Heritage: Language, Culture and Society. This paper, therefore, purports to lend itself not so much as a formal treatise but as a long and loud cry to my African brothers and sisters to break free from the legacy of the inhumane and unjust historical process of colonization and to redefine their identities as Africans and ultimately reclaim their identity as the sons and daughters of the African soil.

In achieving this, the paper will first provide a brief explanation of the following concepts: heritage, language, culture, as well as society. Secondly, it will seek to establish the historical context that has necessitated the redefinition of African culture; the impact of colonialism on African cultures - by focusing on language and religion as the primary vehicles for African cultural subjugation. Thirdly, it will look at how African culture can be redefined through the restoration of historical memory and through language. Central in this paper is the argument that African culture and heritage can only be redefined and reclaimed through the breakdown of colonial structures and statues that were planted by our former colonizers in the psyche of every African men and woman, and which can only be dismantled through redefining our history

as Africans and using our native tongues as the necessary conditions for storing memory.

It is important to first attempt to establish a sound understanding of the concepts that inform and give life to this piece of writing:

The first is **heritage**: this can be understood as practices handed down from generation to generation by way of tradition or culture (Kuper and Kuper, 1996: 196). This means that a person's heritage is made up of the practices and traditions that are passed on from parents to children by way of story-telling, telling of tribal legends and folklores, proverbs, riddles, myths and so on.

The second is **language**: this is a system of communication consisting of sounds, words, grammar, signs, symbols or any form of communication used by people of a particular ethnic, cultural or racial group (Kuper and Kuper, 1986: 196). Language is at the center of what it means to belong to a particular cultural group, it is a measure by which one can identify himself as a Makonde of Tanzania, Gikuyu of Kenya, Zulu of South Africa, Shona of Zimbabwe, Sidamo of Ethiopia and so on.

The third concept is **culture**; according to Macdonald and Plummer (2008: 128), culture is a design for living, the values, beliefs, behaviours, practices and material objects that constitute people's way of life. Therefore, these are the abstract rules, practices and principles that guide the interaction of individuals within a particular geographic space, and which pattern a community's way of life.

The final concept is that of **society**: this concept cannot be viewed in isolation from the above concepts and it basically

refers to a large group of people who live together in an organized way, who may or may not share a similar way of life but who are bound together by what is common between them, for example, language, social space and so on. Now that an attempt has been made to breathe life into these concepts, it is rather important to first establish the historical context which has propounded the redefinition of African culture if Africa as a state is to define itself as a beautifully unique and historically rich continent whose way of life and soul is grounded on the real experiences of men and women of the African soil.

The impact of colonialism on African cultures

The inhumane and inequitable process of the invasion of Africa by European economic powers, for economic exploitation in particular, was foremost and is without doubt, the principal and the sole catalyst for cultural denigration and erosion in Africa. The argument is that the conquest of Africa by European imperialists was not one that took the form of a physical battle in the battlefield but rather one that took the form of psychological and spiritual warfare through the imposition of colonial languages, religion, education system, healthcare system and so forth. It was the defeat of African societies in these areas that meant that the African child had to begin to speak the language of the colonizer; French, Portuguese, English and so forth at the expense of his own tongue, that he had to go to a colonial school to be 'educated' as opposed to the indigenous initiation schools known and meaningful to the people of the land, that he had to stop burning incense, and in the process denounce his ancestors and that he had to abandon indigenous medicines and synonymize them with evil for western medicine that is new, foreign and had no relevance to him. For the purposes of this paper, however, the focus will be on language and religion as the primary stimulus for African cultural subjugation and this is closely explored henceforth.

Language

Language constitutes the soul of culture and its subjugation is the subjugation of culture as a way of life and culture as an identity itself. Achebe (1975: 62) asks “is it right that a man should abandon his mother tongue for someone else’s? It looks like a dreadful betrayal and produces a guilty feeling”. On the one hand Ngugi wa Thiongo (1986: 285) notes that while the bullet was the means for physical subjugation, language was the means for cultural and spiritual subjugation. This means that in the wake of colonialism, language as one of the central pillars of culture lost its relevance as a virtue that was reflective of people’s real experiences and that had magical suggestive power that went beyond the immediate and lexical meaning. Thus, the beauty and richness of African languages were manifested in its daily use as more than just a means of communication but as an art, a lens through which the world can be viewed, a game through which words can be manipulated and exploited to extend beyond the obvious to the complex, ideal and the metaphysical. This was done through for example, riddles, proverbs, story-telling, tribal legends, folklores and so on in an attempt to explain the genesis of men, the origin of the clan and so forth. Thus, through language, the ideal became the immediate and the complex, the obvious; and this is the power and the magical influence that African languages had on those who spoke them; the power to also connect the individual with his immediate environment, the extended family and the community as a whole; thus a sense of oneness and recognition with one another was established through language.

However, the introduction, or rather the imposition, of the so called ‘education’ upon the indigenous people meant that languages that were previously cherished and celebrated and

that reflected the real experiences of men and women had to be abandoned for the language of the English, Portuguese, or French. For example, Ngugi wa Thiongo (1986: 287) points out that as a young Kenyan man and a school child at the time, one of the humiliating experiences was to be caught speaking the native tongue; Gikuyu, within the vicinity of the school. He further states that such behaviour was deemed deviant, morally wrong and was severely punished with at least three to five strokes of the cane on bare buttocks, or the child was made to carry a metal plate around his or her neck with inscriptions such as 'I AM A DONKEY' or 'I AM STUPID'. This further reinforces the fact that indigenous inhabitants were psychologically tricked to turn against their native tongues and to bow before colonial languages in deference and ultimately to bow before colonial cultures or ways of life in conformity. In addition, any achievement in spoken or written English, for instance, was highly rewarded in the form of various prizes, prestige, applause and so forth, and this made these languages become the measure of intelligence and the main determinant of a child's progress up the ladder of formal education and such practice is still very common in the modern system of education. This was, without question, done at the suppression and denigration of African languages, cultures and heritage as a whole which consequently took Africans further and further away from themselves, from their rich heritage, and thus from their world to the world and heritage of others.

In addition, it is because of these reasons that more work still needs to be done to re-awaken the values and principles of Africanness that are deeply rooted in the genes of every African man and woman, but which are rather masked and camouflaged by the legacy of colonialism. Another way though, which the straying of African people from their beautiful cultures was ensured, was by way of the imposition of religion and thus driving people further away from their way of life,

mode of existence and belief systems to the way of life and belief systems of the western bourgeois white man and this is closely explored henceforth.

Religion

The imposition of religion, particularly Christianity coupled with the education system in Africa was without question not a humanitarian act of kindness driven by the principles of religiosity and civic concern but was rather a perfectly conscious effort to vilify, dark-stain and do away with the cultural beliefs and practices of African people. The implication is that there is extensive evidence of the existence of Christianity in Africa before the 1500s, as Rodney (1973) noted, that the ruling class of Ethiopia for instance, in the early centuries before the 1500s, was perfectly Christianized, tracing its descent to Prophet Solomon, but Christianity and the education system on the whole were introduced as a form of social control, or a tool for psychic domination, by the colonizer to ensure psychic submission on the part of the colonized; the African people. This was ensured through painting a negative image of the belief systems of the indigenous inhabitants, thus associating their belief systems with barbarism, backwardness and wickedness. Consequently, this successfully saw a vast proportion of the African people abandoning the cultural beliefs and practices of their forefathers for the beliefs of the white man which had no cultural and experiential relevance to their lived experiences. This, as a result, led to the colonized seeing and defining themselves through the hegemonic memory of the colonizing centre; the European imperialists. The consequence of it all is the world we see and live in today as Africans, the world created to serve the economic and political interests of our former colonizers and the inevitable consequence of this being the loss of a sense of direction, a sense of being and a sense of recognition of ourselves as the sons and daughters of

the historical land of Africa, the mirror that reflects the origin of mankind. The rationale behind this historical insight is not to stray from or to lose sight of the subject under scrutiny, nor is it to give a historical account for its own sake but it is to establish the historical context that has necessitated and has called for a redefinition of African culture and heritage.

Therefore, at the core of this paper is the argument that the process of redefining African culture can only come about through language and history, that is, it is only through going back to our indigenous languages and redefinition of African history that the misconceptions and distortions created by our former colonizers can be corrected and ultimately dismantled. This can be expressed in the African proverb thus “until lions tell their tale, the story of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.” It is, therefore, high time that Africans begin to tell their tale to re-establish themselves as Africans and to redefine their heritage based on their actual and lived experiences.

Redefining African Culture and Heritage through History

Understanding of the self, of the present and preparation for the future can only come about through understanding of one's history or origin. As George Orwell (1984) puts it, “the most effective way to destroy people is to deny and obliterate their own understanding of their history”. On the one hand, Ngugi, when giving the Steve Biko lecture in September 2003, asserted that “fear not those who kill the body, but those who kill the spirit (history)”. The implication is that it is through understanding of one's history that people can proudly recognize themselves as the Maasai of East Africa, Yoruba of Nigeria, Xhosa of South Africa, Himba of Namibia, the Kalenjin of Kenya, the Chaga of Tanzania and so forth. Therefore, it is through engagement in the process of rewriting our historical

narratives and narrating our own stories as they stand that an attempt can be made to redefine African culture and heritage. The argument is that the historical state of Africa was not a state that European or colonial apologists have led humanity to believe Africa was thus a state characterized by a 'primitive' and 'barbaric' way of life, cultural and technological backwardness, a site for the extraction of raw materials and so forth. Africa was, rather, a state characterized by the beauty of cultural diversity, technological, social and economic development, and a state whose heritage was as precious as gold itself and whose history was as rich as Croesus himself. For example, under the reign of the Fatimid dynasty of ancient Egypt from 969 to 1170 A.D., science flourished, and industry reached new and unparalleled levels in Egypt as new industries were introduced which, among other things for instance, specialized in paper-making, sugar-refining, porcelain and the distillation of gasoline (Rodney, 1973: 79). During this period, older industries that dealt with textiles, leather and metal work were also improved and the University of Azhar still stands as one of the historical establishments that attest to the unprecedented levels of development reached in Africa (ibid). It is also important to point out that these evolutionary developments were achieved mainly through the physical and mental efforts of African men and women, they were not achieved through any foreign influence whatsoever.

Similarly, unprecedented architectural innovations and developments were also evident in other parts of Africa such as the state of Ethiopia, which as the ruling class of the time built a number of architectural establishments from solid rock and these architectural achievements attest to the level of skill reached in Ethiopia at the time (ibid). In addition, Rodney (1973) also notes that the first European explorers to reach West and East Africa by sea did submit to the fact that in most respects, Africa was comparable to its European

counterparts, for example, when the Dutch explorers visited one of the cities in the Republic of Benin, they described it thus:

The town seems to be very great. When you enter into it, you go into a great broad street, which seems to be seven or eight times broader than the Warmoes street in Amsterdam. The king's palace is a collection of buildings which occupy as much space as the town of Harlem, and which is enclosed with walls. There are numerous apartments for the Prince's ministers and fine galleries, most of which are as big as those on the Exchange at Amsterdam. The houses are close to one another, arranged in good order. These people are in no way inferior to the Dutch.

These are merely few examples among many others which attest to the fact that Africa was in no way inferior in relation to its European counterparts and people lived in harmony with one another irrespective of their differentiations with respect to language, ethnicity, cultural sect and so forth. This is not to paint a rosy picture of Africa or to exaggerate the levels of cultural and technological developments achieved by Africans before European invasion, but it is to point out that the invasion of the white man has whitewashed many African developments with respect to heritage, and culture in particular and it has reduced Africa to a culturally-rebellious and heritage-straying society. The underlying argument is that inherent in the process of colonialism was the distortion and obliteration of our history and thereby making Africans to internalize their oppression and helplessness. Ngugi (2003) concurs that being deprived of one's history, makes a person who has lost his land, who feels the pangs of hunger; who carries flagellated flesh, to look at those experiences from the standpoint of pessimism; and because he has been drained of

historical memory of a different world, he feels that there is nothing he can do and everything that is happening is his fault and thereby failing to draw any positive experiences from his history. Therefore, it is through rewriting our own historical narratives that the story of the hunt can be told by the lions themselves, thus African cultures can be seen and appreciated for what they really are rather than what we have been led to believe they are. As much as the significance of rewriting our historical narratives cannot be reduced by rewriting our historical memory in a manner that is parallel and that is reflective of African cultures, it is only possible through attempting it in the languages that are pregnant of the rich heritage of the African people, that is, it is also through language that the cultural heritage of the African people can be redefined and the following section closely looks at how this can be achieved.

Redefining African Culture through Language

In this paper, it has been noted that one way through which the conquest of African cultures was ensured was by way of using language as a vehicle for psychic domination and that makes it imperative to also seek to reclaim and redefine our heritage and culture through the very same tool that was used; language. One way through which language can be used as a force of disengagement from the hegemonic tyranny of Eurocentrism is through the naming system. As Shakespeare once asked, “what is in a name?” and this age-old question still bears strong relevance to the current cultural climate of the state of Africa. According to Mphande (2006: 1), a name may indicate the linguistic structures and phonological processes found in the language, the position of the name’s bearer in society, or the collective history and life experiences of the people surrounding the individual. This sacred meaning of the name is lost in a situation where Okonkwo becomes John, Tinashe becomes James, Adashe becomes Gloria and so on,

thus when a name given to the African child, and has no relevance whatsoever to his language, culture, identity, history of his family, of the clan or the events making up his being, the linguistic and phonological sacraments making up his cultural existence are lost. Therefore, through the renaming system, Africans can begin the complex project of reclaiming and redefining their cultural identities within the existing hegemonic tyranny of the Western paradigm that has kept them mentally chained for centuries. This renaming system can also be applied to the valleys, mountains, rivers and the general landscape that define the face of our native land, as Umgungundlovu becomes Pietermaritzburg, the great East African lake, known by the Luo people as Namlolwe becomes Lake Victoria, eGoli becomes Johannesburg and so forth. Therefore, it is by accepting our real beings as Ndukuzempi, Obierika, Adana, Abayomi and so forth as the real conditions for our Africanness that we can dismantle whatever linguistic colonial statue that serves as a constant reminder of our created and former selves and that we can begin to proudly define ourselves as Africans in the true sense of what it means to be truly African.

In addition, according to Karl Marx, consciousness distinguishes humans from the rest of nature, and it is through achieving consciousness of the self that our 'species-being' comes to the fore (Dillon, 2010). In the context of this restorative project, self-consciousness or awareness of the self can only come about through digging deep into the forms of knowledge systems that are reflective of our 'species-being' as Africans, but which otherwise have been dark-stained and smeared with negativity, in order to create a class that lives not for itself, but which lives to serve the capitalist motives of the dominant class; the European imperialists. In his book titled *Pre-colonial Black Africa* Cheikh Anta Diop asserted that black consciousness, which is synonymous with

reclaiming identity or redefining culture, is the right of black people to draw an image of themselves that negates and transcends the image of themselves that was drawn by those who would weaken them in their fight for an assertion of their humanity (Anta Diop, 1987). This right to draw an image that asserts our humanity and that negates the image that was drawn by our former colonizers can also be achieved through African writers, artists, musicians, intellectuals and other keepers of memory writing, performing/ dramatizing, singing, theorizing and philosophizing in the sacred languages of our forefathers; the African languages. Ngugi (2003) asks “what fate awaits a community when its keepers of memory have been subjected to the Western linguistic means of production and storage of memory?” The point that this paper is leaning toward here is that our keepers of memory have a patriotic and civic responsibility to write, theorize and sing in the sacred languages that are pregnant of our experiences, emotions, knowledge and value systems if we, as Africans, are to lead an existence that is informed by our indigenous ways of being and value systems.

In conclusion, the purpose of this paper was to explore the topic ‘Redefining African Culture’ within the broader theme of Heritage, Culture and Society. With reference to this paper, the essay first sought to provide brief definitions of the concepts heritage, language, culture, as well as society. It then went on to look at the historical conditions that have made it necessary and imperative to engage in a quest for our original roots as Africans and thus to seek to redefine our African cultures; the impact of colonialism on African cultures. Finally, the paper sought to put forward the restoration of historical memory and language as the necessary conditions for redefining African culture and reclaiming African heritage as a whole. Therefore, with respect to the entire argument that has been made in this essay, this relentless quest for a sense of

being; redefining African culture, can only be achieved through the breakdown of colonial structures and statues that are deeply ingrained in the psyche of every African child, man and woman and that serve to reinforce the supremacy of the white man over the African man and which also serve as a constant reminder of our place in society, limitations and destiny. These colonial structures and statues or simply the legacy of colonialism, can only be broken down through rewriting our historical memory as Africans that has been dark-stained and drained and using our native tongues as the catalysts for the process of the creation and storage of memory. Therefore, it is through these processes that African culture can be redefined and restored.

3RD PLACE**An African Redefined*****Vumile Ngcobo****** * ***

Quite often as I traverse around the city of Durban, I am disturbed by the sight of young 'whoonga' boys roaming aimlessly on the streets, not to mention the frequency by which their numbers seem to be growing. I often wonder what the end of it all will be, and my heart bleeds as I come to realise that this is the future of Africa slowly being eaten away by what has no teeth. As I ponder these dire facts, turning down one alleyway, I am met by the unsightly figure of an old man, fully able-bodied, stretching out his hands for help from passers-by. As I juxtapose the two sights in my mind, I am struck by a damning reality- the fate of the old man is likely to befall the young whoonga boys, if the drugs don't kill them first.

Without a doubt, change is needed, and it is not up to others. I believe that gone are the days where finger-pointing was fashionable. The longer one person places the success of his life on the abilities of another individual, the more that individual relinquishes the power within him. Success belongs to the man who makes a decision to change, and I believe that the greatest change is a change in mind-set, and the time for change is in the here and now. Needless to say, experience has taught me that there will never be a perfect time to do anything, and that one just has to make perfect use of the time that one gets.

As sons and daughters of the African soil, many are the things that call for a paradigm shift in our mind-sets. For one, a

culture of delay has progressively been inculcated in us through the acceptance of what is coined “African time.” For the uninformed, ‘African time’ is the relaxed, nonchalant attitude that Africans have towards time, the absence of a sense of urgency as well as the lack of punctuality amongst African people. Because we have accepted lateness, we have unconsciously welcomed delay into our thinking, our responses and our actions. It is time for a fresh new start. As a Ghanaian author once penned, “One of the main reasons for the continuing underdevelopment of our country is our nonchalant attitude to time and the need for punctuality in all aspects of life. The problem of punctuality has become so endemic that lateness to any function is accepted and explained off as ‘African time.’”

Surely it is impossible to undo all the wrongs of the past. But our actions today can ensure that the same wrongs are not repeated tomorrow. A fresh new mind brings a fresh new start. The only part of your being that ultimately stays in the past is your mind. It is best to bring it to the present where all possibilities exist. As the old adage states, ‘a mind is a terrible thing to waste.’ Tomorrow waits for no one; it comes whether we expect it or not.

Let us aggressively take on the challenge for change with the tenacity of a taxi conductor continually calling customers into his taxi; with his stubbornness when fending off other conductors from his one customer. Let us make it our habit to address urgent matters now, without holding off action any longer. Like the great author Mark Twain so aptly put it, “if it’s your job to eat a frog, its best to do it first thing in the morning. And if it’s your job to eat two frogs, its best to eat the biggest one first.” For Africa, it is time to take the bull by the horns, it is time to put first things first!

This is not to say we must compare ourselves to others. Emphatically no! We must compare ourselves to that person inside of us, who has dreams that we have dared not dream anymore; that highly ambitious person, who knows he is capable of so much more than he is delivering; that inner person who yearns and longs to be unleashed, whom we have crushed because of pessimism and battered hope. That person is the person I am appealing to in every one of us. I am certainly not expecting that this change begins with someone else, for that would be to fall into the trap of delay one more time. No, it starts with me, for I have chosen to be an African... redefined.

POETRY

1ST PLACE**Let Me Tie My Shoes*****Sibusiso Ngcobo****** * ***

Before me lies that dreadful road I've often feared to traverse.
I perceive the troubles that lie ahead, but better to face them
and feel more alive,
Than to lounge in the comfort seat of mediocrity,
Slowly dying the shameful death of a coward.
So I bend to tie my shoes.

Allow me to tie my shoes,
So I can march on, undaunted, resolute, my face set as flint.
I've listened to the sermon of why I can't, preached many
times over.
Victim of circumstances? Me? Not any longer!
I'm making circumstances my victims!
Grabbing hold of every opportunity...lest I die without
trying.

Let me tie my shoes.
Though I am sure to grope and fumble on this journey,
I will tear down all the vines and creepers
Of fear, self-doubt, self-pity, inferiority and worthlessness,
Because escape at all costs I must!

Allow me to tie my shoes because the future of my children
depends on it.
From today, my mind will no longer be as dark as my skin.
No! I will not be deemed part of the 'underground people',
as authored by Lewis Nkosi
The victory song awaits me at the summit of this mountain.

I have to tie my shoes, lest the shoelaces of despair cause me
to trip and fall,
Lest the voices of the cynical and the naysayers stop me in my
sprint.
Please, just let me tie my shoes
Because today I've made the decision, to take this journey,
Out of the woods, of mental slavery...

2ND PLACE**Stranger*****Themba Spha Ngcamu****** * ***

Talking about my history,
sixteen year after my custody,
I am finally seventeen,
I was named Eugene.

I was late again,
when I walked upon the front yard,
my eyes were on guard,
it was dark,
I didn't want to leave a footmark,
my feet were filled with mud,
as I scud to my room.

The stranger in my home,
he was the ranger in my home,
I was in danger,
frightened for my life,
and he was the major of that household.

In pain my mother was brainwashed,
started losing her attention, there was
tension.

In dirty rags it was my swag,
sigh; they said I like to nag.

Hands of a slave it was like I was digging my own
grave, treated as a maid, fade, my mother's love was
fading away and I was afraid.

As I was a primary school dropout, I kept quiet hoping not to let any of the abuse that I was experiencing out, as I was terrified of getting knocked out by the stranger.

Stranger the devil himself, stranger I so wish he was dead, stranger has hurt many souls, souls with no sin, all thanks to the stranger I call Step-dad.

3RD PLACE**The Life Cycle*****Dillen Gounden****** * ***

Like Egyptian royalty sadness is wrapped around me like a pharaoh
a veil of shame envelopes my face like a bride at the altar.
The eternal storm with the dark clouds begin
“Everything’s Fine”
The façade becomes the puppeteer.

Knowing now the only pleasure I would get would be deep-
throating Smith & Wesson’s,
sucking his 8-inch barrel,
waiting to trigger
The ejaculation
that would set me free.

I stay trapped in a wooden box,
aimed, mauled, and mutilated by
the Beast.

Red rivers and crystal clear streams run down constantly until
disfigurement or death occur.
now a veneered smile appears,
ignorant society accepts me, as theirs
for now I am them,
I have the beast!

SHORT STORIES

1ST PLACE

Boys to Men (Part 2)

Siphesihle Mthethwa

* * *

In the morning, Nozinhle called her nephew to come with her on their usual journey of plant seeking, which was coming to an end. This time Gogo Ngcongco would not join them since she was busy making final preparations for her grandson and other soon-to-be men. She made them new skin garments, as they would cease to use those they used as boys. This was a joyous time for the tribe because the initiation of the boys meant that their strength was growing. This brought hope that the tribe would continue to exist.

On the way to the jungle, Nozinhle warned Khubazi about the dangers on the way to the cave. She knew this because her late brother (Khubazi's father) told her. She warned him not to take short cuts to the cave as they passed by the house of the wicked old hag Nongqawuza. She was cast out of the tribe after the death of Phambuka's father who was in her care. The tribe believed that she bewitched him out of jealousy because Phambuka was to be the tribe's traditional healer after his father. Nongqawuza was Phambuka's father's assistant. Phambuka was still young when his father passed away in the care of Nongqawuza. Duty called for him to take over after his father, regardless of his age. Fortunately for the tribe, Phambuka was open-minded, and he knew all his father taught him.

After being expelled from the tribe, Nongqawuza moved to the jungle and lived there; not far from the cave but a bit further away from the tribe's territory. All this time Khubazi

was listening attentively to his aunt. He had more questions to ask about Nongqawuza, but he would not dare. He was still a child until after the ceremony and was not allowed to question an elder person. They had gathered paw-paws, lemons, wild berries, and herbs. They headed back home. On their way they stopped at a riverbank and drank before crossing. As they crossed, walking on stones, Nozinhle set foot on the back of a crocodile she did not notice. The crocodile swept its tail and she fell into the water. She threw the fruits to the other end of the river and cried for help.

Home was too far, and her voice was not loud enough. Khubazi panicked as he watched his aunt wrestling in the water with the angry water beast. He looked around for any sign of somebody coming to the rescue but found none. He could see that his aunt was trying, but the battle was too much for her. In just a moment, still puzzled, he saw the water turning to blood and his aunt groaning in great pain. He could not bear it anymore. He took a rock and threw it at the crocodile's back. The crocodile continued attacking his aunt. Without thinking for a second, he threw himself in the water. In his hand he had the knife he used for fishing.

He swam deep under water and rose between his aunt and the crocodile. He stabbed the beast in the belly continuously. A few moments later the crocodile was not moving anymore, and the river was like a pool of blood. He recovered his aunt and took the beast with him. Its belly was open from the neck to tail with its intestines and other organs hanging. He saved his aunt. Nozinhle was badly bitten by the crocodile in the leg, but not too much damage was done.

All this time Phambuka was watching from a distance. He was around seeking some herbs to prepare for the boys who were going to the cave. He approached them with some

herbs, crushed them with the stone and applied them to Nozinhle's injured leg. He then bandaged her with the sewn grass. He turned to Khubazi and noticed the ivory necklace in his neck and smiled."Your father's spirit lives in you, young man. You have shown so much courage and bravery today. The tribe is proud to have a freshman with the heart of a warrior like you. I shall tell everyone back home what I have witnessed." Nozinhle looked at her nephew, smiled and nodded in approval. They all left for home.

Khubazi became the talk of the tribe for his bravery, until the big night. The new moon was up in the sky. Phambuka summoned the boys and sprinkled them with herbs. He gave them some to bath with. He told them they were to spend the night in the bush near the river. Their lives depended on each other on this journey. They ought to be on guard all the time during the night and before mid-night they had to bath in the river. By dawn they should go to the cave using the route of the porcupine. The footsteps of the porcupine would lead them to the cave. When they reached the cave, they were to enter at the left opening. They would come out at the right opening of the cave.

Inside the cave in the middle, there was a waterfall. They were not to drink from the sacred water of the cave, no matter how thirsty they became. They were to pass the waterfall and not look back until they reached an open space inside the cave. Phambuka and the older men of the tribe would be waiting for them to give them blessings and their man marks. After all, had been said and done, the tribe bade farewell to the boys, and they left. The night was frightening, and the bush was dark. The boys had to be careful not to wake up dangerous animals. They reached the river and camped there for a while as mid-night was near.

Dlangamandla sported two glowing eyes not far from where they were and warned the other boys. They quickly set a trap before their camp. A rat passed by, and they killed it and sprinkled its blood in the trap. The smell of blood caught the attention of the glowing eyes. The glowing eyes moved towards them and were trapped. They lit a fire and discovered it was a fox. They sighed with relief and went to the river and bathed after killing the fox. As instructed, by dawn they left for the cave.

At the cave entrance the boys were dumb struck by the darkness of the cave. The light of the moon only lit a small portion of the opening. They all hesitated and turned to Khubazi. "Why are you looking at me?" he asked nervously. "You're the cream of the crop, the talk of the tribe and the bravest of us all. Even the girls of the tribe fancy you. We were not there when you killed the crocodile. Now prove to us that you really are brave and lead the way" said one of the boys who used to be the talk of the tribe before Khubazi's battle with the crocodile. The other boys nodded in agreement except for Dlangamandla. Khubazi thought of Phambuka's words after he rescued his aunt from the deadly crocodile, touched his necklace and entered the cave.

Dlangamandla followed him and so did the rest of the boys. Inside the cave it was difficult to see each other. They all followed the mark of white elephant teeth for they knew that was Khubazi. The boy who spoke to Khubazi felt very thirsty and they had no water. By this time, they saw a shimmering light and heard the sound of running water. The boy quickly rushed for the water and Khubazi stopped him. He reminded him of Phambuka's instruction against drinking that water. The boy nearly fainted as they passed beneath the curtain of the waterfall. After they passed the waterfall, the thirsty boy fell and nearly looked back. Khubazi could not help nor turn back.

He instructed Dlangamandla, who walked behind the boy to close the boy's eyes with his hands and raise him up. He did that and they continued.

After a short while they caught sight of light and knew they were near where Phambuka and the old men were. Khubazi urged the boy to conjure a little strength and show no sign of weakness. He asked all the other boys to stand for a little while for their friend to regain his strength. As they waited for him, they heard a little noise of something moving in the ground. When fear filled them, Khubazi told them that he noticed this movement soon after they passed the waterfall. He reminded them not to look back for whatever was behind them was not for their eyes to see. The boys shivered and got ready to go. The light grew bigger as they approached it.

They reached a big open space lit with fire in the middle. A man with the skin clothing covering him all over approached them with a clay pot, dipped in it the tail of a cow. He sprinkled the boys with the herbs on their heads and spoke. "Now you have passed your childhood phase and have graduated from boys to men. The tribe is very proud of you. I am happy that all of you made it. It has been a long time since all the boys made it all together this far. Did you not see anything unusual on your way?" "I fell on something strange after passing the waterfall," answered one of the boys. The old men looked puzzled and asked how come he made it with the rest of the boys then?

Dlangamandla told the old men that Khubazi asked him to close his eyes and reminded them not to look back. They also said that this was because he was thirsty and could not drink from the waterfall. They also told the men about the movements. The man covered in skins turned to Khubazi and said, "Not only have you the heart of a warrior, but you are

wise too. Your father must be proud. You wore his necklace in the river and again you are wearing it. He truly lives in you.” He turned to the boys and told them that the boy fell on the skull of a boy who disobeyed and drank from the waterfall. He told them the movement was of the great serpent of the spirit that lived in the cave. It devoured anyone who caught its eyes. Many boys did not make it in the past because they disobeyed instructions.

The boys passed to the old men who waited for them to carve on their left arm the man mark of a first quarter moon, a full moon and a last quarter moon. The freshmen were given new clothing and they left the cave exiting through the opening on the right. They reached home and there was a huge celebration for the return of all young men safe with their man marks as symbols of excellence.

The next day Khubazi went to the river where he killed the crocodile. He went alone and no one noticed since the celebration was still going on at home. As he drew nearer the river, he noticed a girl his age, wearing the same as the girls of his tribe. He stood for a moment and noticed that he has never seen her before. He approached her. When the girl saw him, she sprinted to the bush and disappeared. He followed her in a sprint too. As she ran Phambuka noticed that she was going by the cave and in this way the cave was closer. He followed her until he saw her entering an old hut.

He went to the hut, laid down his weapons as a sign of peace and went on. Before he even uttered a word the girl came out of the hut. Now he could see her much closer. She had eyebrows that were like the fur of a sheep, eyes as innocent as those of a dove. Her lips were red as if she ate red berries. Her skin was light and smooth like his favorite rock back home. Her eyes glowed like the waterfall of the cave. Behind

her emerged an old woman, about her grandmother's age. She spoke to the girl, "Nkosazana, give him water, he must be tired."

Khubazi was still out of words when the old woman spoke to him. "I see your man mark is still wet. The tribe is proud of you and so am I." Nkosazana came with the water and offered him a mean look then returned to the hut. "I am Nongqawuza..." His heart nearly jumped out his chest. He thought this was to be his last day. The old woman eased him and told him she knew he was scared, and she was not surprised. She told him her side of the story that she never got to tell after the death of the great traditional healer. She could not because the tribe was too angry with her and blamed her for his death. The tribesmen stabbed her pregnant daughter on their escape. She did not make it. On her death Nongqawuza had to cut her belly and take the child out her womb.

After hearing her full side of the story, Khubazi left for home. When he came home everyone was waiting for him, they asked where he came from? Why did he go? There were too many questions at once. When they were finally quiet, he started speaking. When he told them he was coming from Nongqawuza's house they moved back. He told them everything that Nongqawuza said. He explained how Phambuka's father died. Nongqawuza was out seeking more herbs in the middle of the night because the pains were too much to bear and there were no herbs left. She could not wait till the morning. She had to risk her life at night for him. Sadly, when she returned it was too late. On that night Phambuka was out camping with the men on the other part of the mountain. Khubazi also told the tribe how Nkosazana was born, recovered from her mother's dead body. The tribe went silent.

Khubazi called for peace and that Nongqawuza be forgiven and not be blamed for the murder she did not commit. Phambuka came to him and said to him “Before you were a man you showed bravery, in the cave you displayed wisdom and now you call for peace. Your voice is no longer small, and we respect it.” He gave him a beautifully carved rod and a necklace made of crocodile teeth. He then asked the men of the tribe to go fetch Nongqawuza. Two moons after that, Khubazi and Nkosazana got married and the tribe triumphed at the joining of the two young hearts in love.

2ND PLACE

Njivas

Njabulo Sibiya

* * *

I just wanted to blend in and be normal for once in my life. Even so, maybe we took it too far. I took it too far. I believed my grandmother was going to kill me herself if I did not die on my way to the hospital. I had disappointed her and brought shame to the Sibiya family. Her wrinkled hands around my neck would have been a fair way to go for attempted murder.

Although I spent most of my time at home doing my chores and helping my grandmother with everything from collecting firewood to mending the kitchen floor with cow dung and setting up the fire in the cooking hut; I could always effortlessly fit in with other boys in spite of my lack of “practice” with their rituals. I had no doubt that I was also going to fit in with the boys of Hammersdale Township where I was going to visit my aunt. The bus from the town dropped me off exactly where Mrs. Cebekhulu, my aunt, said it would. On the right, there was a huge bottle store with its name written in big words on a Coca-Cola board, “Kwamalinga” where I bought a cigarette even though I had never smoked before, and on my left, there was a red container at the corner of the road where I was supposed to “turn on the narrow driveway behind the red container and walk straight.” As I proceeded straight, as instructed, I noticed that everything was better here. The streets were encrusted with tar, and their sport grounds still had some grass on them. Although the houses almost looked the same, everything was better and for me to fit in I would also have to be better. I turned right on the second street as I was instructed, and I

could see the green painted house that I was supposed to be visiting. By the time I arrived at my aunt's house, I was certain that I did not belong. I could not escape the judgmental darts from the eyes of the boys who were visibly smoking and playing football on the street near my aunt's home. I was sure those well-dressed boys with funny haircuts and sticky jeans could smell the detraction of Sundwini village where I came from, and maybe they could also hear the sound of my grandmother separating wheat from chaff on my footsteps. Nevertheless, I was thankful to have arrived safely. When I looked to my left to cross the street to my aunt's house my attention was arrested by a girl whom I saw walking down the street. She stared back and I looked away lest she saw traces of a leaking roof and a falling house on my face. I felt worthless. She looked better than the girls back home and even better than Mbali the lead dancer of the reed dance girls. I had to be better than where I came from, even if it meant committing murder.

My brother's son! You found the house?!" Mrs. Cebekhulu announced as she rushed towards me with her big arms wide open to stifle me between her huge breasts. I opened my arms by a whisker to receive her. I never felt comfortable giving or receiving hugs, but I could always suffer through the ones I got from family. "Yes aunty, the place was not hard to find." I assured her. Undeniably, it wasn't. I had explored forests bigger than the whole Hammersdale Township before, although that experience seemed beside the point there. My grandmother had paid to call ahead using the phone from the supermarket to inform Mrs. Cebekhulu that I was on my way, and she had been excitedly waiting for me ever since. Her house was beautiful. Back home, the only house that was built of red bricks, and black painted asbestos was the ward councilor's house. The rest were either built with mud or ashes mixed with cement. Aunty sat me down to interview me

about my trip and the lives of everyone back home before she showed me to my room. I was going to be sleeping alone. Mrs. Cebekhulu was married, and her husband was at work when I arrived. They had two bedrooms but no child. I was going to be their child for the December school holidays. The bed was huge and better than the pee-marked sofa cushions I used to sleep on the floor back home. As I lay on the bed, I thought about the stories that my grandmother had told me about township life, drinking girls and mischievous boys with leather jackets and smelly all-star sneakers. She had worked as a housemaid in Umlazi Township. My grandmother told me all about gossiping neighbours and the police who arrested you if they found you urinating in public. I fancied if I had a leather jacket it would not be hard to fit in, and I lost myself in thoughts about the things I would do here with so many opportunities. I drifted so far with imagination that I didn't feel the slumber coming.

The next morning, I was awakened by the sound of frying sausages and eggs rather than a wet blanket because my cousin Linda had peed himself. Mrs Cebekhulu was making breakfast for me. I did not have a chance to meet Mr Cebekhulu the night before because I was asleep by the time he arrived and when I woke up, he had already gone to work. Mr. Cebekhulu was a busy man. I hoped that was not the reason why they did not have children.

"Morning heir, did you sleep well?" She greeted me, holding a frying pan with her left hand and a spatula with the other. She liked to call me an "heir" which always reminded me of my father, her brother whom I last saw twelve years ago when I was six. He was not dead, only to me, and I think Mrs Cebekhulu tried too much to correct her younger brother's wrongs, which I did not care about. My grandmother had always been both parents to me since my mother went to live at college to complete her diploma.

“Good morning aunty, yes I slept well,” I responded rubbing my itchy eyelids.

“Good then, now go and wash your face and hands before you eat breakfast.” She said, and I did as she coached.

“How many slices of bread do you want?” She asked. I battled with an answer for a while since the number of slices was always decided for me by the circumstances at home and my grandmother’s discretion.

“Three!” I responded by trying to pick a number that was neither greedy nor needy.

“Hawu! You want your grandmother to say I was starving you when you return home looking skinny? I’ll put five.” Mrs Cebekhulu said as she put five buttered slices of bread on my plate. I uttered a thank you as I folded my arms and bowed my head to bless the food as my grandmother had taught me.

“You should go and play football with the other boys after you are done with your meal,” Mrs Cebekhulu suggested as soon as I said amen. I would have preferred to stay indoors and watch television and get lost in imagination than go to dodge darts from those boys’ eyes. I always preferred my own company but going out meant I might see that girl that was walking down the street again.

“Alright aunty, as soon as I make my bed and wash the dishes.” I conceded.

“No! Men don’t wash their dishes in this house. You want your grandmother to say I was enslaving you.” Aunty countered. I always washed my plate back home. My

grandmother did not believe that men should not wash their dishes. She would say if men can eat, men can also wash dishes. So, after I made my bed, I went outside to play with the boys on the street. On the wooden street pole outside our gate leaned a strange-looking guy with a friendly face and rough clothes. He wore a brown leather jacket, formal trousers and red all-star sneakers. He stared at me as if he could see through me. He squinted his eyes and continued to smoke the cigarette that looked like the one I kept in my pocket and had planned to smoke in front of the boys who were playing football to prove to them that I also belonged in a township. I tried not to pay him any attention and crossed the street to the guys who were playing soccer.

“Eita guys!” I greeted, trying very hard to mask my insignificance.

“Eita mjita! My name is Spha, they call me Maphara.” One of the guys who had his hair shaved only on the sides and had the remaining top braided. He went on to introduce the other guys whose names I did not catch because we later referred to each other as “Mjita” or “Mfethu” the whole time. They didn’t seem to mind my estrangement for a while until half-time in-between street soccer games. They had a habit that I did not know about them, calling each other nicknames and I was furious when they called me “farm Julia” and made fun of the jacket my aunt gave me because it was too small for her husband to wear anymore. I made an excuse about leaving and said I was going home to pee. They seemed confused about why I needed to go home when I could just pee on the side of the street. When I told them about the fear of being arrested, they laughed their lungs out and called me many other names which began with the word farm. I wanted to pick one of them and set an example, but my grandmother had not raised me that way so I left and before I could reach the gate the guy

with the friendly face and rough clothes called me. Out of desperation and curiosity, I went to lean on the street pole next to him. He asked why those guys were laughing at me and he laughed too when I told him, and he told me to loosen up and forget all that I thought I knew about township people. He introduced himself as Njivas and he told me about his township adventures, how he started smoking when he was twelve and how he did not fear anyone. Whilst I listened to him talk, we saw the girl who was walking down the street the previous day. She was walking on the other side of the road and Njivas called her to where we were standing and without hesitation she came. “How are you beautiful?” Njivas greeted her with his friendly face and a little grin.

“I’m alright, how are you?” she bashfully responded, drawing invisible letters on the street with her toes.

“I’m not good because you and I are not dating yet.” Njivas said, looking straight into her eyes and reaching to hold her hand.

“Aibo!” she protested, on the other hand looking cajoled. “But we don’t even know each other.” She crooned, avoiding to look Njivas in the eyes.

“You can never assuredly know more than a person’s name, people are complicated, but I wouldn’t mind spending the rest of my life studying you. What is your name?” Njivas said as if reciting a poem.

“Sandi, what’s yours?” She asked after a chuckle, this time looking at his face while I stood there looking at her face too. Her spotless caramel skin seemed to compliment her wide eyes very well and I would have believed everything that came out of her perfectly thin, heart-shaped lips.

“My name is Njivas. So, what do you say Sandi?”

“I don’t know.”

“When can I at least see you again?”

“I don’t know. My friend is having a party tomorrow night, you can see me there.”

“Okay then beautiful, will see you then. Try not to think about me all day.” Njivas said as he let go of her hand and she continued her way, blessing us with the view of her African curves.

“Mjita, you have to come to the party tonight,” Njivas said to me.

“I can’t, I am not allowed.”

“Come on man, don’t you want to see Sandi, or didn’t you see the way she looked at you?” Njivas implored.

“I will try.” I pledged. I spent the rest of the day plotting my escape and planning conversations with Sandi in my head. Maybe if I had not gone to the party, I wouldn’t have gotten myself into this suffering. My grandmother would never look at me the same way. I failed her trying to fit in and I wanted to know more about the girl who was walking down the street. Later, on the day of the party, I had finally decided that I was not going until I heard a faint knock on the window. I hesitated to attend to it with the fear that perhaps the ghost stories my grandmother told me were not just stories, and I wouldn’t have opened the window if I hadn’t heard a familiar drone outside. It was Njivas and he had come to fetch me. I

did not bother to ask how he got through the gate, I just picked up the jacket I was wearing the day before and sneaked out the window. Njivas had assured me that we would be back before Mr. and Mrs. Cebekhulu woke up. The party was very crowded, and it would have been hard to find Sandi if she had not seen me, us first. I felt a faint touch on my shoulder. It was her. Looking more beautiful than I remembered from the other day. She handed us bottles of beer and white pills that she said were going to help us loosen up. Njivas made small talk with her for a considerable amount of minutes before I jumped in and complimented her on her dress. She did not seem to mind my intrusion and from her blushes, I could tell she rather relished it. We continued to talk about how Hammersdale Township was different from where I was from and she seemed interested in the stories about my grandmother, as Njivas disappeared in the crowd of people who were there. We talked for a very long time about everything until the sight of Mr Cebekhulu disturbed us. He was dancing with a girl who was young enough to be his daughter. I could not believe he could do such a thing to my dear aunt. Sandi saw that it bugged me and convinced me to go and confront him about it and so we went.

“Baba Cebekhulu, what are you doing here,” I asked as I craftily pulled him by his jacket.

“I should be asking you the same question boy. How did you even get out of the house?” He confronted me as I led him outside to talk. To call him drunk would have been a gross understatement.

“Why are you doing this to aunty?” I asked him, avoiding answering how I left the house.

“You won’t understand, boy. Your aunty is old, these girls make

me feel like a man. Uyinyumba! She can't even give me an heir. I can't believe I wasted ten cows on a barren woman. That girl is going to give me eight sons." Mr Cebekhulu shamelessly declared rocking back and forth. The girl Mr Cebekhulu was dancing with came outside to where we were standing with Mr Cebekhulu and said the first two letters of HIV, and when I irritably ignored her, she called Mr Cebekhulu by name telling him she was feeling sleepy and suggested that they should leave the party. And so, they left as I swallowed more of the white pills Sandi gave me and went back inside to find her. When I found her I didn't know what to tell her so we stared at each other's face for a while as if dreading the words that were to come next, but I felt like she could read my thoughts and for a moment we forgot we were at a party until Njivas emerged again from the crowd and kissed her. She answered the kiss and he led her to the bedroom, and they did what people from my village pay a cow and a goat to do outside of marriage. The effect of the drugs must have been too strong because I woke up the next morning stark naked in the bedroom with Sandi and no recollection of how I got there. I woke her up to ask where Njivas was, and she looked at me with confusion as if I was speaking in a foreign language and told me that I was still drunk. I dressed myself and walked out with shame. I could not believe it was close to midday already and I had spent an entire evening at the party. I had betrayed my grandmother's teachings in just one day. I could not believe Njivas broke his promise about returning me home in time. I hoped what I learned about Mr Cebekhulu was a lie. Njivas must have left after he spoiled Sandi. I rushed home wondering if Mrs Cebekhulu had woken up yet and if she noticed that I was gone. When I got to the house, I crept to the back window that I had used to escape, and I found it locked. Mrs Cebekhulu must have locked it from the inside. When I got to the front door, it was unlocked. Mrs Cebekhulu was already up, and I walked into her sitting on the sofa facing

the door. Fire was coming out of her eyes. She ordered me to sit down and asked me where I had been, and I told her. Even about her husband. She gave me a lecture about how I had disappointed her and her family's name. She continued to tell me how grateful she was not to have a child because children are a curse and called me ungrateful after all she was going to do for me and called me a lying witch for making up stories about her husband. She called my grandmother on the supermarket phone, which means everyone from Sundwini knew what a disappointment I turned out to be. She handed me money and told me to clean up and leave her house. She packed my clothes herself, shoving them in my metal suitcase and told me to leave the brown leather jacket she had given to me. I left without eating lunch. Mrs Cebekhulu could no longer stand the sight of me. On my way to the bus stop I met Njivas. He apologized for leaving me at the party and told me that I should blame everything on him when I got home, that I should tell my grandmother that he had blackmailed me to attend the party. He convinced me that everything was going to work out.

"Njabulo! You are leaving already, without saying goodbye?" Sandi shouted from a distance, approaching us. "What kind of person are you." She added. We waited for her to catch up, Njivas didn't seem to appreciate that Sandi was worried about me leaving.

"Yeah, Mrs Cebekhulu found out I sneaked out to the party, and she kicked me out." I answered.
"Still, you could have said something to me before taking off."
"Why?"

"Because..." She hesitated to say. "Because last night we had unprotected sex and I might be pregnant so you can't leave me yet until we know for sure," she said avoiding looking me in the eyes.

“But you slept with Njivas not me,” I said furiously.

“Who is Njivas now?” She asked her face painted with confusion.

“Oh, so you think I’m a farm Julia fool? I guess my grandmother was right that all township girls are whores.” I heatedly said as I picked up my suitcase to leave. I left as she stood there, staring dependently me at me. It was evident from the water sprinkles on my shoes that it had begun to rain. Before I could get far Njivas caught up with me and pulled me by the back of my collar so hard that I dropped the suitcase.

“So, you had sex with my girl, man?” He asked and before I could answer he punched me in the stomach. I was also angry that he slept with Sandi first, but I was being blamed for her pregnancy so I hit him as hard as I could between the eyes, and he started bleeding. He tried to return the punch to my face, but I fought too many boys while herding cows to go down that easily, so I dodged his punch and swept his leg. He fell with the back of his head on the pavement, and I started punching him in the face. I broke a brown beer bottle on the side of the road, and I stabbed him in the stomach. Then I tried to get up, but I couldn’t. There was too much blood where we were fighting, and the rain had made things worse.

I realized far along that Sandi was screaming for help, shouting “Sizani! He has gone crazy”. My nose was bleeding profusely, my stomach was cut open and the pouring rain made the T-shirt stick to my skin. I thought Njivas had cut me somehow and so I punched him in the eye, but my eye hurt too. Whatever I did to Njivas happened to me. I took the broken pieces of the beer bottle and drew the letter “N” on the back of Njiva’s hand and the same letter appeared in my hand. He

and I were one person. Perhaps I couldn't stomach becoming the person I wanted to be to fit in, so my subconscious took over and I thought he was another person. Which means there was no one else to blame for sneaking out of the house and doing drugs. There was nowhere to hide from my grandmother's wrath. I was going to have to pay Sandi's parents for sleeping with her outside marriage. Perchance Lewis Nkosi was right to think there is neither a gun nor Jesus, that there are only mystified forms of our consciousness. And perhaps Njivas was my own baffling form of consciousness. Maybe Njivas is in all of us, the side we keep from our families and church people. I then understood or, better yet, came to terms with the thought that maybe Mr. Cebekhulu relied on his Njivas to help him look for his manhood even if it meant looking up seventeen-year-old girl's skirts. But I cut my stomach open trying to fight my Njivas and I was lucky the people called for an ambulance and police when they saw me punching and stabbing myself. I just wanted to blend in and be normal for once in my life. But maybe we took it too far. I took it too far.

3RD PLACE

My Virtue and Vice

Van Kakwere

* * *

Angela could feel the biting cold move along her spine sending shivers to her whole body. The European winter had been dreadful to Angela in all respects. Her once radiant skin was now dry with patches of discolouration. She had lost a lot of hair; how dare the European winter take away from her crown and pride as an African woman. Her emotions had just become as bleak as the winter. She wondered how she could feel so miserable yet be living her dream. Europe was supposed to be exhilarating and snow was supposed to be wonderful, yet she found it depressing. How she wished at this moment she could bask in the radiance of the African sun.

Growing up as a young girl in the Venda kingdom in Limpopo had been such a joy to Angela. Her village was a close-knit community with a rich culture and heritage. It was a little paradise with red soils that produced a plethora of succulent fruits and vegetables. The landscape was breathtaking, from the panoramic Vambe mountains that gave access to the view of the whole land to the gushing Mutarazi waterfalls. To her young mind there was no place better than her homeland, it was her foretaste of heaven.

The beauty and the joys of living in her village had made Angela somewhat oblivious of the depth of her heritage. She had a basic understanding of her culture but was unaware of the deep-rooted meanings of the rituals and regalia they wore during ceremonies. She took pride in wearing her multi-coloured and beaded traditional regalia. To her they were just

clothes, yet they symbolized the traditions and values of her ancestors that at some stage she would be expected to embody.

As she came of age she realized, she had no control over her life, her fate had been decided for her by her ancestors. Upon this realization, Angela began to loathe the blood of her ancestors that ran in her veins. Once her pride, her traditional regalia became a reminder of dreams she would never fulfil and the woman she would be forced to become. In their native culture, women were married off at a tender age and hence were regarded as liabilities that were not worthy of investing in. Angela had a deep desire to learn but of course, having several brothers and limited resources, her odds were even smaller. She had learnt to read and write through ritually doing her brother's homework. It was their little secret until his brother's teacher a Dominican nun discovered it. Angela undoubtedly had talent and intellectual prowess that could be harnessed into a bright future. The Dominican nun became her saviour as she begged her parents to let her go to school and would be liable for all her educational expenses. After countless meetings and intense conversations her parents finally consented to let her go to school. It was a dream come true for Angela and she vowed to make it worthwhile.

Angela's intellectual prowess opened one door after another. In as much as Angela was making headway academically and making strides to realize her dream, she had grown to resent her heritage even more. With every new door opening, came a greater degree of bitterness as she realized what could have been robbed from her. Angela wanted to be as far away from home as possible, away from her barbaric culture as she would call it. It was a sigh of relief when she landed her dream job in Europe.

As winter dawned and spring came forth Angela had finally apprehended the root of her winter blues. It was not the dry skin nor the lost hair but rather a deep yearning within her soul. Yes, she had been set free to live her dreams, but she was haunted by a distant echo of the girls deep in her village crying out to be set free from the shackles of tradition. The Dominican nun had been her saviour, she had relentlessly fought for her right to choose. Now it was time for her to return the favour, it would be an injustice not to.

Angela woke up as her flight touched the African soil. This moment had culminated from months of contemplation. With an objective mind she had apprehended the fact that her culture had taught her hard work, love, kindness, dignity and self-respect, values that had helped open doors for her. On the other hand, her heritage had almost snatched her future and the power to determine the trajectory of her life. She had finally come to embrace that her heritage was a blessing and a curse, her culture a virtue and a vice. But now she was home, not to erase her heritage but simply to redefine it for future generations.

2017

ESSAYS/OPINION PIECES

1ST PLACE

History will not judge us

Nkosinathi Mkize

* * *

As I sit with my fellow brothers, I cry silently as I listen to the excuses made by people seemingly trapped in tin-roofed houses. I listen to backroom philosophies of drunk uncles and old women narrating stories of the struggle. Wake up, Africa! The chance you have fought for has arrived.

On this piece of paper, I light the biggest fire the world has seen. When the flames fade, I hope the fire burns on in your hearts. Our history and heritage are not in books but dwell within our hearts. We are the vessels of knowledge, the link between African customs and the children of our beloved Africa.

I stand on the tip of Kilimanjaro.

Since the very beginning of time, men had only one purpose; to survive. They had developed ways and patterns from age to age to best support their survival. However, one of the very core aspects that ensured that man survived was adaptation. In order to survive one had to adapt to whatever change "Mother Nature" presented.

The core problem facing us, as Africans today, is accepting that time does change. By convention, culture is the ideas, customs and social behaviour of a particular people or society. In other words, every generation develops its own culture that best suits the conditions it lives under. However, as Africans, we define culture as the way our forefathers lived. This defeats

the conventional wisdom of viewing culture as a variable of time, and frowns even on progressive change – which has always been an independent variable even in the survival of our forefathers. With different contexts and times, it would seem counter-intuitive to aspire to the kind of life (culturally) our forefathers lived.

The context of different societies has changed both negatively and positively, in the past decades and centuries. The Shakespearean English of the 16th Century is now obsolete and almost meaningless to most in Britain. Likewise, the sun-worshipping and human sacrifice of the Aztecs have now been relegated to the realm of absurdity. Some of Africa's pride rituals and cultural practices have been exempted in this inevitable alteration. Raw animal skins are no longer used for everyday clothing in most African cultures and using livestock for *ilobolo* is slowly being phased out due to the scarcity and high expense of cows. I believe this is the progressive change that Africa desperately needs in this modern world as long as the value of communication, religious observance, bodily integrity and re-establishing new relationships is still respected; the means of achieving this should, rightfully, change.

Why then is modern Africa sceptical of change? Fear is the reason most of us are afraid to even start moving forward. We are afraid that while trying to embrace the change, we might lose ourselves in the process. While it is true that Africa is behind with development in almost every essential aspect of life compared to the rest of the world; I do believe that half of the reason is that we are afraid to make reasonable efforts to move forward and embrace the new era. The era where people of different races, ethnic groups and nationalities mingle together on a daily basis, may seem to take away from our identity yet it opens us to our new inclusive selves. As

such, I believe, embracing and adapting to this change is the best strategy to survive today.

Another cause for concern for us Africans is language. Language is primarily a form of communication. Its purpose should therefore be to allow us to communicate effectively. In most African languages one finds that the language is stagnant. Little or no progress and transformation can be observed from the time it started. This is yet another aspect about our “culture” as Africans of remaining how and where we are that frowns on progressive change. If, however, you look at European languages like English, the language progresses. As stated earlier on, the Shakespearean English of the 16th century has minimum relevance in the modern world.

This is perhaps the reason English is used across the globe: it remains a variable of time. It transforms to meet the standards and conditions of that particular time. There are countless words that English has adopted from other languages to maintain its relevance, especially from Latin. I therefore believe that opening ourselves to our newer inclusive selves is the best way forward for everyone. Accepting our differences and trying to work around them will ensure that we live in a blissful and just society. We should understand now that in ancient times people were grouped by language but now we are grouped by something bigger than that, being human.

History will judge us if we don't share our languages with the world. If we shy away from saying, “*Sawubona, unjani?*” to the world to express and illuminate our identity. If we fail to share and express our opinions on social media platforms in our native Tsonga or Xhosa, if we fail to conduct meetings and gatherings in our African languages history will judge us.

As a consequence, the culture that we start to develop in our era would be that which we all share as different races. We are now bound together by a bigger bond, being countrymen. And in our country, and Africa at large, we should set our values based on mutual respect and love to promote peace and harmony. We should create a culture of being willing to learn, read, and research because that is how we grow, by enriching our minds. We should create a culture of promoting academic learning and all other forms of learning so that people can gain skills and be able to have a professional career in order to afford the cost of living. Amongst many, those should be the values and principles of our inclusive, progressive culture.

Of course, this is not going to be a straightforward transformation, but it is worth the effort, especially because we are no longer small tribes living the most basic form of life. As often said, everything begins with one's 'self'. From me and from you, let's diffuse and pass on the message (of progressive change to our culture) to the ones closest to us. And if that happens, we will have taken the first step in the journey of a thousand miles.

Principles (or purpose) count more than means, in this context. New realities and opportunities enable us to find new means of retaining our proud value systems. Therefore we can still remain truly African even while we embrace modern technologies, education, and lifestyles. As Africans, we should start embracing and accepting change because it is what we make of what we have that separates one person from another, one group from the next, and even one country from the other.

History will judge the old. For they have lived in a time when the customs and rituals were still done accordingly. However,

they hide behind pride to unite with other seniors to put together the fragments of our identity to create a broader, brighter and everlasting image of an African. History will judge the old for coming back home from work “too tired” to narrate stories of old for children and leave them to the mercy of comic books and fiction. History will judge us if our stories are told in italics.

History will judge the younger generation for not realising that the pride and heritage of the African people now rest with them. The young can now create websites and pages on social media, yet they seem less keen about progressing their very being. How easy it would be for the very rich history of ours to be accessed if it dwelled deep in the belly of the sky drives and at the bottom of our hearts. History will judge African games developers for not programming African themed games, whether it is stick fighting or just the tactics of an *impi*.

History will judge the young for abandoning school and running for quick fixes. As the world progresses, so should we embrace progressive change as Africans to ensure that we integrate our culture and customs to refrigerate African identity in the heart of globalisation. The world currently requires more than literacy, it requires that people learn more, do more in their respective fields to prevent external influences to crowd African heritage. The more the youth studies, the more they can get opportunities to go abroad and take along with them Africa, to share it with the world and defeat the stereotypes about who we are.

African literature is about a place most people have not visited, even in imagination. It is a place worth getting to know. The sights and sounds are unique. The rain beats heavily on tin and thatched roofs. When the rain stops, a small bird begins to

sing in a mango tree. Then people come out, talking. On their way, they meet others and stop for a while to talk some more. The conversation may be in any of the eight hundred languages spoken on the continent, but it is undeniably African. In the spoken word may be found the quality that some African writers have called the genius of African civilisation. And in the spoken word there is magic. The spoken word, always fresh, is the source of all African literature. History will judge us if we shut that door to the world.

History will judge us for not recording and performing our African music. For not beating drums and blowing horns hard enough. Almost all music currently playing on radio and television across the globe has an African element. This is due to many Africans being shipped to all parts of the world taking with them the one thing the oppressors could never take. Music has been a symbol, for many Africans in Africa and beyond, that we are still African inside and out. It is our responsibility to ensure that we wear the African tag with pride, for many long for it in foreign lands.

We shall wear the African tag with pride. We shall appreciate the beauty of the hills and valleys back home. The varying climate and topography. The brand of cultures is unique and vibrant. The sound and rhythm of music, the instruments played. The foods that gave *okhokho* hundreds of years in this life. We shall be proud of the rich beliefs, the natural rain forests and the architectural masterpieces, the pyramids.

Being African means being able to rise above all obstacles that have been placed on our path. Engraved in our DNA is the work ethic to work tirelessly to achieve what we desire. The “motherland” is blessed with mineral resources, which is the wealth of the continent that Africans are not getting privileges from. It is up to us to work hard enough on all fronts,

academically and politically also, in order to enjoy the riches of our home.

We now stand at a crossroads. The fate of this lovely continent rests upon our capable hands. It is up to us to embrace progressive change, for change is inevitable and our culture and identity, though it remains the same, manifests differently in different times. The path each African decides to embark on, will collectively define who we are. Never before has the world been so connected. With connection comes sacrifice. Languages will be lost, beliefs, customs and culture will all vanish into thin air, and then history will judge us.

We can fight, we can be strong together, united. History will judge us whether we do good or bad. We can be proud. Sit around the fire to tell stories and bond with our loved ones. We can embrace a chance to share ideas about our native land. We can critically plan our future, one where Africa leads. We can be heroes in our communities, schools, cities and universities and let every month be September.

2ND PLACE

The Moffies of the Motherland

Dillen Gounden

* * *

This land, this majestic land! Selflessly she has given life since time immemorial. This is where it all began. The land that has given rise to man. The birthplace of humanity. For millennia this continent showered mankind with love, life, longevity, legacy and legend. A place where nature was a part of life and mankind reciprocated respect to all beings.

Today there is no resemblance to the greatness of what this place was. Greatness is nothing but a memory found deep within the pages of unbiased history books.

This land is now tainted, and the inhabitants' minds are poisoned. Poisoned by a shroud of perversion and clouds of ignorance. The invaders came and they bastardised this land and corrupted the people. Turning the land, diverse with abundant flora and fauna, rich with minerals and fertile land with a gigantic spectrum of culture into nothing but a Dark continent...

The invaders relinquished their hold on us. They have admitted and pointed out their wrongdoings. So why, when we take back our glorious land and gain our freedom, do we turn against each other?

Have you not seen it? The inhumane hellish treatment of our comrades. Open up a newspaper! This virulent despicable behaviour is now the norm and is promoted across the Dark Continent. "*Iqaqa alizizwa ukunuka*"

It is not torture; it is far worse than that. My brothers and sisters are tossed into cages like vermin. They are jailed for no crime, yet their human rights have been torn away from them. Worse than pariahs they are portrayed as the ultimate taboo. Hunted down and slaughtered as if culling an infected herd. "Moffie" and "faggot" are some of the arrows of prejudice armoured with the sounds of hate that are ubiquitous today. The gays, the lesbians, and transsexuals - they are my brothers and sisters. I will stand up for them. I will stand up for my brothers and sisters that are suppressed in Zimbabwe, jailed in Uganda, tortured in Nigeria and slaughtered in Gambia. My brothers and sisters suffer in every country on this continent. This is their land too. This is our Motherland!

"Homosexuality is not African," that is the shield they use to defend, justify, and promote their heinous crimes. Homosexuality is just as much African as the Baobab tree.

Homosexuality is strong rooted in African culture and tradition which has become bastardised after Africa got colonised. From the dawn of culture, we have had and accepted homosexuals in Africa. The Langi, the Kisii of Kenya, the Nuer of Sudan and the Kuria of Tanzania, as well as the Igbo of Nigeria. Even the Great King Mwanga II was an open homosexual and a glorious monarch.

These are our brothers and sisters. They are all just as African. We are all African. I will not rest! I shall fight tooth and nail until we are given our equal rights! That is my vow to my brothers and sisters and our Mother Africa.

3RD PLACE

Unity Through Dialogue

Lulama Zono

* * *

Beth Moore once said, “Differences will always exist, but division doesn’t always have to result.” South African society is a divided one, primarily along racial lines and the City of Durban is a microcosm of that division.

I started living in Durban at the beginning of 2017, as a student at the Durban University of Technology. One of the things that struck me was the deep-seated antagonism and mistrust that existed between Black and Indian Africans. After conversing with different people, it became clear to me that there was a logic maintained on both sides. The African Indians view the African Blacks as a people who want things for *mahala*, as the colloquial expression goes. Free housing and free education are mentioned as examples of this tendency. They also see African Blacks as perpetrators of criminal activity, such as house break-ins, hijackings, heists and the like. On the other hand, Black Africans maintain that the average African Indian sees himself as intellectually superior to his black counterpart. As far as African Blacks are concerned, the employment given to them by African Indians is unfair, in terms of pay rates, working hours and career progression. This makes Black Africans see the African Indians as cunning, malicious and exploitative employers. These perceptions are held by both groups as indisputable truths and dispelling them is not easy.

In seeking solutions to these problems, we can draw from the traditional African way of life. “**Ukubutha**” is a Xhosa word which means to collect or gather. The word also relates to a

traditional social norm of visiting family, friends and acquaintances merely to converse about anything under the sun. Steve Biko in his book, *I Write What I Like*, page 42, writes, “House visiting was always a feature of the elderly folk’s ways. No reason was needed as a basis for visits. It was all part of our deep concern for each other... We regarded our living together not as an unfortunate mishap warranting endless competition amongst us but as a deliberate act of God to make us a community of brothers and sisters jointly involved in the quest for a composite answer to the varied problems of life.”

Ukubutha created an opportunity for individuals in communities to be mutually enriched by each other’s knowledge, experiences, and insights through talking to one another. I am not advocating the advent of house visiting during the day or after work, as the orientation of society is vastly different from the traditional African society. Rather, I suggest that we nurture a culture of meaningful dialogue in spaces that we commonly occupy.

In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, “Be the change you wish to see in the world,” so to move the wheels of change we need to impact our immediate surroundings. In the Durban University of Technology,

- our Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Mthembu, in his 'Iminingo' communicate dated 21st July 2017, called for the revival of a student parliament. Regardless of the structure and constituency of such a platform, it would certainly assist in creating a space where students can meaningfully engage amongst themselves and the powers that be.
- there is no functional debating society. Such a society would create a platform where issues of cohesion, cultural diversity and myriad of other social issues could be frankly,

rigorously and constructively debated.

- at present, student political organizations are mainly, if not wholly, led and constituted by Black African students. Student political movements in our university must diversify and re-orientate their manifestos and action plans so that they can appeal to and attract African Indian and White students. This re-orientation will require and lead to engagement and dialogue which will help bridge the racial divide on our campuses.
- there are about 25 religious organisations registered with the Student Representative Council, each requiring at least 150 members to qualify for registration and recognition by the university. Theoretically speaking, there are at least 3 750 students that are religiously affiliated on our campuses. I believe student religious organisations have a latent potential, responsibility and obligation to bind and unite students. Student religious leadership must foster dialogue in its ranks on social integration. For instance, inter-organisational panel discussions, meetings, conferences, camps, get-togethers and so on, can be hosted where matters of social cohesion are discussed.

Through dialogue, the Congress of The People, composed of people from all races and all walks of life, was able to formulate The Freedom Charter in the 1950s. During the transition from Apartheid to a democratic South Africa, dialogue was the basis of negotiations, compromises, and agreements, from which a new and united South Africa was born. Our beloved Ngugi Wa Thiong'o put it so well when he said, "There is no way we can survive as a nation in the world without finding unity." It is only by meaningfully talking to one another can we have the hope of finding that unity in our diversity.

POETRY

1ST PLACE**Sober Thoughts Drunk Actions*****Njabuliso Mofokeng****** * ***

Like a pack of hungry wolves,
We prowled the scene
Canvassing every inch of the packed club.

Three bottles in and predator mode engaged.

I glided to the counter flashing my best smile,
I asked her name.

With a smirk she stole a sip, drinking up her poison,
The infection began.

“Hi I’m Zama”

Three words that spread through my being
Like a virus in its last stages,
Infatuation was in the air,
An intoxication spreading like wildfire.

I asked her for a dance,
And she bit her bottom lip.

Clasping her warm soft hand
We manoeuvre around drunken hostiles,
At centre stage our provocative selves embraced
Gingerly gyrating unlike the music in the background,
We swayed and slid
Caught in a ghetto salsa
The infection spread...

Lost in lust our sin grew,
Our pelvises met timely
Like a woodpecker and a tree.

We touched and danced like two deprived souls
Hungry enough to kill.

As the music slowed
We kissed until a new song poured in
As cheers rumbled all around
Like heavy rain on a tin roof.

Almost sober we staggered to my table,
The wolfpack drooling through their bared fangs
All they saw was fresh meat ready for a feast.

She brought her feminine herd and sat on my lap,
The infection spread.

Slurred and wobbly
We all left in a giggling mess
Paired up we all disappeared into the night.

She stuck with me like bubble gum on hair,
We kissed until our lips went numb,
And rolling on my bed we danced
Like untamed beasts chasing their first meal
After a long time.

The infection spread...
Jerked awake by a rooster,
Confused and scared we awoke to a condom-less situation.

Strangers in bed,
We hid our nudity like Adam and Eve.

Regret a potent stench dripping off the walls
And foggy windows,
While we dressed in silence and awkward glances.

She walked out like a house robber,
Tiptoeing in the hallway with her hands full
Trying to contain her leaking tears,
Lamenting her lost dignity.

While I rejoiced entering the shower,
Already texting the wolfpack.

Three months later the pack and herd crossed paths again
A pregnant Zama leading the flock,
Sweating bullets and charged up with stubbornness
I braced myself.

Her glaring gaze pierced my poker face,
she said hi again
This time my fear almost tangible
Her next words cut through it like a double-edged sword,
Yes it's your baby...

2ND PLACE**Daughterless Mother*****Siphesihle Nzuza****** * ***

She has brown skin wrapped in grace
God lived in her once warm tender embrace
A light like the stars
But she is also human, her skin also scars.

Pink cheeks Black lipsticks
She is poetry on a dirty sheet
Her perfection has become so obsolete.

Her life told on a thin, flimsy, disposable note
Her thoughts drag her down like waves on a sinking boat
She wrote her guilt in a page in the Bible to make it holier
Added a few drops of tears to make it softer.

Her first daughter
Her first murder
She took the same life that she gave
Now she cannot stomach the thought of her stomach being a grave.

Dark brown toned skin nourished by guilt and self-hate
A decision made in the wrong mental state
Life is never lost until you give it away
But today she seeks to leave this world, she cannot see any other way.

As the sun sets today, going down with it is her light
Tomorrow her body will be found cold as a winter night

Heaven can you hear her?
I know that hell can
Grave grant her mercy.

3RD PLACE

Be Proud

Nkosinathi Mkize

* * *

A touch of beauty, from head to toe.
Ridiculed by the world, the centre piece of the world.
Independent and connected to all by the Indian and the Atlantic.
Rain beats on tin and thatched roofs.
Cut-open to the core, she bleeds wealth, that's shipped off to the west.
Another story, perhaps of one who could only be a shadow of her best.

Eyes into the sky, back on the stone-cold concrete floor,
I say be proud before the sun rises and bakes your ebony tropics.
Once men diverged but now they converge, indeed there is no place like home.
The maps of history draw past your front door
Tracing the footprints of the very first men.

Be proud and call upon amadlozi!
For they have idols, crosses, and gods.

Your story is buried beneath the ground yet, your wisdom of Ubuntu lives on.

Like a skull, the land mass gaze to the east, a symbol of your fate.

Crowned by the great pyramid in the bald of the Sahara,
Your white and blue tears flow throughout the year in the
arid to the Mediterranean.

Some ride them, drink them, seek life.

What seems to be doom, is life, the purest form!

Be proud, before you utter foreign words.

The sweat of your hard labour drips in the Victoria and falls,
we marvel!

Savanna, Congo basin, Madagascar, the busy streets and
beaches of Ethekwini.

Indeed, a home with a hut for all!

SHORT STORIES

1ST PLACE

An archive of flowers

Shuratta Muyeni

* * *

I am pregnant. I am pregnant. I play the words over and over in my head. “I am pregnant.” The words fall flat on my lap as my school uniform cradles them. I am not too sure what this means; all I know is that my breasts are sore. I have missed two of my periods and everyone has something to say about my weight. I rock myself, shaking my head free of all this worrying. “What’s wrong with you?” My mother asks as she walks into the maid’s quarters, a place we call home. “Mama...” I brace myself, as my hands involuntarily start shaking.

“Speak up girl!” My mother retaliates; her mind now fixed on what her hands are searching for above the wardrobe. “It can wait,” I offer, as a distraction.

“No, it cannot.” My mother has always been impatient, her excuse being “What if Jesus comes back while I am waiting, for all we know He is coming tomorrow.” “Child, you know I do not play that game,” she utters mindlessly. I might as well keep the ball rolling.

“I am pregnant.” She freezes gruffly and turns to study me. “Speak up little girl!”

“Mama, I am pregn...” Before I complete my words, the back of her hand makes its mark on my face and I stumble to the ground. She raises her hand at me again, I quickly cringe and protect my face from another unannounced attack. She looks

at me, disgust and rage apparent in her eyes. She takes a step back; I remain rooted to the ground. “Mama”

“Shut up. SHUT UP!!” She bends over me, pointing her index finger to my face. “Who is the father?” She spits out the words.

“Josh, Mama.” My face sinks to the floor because this is a tragedy, even I at 14 know that. “Which Josh?! Which Josh, Swazi! Which Josh?!!” She regains her composure, and places her hands on her head, seeming dazed. “What have you done you stupid girl? You know that this will leave us without a roof over our heads! You stupid children! Why would you do this to me, huh?”

“I am sorry Mama.” The tears flow, hot and furiously, “I am sorry Mama.”

This day haunts me. It has haunted me for nine years now. As soon as Josh broke the news to his mother, I was ordered to stop attending classes, for no one was to see me. Shortly after I had given birth, I was sent to the UK to continue with my studies. This, as far as my mother was concerned, was a generous gift after my despicable act. The child was, almost, as white as snow, so the Van Ryne’s told the neighbours they adopted a bantu baby. It was 1996, people could accept such a noble act. My mother kept her job, and it was the only way she could see her granddaughter. However, she was not allowed to stay in the maid’s quarters anymore, due to a lack of trust. Possibly also due to the fear that the secret might come out.

The year is 2005, I have succeeded in life, but these memories still bring me a great share of heartache, often making me feel as if life is not complete. Although I have met a wonderful man

here in London, one that nurtures me with his love, but however sentimental and genuine his love is, it can never lick all my wounds. Sometimes I think, maybe there is no void that needs to be filled. I have Marcus now; shouldn't he be enough? Is a relationship built on lies and missing information, ever enough though? It shouldn't really matter, since this man is crazy enough to want to marry me. Since I am a Xhosa girl, I cannot simply just marry. Marcus being this 'African English' man is naïve to anything truly African. Momentarily after he proposed he reckoned we could get married within three months.

He does not understand that customs have to be followed and Lobola negotiations cannot be done over the phone. Trust me we have tried, so I have to head back home, to the 'new South Africa'. My fiancé, his older brother, father, uncle, and I are ready to leave so that this minor problem can be solved. I have notified my mother that she is to expect us this Saturday so we can conclude the Lobola negotiations. When the day to leave arrives, my system is flooded with anxiety and panic. On the plane all I can think of is the day Mrs Van Ryne found out about my pregnancy. Before the whole scandal she took me as a daughter, and the news truly astonished her. It was no surprise that on that evening everything changed, maybe that is why she shipped me off to a foreign country.

Eleven hours later, we arrive, home at last. "Welcome back home baby." Marcus plants a kiss on my cheek, I shrug, "hmm, 'home'...". As soon as we step out of the plane and onto the runway, I recognize familiar voices. "She must be in this plane Madame." "Oh, let us see, Joyce." There is some chatter, amongst my entourage but my attention is on the voices I keep hearing outside. "*Nangu!! Oh umntanami*, (Here she is, Oh my child)". My mother rushes towards me, I float across the room to offer her a long hug. "Yoh Mama, bendikukhumbula, (I

missed you.)". "Oh, my child." After a long hug, I kiss her cheek. While doing so, I get to take a look at her face. My mother, she has aged. The wrinkles only add on more grace to her face. "You look so beautiful baby." I cannot hold back the tears, as a lump forms in my throat. "You have not changed Mama." She kisses me, she kisses my face as if I were a baby. With each kiss, I feel her love and how much she has missed me. I also feel her regrets. I am so wrapped up in my mother, but Mrs Van Ryne's comment drags my attention to her. "Swazi, dear, save some of that love for me."

"Oh yes." Before letting go of my mother, I give her one last kiss, then I go to Mrs Van Ryne. "Long time dear." We embrace and my heart feels heavy.

"Indeed."

"Hey," what feels like a small tap on my back grabs my attention. As I pull back, from Mrs Van Ryne's embrace she offers a warm smile. "Hey Waz."

I turn, "Oh Lord."

"Not by a long shot."

"Josh," I am puzzled, perplexed to say the least. "Oh my, Hi Josh." I signal for a hug; our hug is very brief and cold. "You have not changed."

"Good thing I hope," I clear my throat. It all feels strange, being here. It's a bizarre experience. I guess the Van Ryne's offered Mama a lift. "Where are my manners, babe?" Marcus interrupts as he moves closer. As he does so, I see a tiny figure. We are all standing on top of each other, so I barely notice. She walks towards me, as if to cling onto Josh. I

observe this human being. My exact copy, “Sweet Jesus.” I swallow sharply. She is me. The last time I saw her, she was two weeks. I stare at her; she does the same, not blinking. “Are you okay, honey?” Marcus studies me. “She must be experiencing jetlag,” Josh comes to the rescue.

“Uh, yeah, yeah,” my mind is clearly distracted.

“And what’s your name little girl?” Marcus asks. Her voice is soft, but as clear and pure as honey, “I am, Zoe Sithelo van Ryne. Nice to meet you.”

“Aren’t you adorable. I am Marcus.”

They kept the name I gave her; Sithelo. They kept it.

2ND PLACE

The Grey Wolf

Thobile Ndlazi

* * *

“If I had R22.00, I would have gone to Queen Street to buy a KFC schwarma (wrap) and had it for dinner,” I thought as I was preparing my two-minute noodles. I had had a long day on campus, so I could not stand for too long cooking a proper meal.

After cooking noodles, I received a call from my bae (boyfriend). We had a cosy conversation and said our goodbyes. I sat down and started watching a series called Avatar on my tablet and connected my Samsung ear phones. I do this every time I eat. It brings that warm feeling of being home while I am alone in my small single room.

VROOOM!!! What was that? I paused the series. “Argh, it must be one of the Blessers (Sugar- daddies) dropping off a student. These VULTURES!” I thought as I pressed resume on my Mercer tablet.

A few seconds later... “HELP!! HAWEMAAA!!” A loud scream shocked me. I froze. A shiver ran up my spine. My stomach felt like it was packed with ice. Goose bumps developed within the blink of an eye. I tried to stand up. I could not. My knees became weak in a second. I felt powerless. I took heavy steps towards the window. A young lady in her 20’s wearing high-waisted jeans and a crop-top was still sobbing uncontrollably. People rushed to the scene. They formed a mob. The lady told them that her sister had been kidnapped.

According to the Bible, God created a man first for a reason. He wanted men to protect women. He gave them power and strength to protect women. Women follow men. The words man and male form part of words woman and female.

I stood there by the window. Warm tears rolling down my cheeks. I cried a painful cry. We are all connected by love. My heart was heavy. The pain was too much to handle.

The DUT Communication Department had sent emails earlier that week warning us about a grey VW Golf car which abducts women, I thought it was all fiction. I never thought there was a human who could be capable of such cruelty. There I was, looking down at the scene.

Where is love? Did money occupy every space of love from our uncles and brothers to the extent that when they see women, they only see millions from our body parts? They see their ticket out of poverty. Who will protect us if they do that?

I stood there crying on the fifth-floor window of Abdul residence, an outsourced DUT residence located on Victoria Street, just five minutes away from the Berea Station. My mind was frozen. Only tears rolled down my cheeks. The lady could not stop crying. They tried to comfort her.

The mob called the police and they arrived in a heartbeat. Police cars rang sirens and disappeared in the Grey Street light towards Greyville, following the grey Golf. The grey wolf disappeared.

3RD PLACE

My Mother's Teachings

Busiswa Mnqabe

* * *

While those who are mothers to daughters my age taught their children how to pray, avoid boys and make a success out of their lives through education, my mother taught me how to live the luxurious life using nothing more than my body. I recall from the early age of thirteen, how I had grown accustomed to having different men walk in and out the house, I remember all the different cologne scents on my mother's clothing and the different voices that filled her room with moans and groans as she made enough money to maintain our living standard.

When she passed on, just a few weeks before my eighteenth birthday, I was shattered. She had suffered from a mere headache and never did I think it would take her away from me. She had been the only family I knew all my life, the only person I did not mind receiving hurtful words and ill treatment from because she was my mother and I knew that despite everything else, she loved me. I had heard and seen different stories on various media platforms about children who lose mothers and are raised by other family members who do not treat them well and that was my fear, fear of the unknown, the fear of living without my mother.

Her burial was very intimate, mostly people from the township who knew her for the bubbly personality that she had always presented were there to bid her a final farewell and after everything was said and done, I was left on my own. Together with the house, the clothing and the little money

that she left for me, she also left a very important note, one that had a concluding line that read, 'Take care of yourself like how I taught you to.'

The night I lost my innocence still plays itself in my head every day of my life. I was with the Mayor who left his wife and kids at home to be with me for a few hours that evening. There was a disgusting look of lust that he gave me as he watched me undress like he had instructed me to and he told me to dance for him, which I did. It was not long after that when he began touching me. To him I was just an object, and he did everything he wanted to do with me. His rough hands wandered on my body as he began to sweat and breathe heavily on top of me.

My eyelids were tightly pressed together yet the tears still rolled down the side of my face and my teeth were grasped painfully on my lips, yet the sounds of agony were still audible from my mouth.

It felt like he had been at it for hours when he finally stopped. I did not move an inch. I calculated his every move in my head, from when he dressed up to when he threw a stack of money on the bed next to me, saying something along the lines of 'Your mother taught you well,' and his exit marked the beginning of my life as my mother's daughter.

2018

ESSAYS/OPINION PIECES

1ST PLACE

Risen Africa

Lindelwa Mjaja

* * *

You are like an innocent child without sin. When you smile nature claps for you with pleasure and tender as you are clothed with only splendour; purely a symbol of joy, love, and unity. Through hatred, you created love, through pain and hunger you taught survival and through diversity you called them to unity.

Not Israel but before my eyes a chosen nation. The oppression was more than enough to mend the broken pieces of a united diversity, for in every bad comes out the unexpected good. Those who were said to be the worst enemies you called to love, binding them with a very strong bond, unbreakable and unshakeable but remarkable. Forming beautiful colours of the rainbow in the nation with a new great foundation of remorse and rehabilitation, from the cloud of dark imitations into the limelight of knowledge. Clearly, a resurrection in disguise for you rose in the most unclear path.

With pride you make me scream to the top of my voice, proclaiming how blessed I am to be your child. Such an incredible exposure of the creative art of God when a child of unity in diversity was reborn. That after a long period of labour pains which were a sign of something new, bold and beautiful that was going to change the rhythm in every city and bound to live from generation to generation. A bright star worthy of shining, the great lighthouse of a new dawn and a mix that produced a better solution. By your love, in commotion and collision, you planted humanity and reliability of one by another.

Africa; a well-known nation for its unity, humanity, love and respect. Beyond that the most beautiful diverse people with their prominent languages as the icing to the cake. The frame description of abundance's fruits, home of joy and prosperity and centre of assurance for the existence of God. With the friendliest people who can go the extra miles to protect those, they love without a slight of pretence, families by and by not blood or name and those who only find peace and pleasure in others happiness. Not too rich and famous in the economy but treasured with so much wealth in the heart and hands.

May you always strive for the better, live for love, cry for peace and happiness and always steal hearts with your humanity and respect. From death, you rose to be the light of the whole universe, for you were loved and chosen by God. Risen Africa.

2ND PLACE

In Praise of Africa

Sanelisiwe Mabaso

* * *

In certain circles, it is always felt that there is something slightly shameful about being African. That there is an obligation to mock every African institution from football to language to the culture of the continent. Moreover, I am tired of people using their intelligence to look down on other people and our continent.

The guiltiest are the pseudo-intellectuals. They enjoy wealth and status and speak with feigned accents but, they lack pride and they suffer from a form of self-hatred. They are quick to praise the intrusive democracies commonly found in western nations. However, they are extremely critical of anything found in the African continent. They express the desire to permanently leave Africa citing corruption, crime and lack of development as good enough reasons to leave for 'better' nations. Yet they fail to realise that there is no perfect nation. They allow themselves to be seduced by the media who portray western nations in an exaggerated positive light compared to the pitiful light the media sheds on Africa.

Their aversion to the common culture of the continent is insulting, degrading and completely unnecessary. My guess is that colonisation made Africans feel like strangers in their land and this has resulted in deep-rooted self-hate. For far too long Africans have been indoctrinated to believe that if it is African then it is less than the other; this has left mental scars that have lasted for generations. The solution, I believe, is growth.

The beauty of a nation lies in the nation's ability to celebrate the positive while working towards curbing the negative. Accusing Africa of a range of sins and permanently leaving the continent results in a 'brain drain' which is a big loss for the development of our capable continent. Growth involves a clash of different ideas and therefore a change of attitude will be agonising and slow, but we should communicate and try to find solutions.

What does it mean to be truly African and proud? I honestly cannot tell you, but the self-hatred and shame that exists among some Africans are deeply unsettling. We should encourage communication and debate, know the confused and approach them with tactics that will convince them to reconsider their viewpoints. There are still Africans who question my position because they believe it is too 'unrealistic'. I do not agree with them, but I try to understand their perspective. There are certain things people won't always agree on, but I think the answer to the question of whether or not intelligent and formally educated Africans should abandon Africa is obvious. We can all agree that European colonisation has left many scars and we have a long way to go before Africa truly recovers. Nevertheless, Africans newly conscious of the crisis brought on by the legacy of apartheid and colonisation should work towards contributing to the birth of a new identity for the African by standing in rebellion against anti-African teachings. Instead, we should champion our African heritage. Only then will the true greatness of Africa be realised.

3RD PLACE

Africa: The Reservoir of the World

Mpho Ernest Moteane

* * *

Africa is the reservoir of the world. A place where precious things are found. All the minerals such as gold, diamond, coal and oil are found in this beautiful continent. This land is filled with so much riches and rarity. Africa is what I call, 'The place of value'.

If you take a closer look at the Shape of the African continent, you will see that it has the shape of the head. A Head symbolises leadership (which in modern language is understood to be authority), which means that Africa is the head of the world. Most great and influential leaders in history hailed from Africa, which was and still is the destiny of many Africans.

Africans were destined for greatness and leadership as signified by their continent's shape. However, the West came and enslaved and lure them from recognizing their true identity. They enslaved and afflicted them because they feared that if Africans get the freedom to showcase their leadership skills and abilities, the west would be at great risk of being ruled and embittered by them.

However, as the African continent has a head shape, this also means that the problem of Africans is in the mind. Since the mind is in the head, therefore if every African can change his mindset, greatness will be inevitable. Nothing changes until you change the way you think: nothing can stop a man who

has decided to put his mind-power to work. It is not that you're inferior; it is just that in your mind you believe that you're inferior. Change the way you have conditioned your mind and your life will automatically change. One of the greatest ancient and wisest king, Solomon said, "As a man thinketh ... so is he." Whatever you think, that is exactly what you will become. I therefore, believe that God shaped the African continent a head so as to let the Africans know that the greatest key for changing their lives is in changing their minds. If they stop believing that they are inferior, their greatness will show, and if they stop believing that they are cursed, their blessings will manifest. In simpler terms, change what you believe in your mind and your life will automatically change because your life is governed by your thoughts.

Yet again, the fact that Africa is filled with all these precious stones (minerals), also means that we, as Africans are filled with wonderful treasures and precious gifts within us. Africans live in this valuable continent which is a sign that they also are valuable people. An African is filled with so much potential in a way that he can become anything that he aspires to be. God put you in Africa to show you that you are a valuable person with great potentials encapsulated within you.

The West saw the sacred riches within you and they tormented and enslaved you so that you lose sight of who you are. You're an awesome creature but they made you a slave because they were afraid that you will recognize your true identity and become who you were meant to be. Thieves don't break into empty houses, they always come to a house that is filled with riches, treasures and all the glorious things. The fact that they came to Africa is a sign that Africans are valuable and all they wanted was for you to lose sight of your identity. They made you a slave because they knew that once you realised who you were, you would be unstoppable.

In an acrostic manner here is how they define A.F.R.I.C.A(**A**fraid, **F**all, **R**ely, **I**mitate, **C**ursed, **A**fflicted). But according to me, here is the true meaning of A.F.R.I.C.A(**A**bility, **F**ly, **R**eign, **I**nitiate, **C**hosen, **A**rise). They made you **afraid** because they knew you possessed the **ability** to become great. They made you **fall** because they were scared you will **fly** high like an eagle and be above them. They made you **rely** on them but you were born to **reign**. They want you to **imitate** them because they are scared you will **initiate** something great to have your name on. They made you believe you were **cursed** when you were **chosen** even before the foundations of the world. They **afflicted** you but now it is time to **arise** and to release the wonderful treasure that God has placed within you. You are a great man and you're a great woman, don't use their definition of Africa but define your own because if you don't know who you are, they will tell you who you should be.

In the documentary I once watched about lions. I learned that lions are native to Africa and Asia. They were captured and taken to other places so that they can be there too but originally, lions are from Africa. Lions are the kings of their domain. This should teach you something like an African. You are like a lion, Africa is your home. Like a lion, you were born to rule your domain and become the leader. Therefore, be courageous like a lion, don't let them inflict fear on you rather take courage and run after your destiny. No matter how big the prey is, the lion will chase it and persist until it brings it down. Develop this kind of mentality, run after your dream regardless of how big it is and be persistent until you reach it so that you may be fulfilled.

Another interesting thing to note about lions is that they hunt together. They walk as pride. They believe in unity because

lions understand that they can bring down any prey as long as they walk and hunt together as the ancient prophet, Amos exclaimed, "Can two walk together except they agree." This is exactly what Africa needs; Unity. If Africans can be united, they can all achieve great things. Unity is a sign of reconciliation, peace and love. As an old saying goes "I can, you can but together we can do exploits." My African dream is that as Africans we develop unison amongst each other and work together in bettering our wonderful continent. Africa is the land of so much potential, the place of the courageous.

POETRY

1ST PLACE**African skies and thunder thighs*****Minenhle Khazi****** * ***

I pray for the day when we realise that we are all beautiful,
That our dark ebony skin,
Is not of punishment of a particular sin,
When we realise that our big bushy hair,
Are the crowns that we wear,
Because we are Queens
We are women that are crafted and merely not made,
African skies and thunder thighs,
Always staying strong during the lows and the highs,
Our bodies are sculptures,
They are perfectly shaped God made no mistake,
Different sizes, shapes and colours,
Yet we were all born from the same mother!

Crafted with a purpose and vision,
God sent us to earth on a mission,
I see the pain in our eyes,
Our history is written on the back of spines,
We are African women,
You can tell by the swing in our hips,
That we will always be African Queens,
Souls that are in sync with the universe.

2ND PLACE**The Ornament of Africa: An African Woman*****Luthando Shembe****** * ***

A living proof of life's cradle
That it all began in Africa when God created a man but that
man was not really a man without the woman I mean the
womb man, the man with a womb
So God out of his wisdom
Extracted the lonely rib of a man to create a woman
And thus the mother of all nations
was introduced to the face of this mightily beautiful land.

An African woman, the ornament of Africa
A genetic processor
The children's protector A man's helper
And for many souls to come an ancestor
Yes, she is an architect of love
with smiles drawn on the dark and lovely faces of her people
as evidence of her art
Such a pure soul like the doves of Louis Trichardt that bring
joy and harmony with their melodious cooing.
A queen by nature
Whose crown influenced the shape of the pyramids of Egypt
A warrior of kindness by heart
Whose body waist and hips inspired the curves of the
bushmen's bow
And when her land was taken away from her with cunningness
and cruelty,
she cried a great cry and her tears were given the name of
one of her conquerors, Queen Victoria!
She can still feel the pain even today

when she sees how most of her children have forsaken her
teachings and cherished the way of the coloniser
Even so, she is still an African woman,
the ornament of Africa

3RD PLACE**That revolution song*****Noluthando Loveness Mtshali****** * ***

That revolution song was sung deep in the depths of the
mines
Where our fathers dug for gold
Which was worth more than their souls
In the heart of the earth their faces darker than coal they sang
that song,
With their sweat keeping the ground soft, lifting the pick
deeper into the earth they went
That song was for my Africa, my beautiful Africa
As she fell to her knees stripped of all her wealth
Her children made to be slaves in their own home
These slaves, her children would never be fed
I sang that song in sorrow,
My beautiful Africa do not weep
Land of my fathers do not grieve forever
That song was sung standing in the graves of fallen heroes
I sang it for Nelson Mandela when he was in prison
I sang it for Solomon Mahlangu, Steve Bantu Biko, Robert
Sobukwe
It comforted the soldiers, each rising sun they would fight for
freedom
And each night sung their song
That revolution song of hope
A LUTA CONTINUA!!!

SHORT STORIES

1ST PLACE

Lizzy Abrahams

Carissa Marncce

* * *

Lizzy Abrahams arrived on Peterson Street at 6 pm on a Sunday evening. She swung her legs out of her yellow 1960's VW bug and onto the rocky ground of Mama Jackie's shebeen. The Eastern Cape's icy dew had already fallen this time of day, Lizzy's heels slowly sunk into the muddy ground. She drew her handbag close to her breast with a deep sigh she lowered her head and whispered, "Help me lieve Jesus."

The shebeen was packed at this hour. Smoke came billowing out of the building like a chimney, while the methodicalness of drunken men caused them to collapse on the grass outside. Clutching onto their empty bottles they reminisce on mischief that Friday and Saturday night generated. The washout brick-faced building was surrounded by darkness except for the overhanging light that shone over the plastic Castle Lager sign. Lizzy placed her hand reluctantly on the entrance door to push it open, fearing that one of the members of the *Griqua* congregational church might see her, especially nosy Sister Lousia, who always seemed to be meddling in her business. She was no stranger to this worn-out chestnut door, many Sunday evenings she would come to Mama Jackie's Shebeen in search of her husband Hendrik. After a full week of hard labour, he used the seventh day of the week to forget about his duties before starting the cycle again on Monday. Hendrik was well past the age of retirement, but he believed that death would come faster to those who agreed to rest for the remainder of their lives. Lizzy navigated her way prestigiously past drunken men to Hendrik's favourite table. She found him

resting the pillow of his body on the table and pitied him as one pities a muzzled faced pug. “*Arme ding*,” she sighed.

“Hendrik come, we are going home!” he could barely sit up straight let alone get up. Hendrik mumbled a command as she placed his brawny arm on her fragile shoulders. Once she had finally got him to stand up, Lizzy was suddenly enthralled by a story being told by a rugged-looking man on the next table. “*Beware of the mountains for they call you home.*” The man spoke of adventures from different parts of the country and the thrill they brought. She stood bewitched for at least 20 minutes before she regained her wits and continued with the task of getting Hendrik into the car.

It was 8pm when Lizzy got Hendrik into the house. He managed to stumble across the stoep to their bedroom; she left him face down on his pillow and closed the door. In her mind, she was still being haunted by the stories of the rugged man from the shebeen. Lizzy had no idea why these stories interested her; in her mind she was well past the age of adventure and had commitments to her husband, her church and her community. Nevertheless, she longed to hear more of his stories about the Drakensburg caves or the free-roaming penguins of boulders beach. With no hesitation, she rushed to the kitchen to get some biltong and bread and put it into a lunch box. She jumped into her yellow bug and rode to Mama Jackie’s shebeen for a second time. Her delicate knees clutched together as she swung her legs out onto the ground. This time the air was colder; she knew her legs would make her pay for all this excitement later on. She slammed the door and walked up the rocky pathway as fast as she could. The building was still as she left it, full of smoke with drunken men parading outside. Lizzy walked strategically to the table she found the rugged man on and just as she hoped he was there. Feeling a bit uncertain she handed him the lunch box, he looked up at her. “*eet*” she pleaded.

He ripped the lid off and began devouring the biltong and bread in front of her. Lizzy smiled nervously and sat down on the chair across from him. “Tell me one of your stories *asseblief*.” The man chuckled and wiped his mouth with his sleeve and began one of many tales that would be shared between them.

Over the course of a few months, the ritual between Lizzy and the rugged man continued.

Each Sunday evening at precisely 6 pm she would arrive at Mama Jackie’s shebeen, navigate her way to the table right at the back and place a lunchbox with biltong and bread in front of him as a sort of payment for his stories. On one particular evening, the two were interrupted by the voice of Pastor Jan and Sister Louisa from the *Griqua* congregational church.

“I told you Pastor she comes here every Sunday, and she calls herself a Christian, Sies!” sneered Sister Louisa.

“What am I seeing!” exclaimed Pastor Jan. “*Haai!* Lizzy what is a good standing woman like you doing in the devil’s playground?” questioned the Pastor.

The enchantment from Lizzy’s face turned to sudden embarrassment. She folded her hands neatly in her lap and faced the ground like a child receiving a scolding from their parents. “You are a hypocrite my sister, pretending to be an upstanding woman in our community while you keep the company of thieves and criminals. This is a great sin, and you need to repent immediately, or the lord will turn his back on you!” yelled Pastor Jan as if he was preaching to his congregation. “You must leave immediately with me, and we will prepare the reconciliation oils,” commanded the Pastor.

Lizzy clutched onto her handbag and was getting up to leave with the Pastor when she had a sudden epiphany. Her entire life had been about pleasing someone else, when she was little, it was being obedient to her father, when she got married it was being an obedient wife and now Pastor Jan was telling her to repent of the one activity that had given her the most excitement in years.

“Hurry up Lizzy we must get to the church before the maintenance man locks up.” “No.” mumbled Lizzy under her breath.

“What was that?” questioned the pastor.

“*Aikona*, I think she said she likes being a sinner!” barked Sister Lousia.

Lizzy raised her head and fixed her eyes on the two of them. “I may be a sinner, but I am going to be a sinner that makes their own choices” declared Lizzy. “Thanks for your concern, Pastor Jan but I would rather have adventures than a reputation.” She turned to the rugged man “And as for you my friend I thank you for all your stories, but I think it’s time I start living my own.” With that remark Lizzy Abrahams stormed out of the shebeen.

When the following Sunday evening came Lizzy Abrahams swung her legs out of her yellow 1960’s VW bug but this time, not onto Mama Jackie’s shebeen’s rocky ground instead of lush green grass beside a lake in the Drakensburg.

Glossary of terms used:

Liewe Jesus – Dear God

Griqua – A Subgroup of multiracial coloured people who have an early history in the Cape colony

Arme ding – Poor thing

Stoep- A veranda in front of the house

Eet- Eat

Asseblief- Please

Sies- A remark of disgust

Haai- A word to strongly protest something

Aikona- An emphatic word to say no

2ND PLACE

The mighty Khabazela's repentance

Siphesihle Mthethwa

* * *

"It's been ages since I waited for my umqombothi! All this woman know is to drag her lazy feet. It seems like I wasted my lobola here. Where the hell is she? MaDlamini!" The roar of Mkhize chased even his dog away. Bhekani and Lindiwe made sure not to be in their father's sight. Pity for MaDlamini who had no choice but to respond to the call for it was not to be ignored. If it was by any chance, last night's history may repeat itself in this early cold and drizzling morning.

"So... so... sokha... sokhaya..." stuttered MaDlamini in a shaking voice as she suddenly got cold feet. She knew her husband never had to repeat himself when he called. "So... so... usunamalimi MaDlamini? Where is my IsiZulu?" Mocked Mkhize. MaDlamini came into the room with traditional beer. She knelt before her husband and gave him to drink. He took the beer and without even saying thank you, he took the beer with a big smile on his face as he held it. His smile only lasted for less than ten seconds then he turned to her in a mean and disgusted look.

"MaDlamini! is this my traditional beer or your mother's spit?" "I'm afraid baba that's the last of it and I intend to prepare some later today". He shook his head in disbelief "This is an insult. I am a Zulu man, and my tummy cannot be filled by this drop you just gave me. It seems as if you are forgetting your place MaDlamini. Uyivila MaDlamini!" Mkhize said as he took the first sip of the beer. MaDlamini asked for her husband's permission to go and help wherever she could

at the Langa's homestead not so far from their home.

"That's the only thing you know MaDlamini! Imizi yabantu. I do not have my traditional beer and yet you want to go and feed other men. Are there not enough women to help at the Langa's? can't they do a thing without you? what are you? Their foreman?" yelled Khabazela. MaDlamini wiped tears and humbly apologised to her husband and reminded him how Mrs Langa helped them during their daughter's umhlonyane the previous year. After hearing his wife's plea, he reluctantly permitted her to go.

Soon after she left, someone sang clan praises at the Khabazela's gate. "Sikhulekile ekhaya koMkhize, Khabazela, Ngunezi..." said a man at the gate. "You sing praises in the wee hours of the morning at my house, is your business at your own home too much for you?" rudely replied Khabazela as he invites the man in. "Oh, it's you Mbovu, how are you? what's wrong? is your wife dancing in your head?" Ngubane knowing how rude Khabazela is turned a blind eye to that and asked for a drink. Khabazela mocked his wife's beer and told Ngubane that he was on his way to attend a ritual ceremony at the Langa's

The two men left Mkhize's home and headed to Langa's home. The atmosphere at the Langa's homestead was joyful. There was noise everywhere, at times you needed to shout when you spoke with someone. Mr Langa was performing a welcoming ceremony for his son Xolani who was working at the mines. Mrs Langa was also in high spirits about the ceremony because that meant that should she and her husband pass on, there are two men to look after their home and children.

The Langa traditional ceremony had been a success, and everyone feasted very well. MaDlamini was already at home

when her husband came back. She was busy brewing the traditional beer for her husband. She had hoped that on the following day she would wake up early and cook it. Khabazela entered the house and went straight to his chair and chatted with his wife. They revised the day and spoke about how profound was Khabazela's talent for leading traditional songs. They would sing some and Khabazela would dance with his feet as he sat on the chair.

Everything was merry until Khabazela said he was thirsty. MaDlamini shivered as she knew she had nothing to quench her lion's thirst and she knew that the lion will devour her alive. She spoke softly, "Baba, I gave you the last beer in the morning. As you see me up and down in the house I am brewing another one my husband as I have pro...". She could not even finish her sentence. Khabazela roared like a trapped lion wanting to be set free. He shouted at his wife demanding the traditional beer. Pity for MaDlamini she could not give her and for that, she was beaten like a criminal who had been beaten by a mob.

Meanwhile at the Langa's. The brothers, Xolani and Sphe were chatting about how Xolani's ceremony had been. "Ay bafo, the ancestors are happy that you are home, look at the rain outside?" said Sphe. "Impela brother, indeed I am happy to be home as well. I have long been searching for myself," replied Xolani. The brothers went on about the success of the ceremony and about the girls they took fancy of. Things turned awkward when Sphe mentioned Lindiwe Mkhize.

His brother warned him about her human version of a lion father who was feared even by chickens. He even reminded Sphe of how MaDlamini was bruised in her neck. Sphe, being a social worker got sick worried about the violence that took place at the Mkhize home and he had a perfect plan to speak to Mkhize about his behaviour.

The following morning, MaDlamini was preparing to go to church and making breakfast for her husband. She had been beaten badly the previous night and she limped. She called her daughter Lindiwe and sent her to the shop to buy bread since they had none. Her son Bhékani walked in and greeted her calmly and asked how were her pains. Bhékani,” but mom I do not like the way dad treats you. sometimes I feel like knocking his head with my knobkerrie.” “No my son, he is still your father and he is my husband. He will change, you will be surprised” said MaDlamini. Bhékani was not convinced but he could not argue with his mom. He asked for her permission to go with his friend to take the cattle to the dip.

On his way out he bumped into his father Khabazela, who nearly knocked him down with his fighting stick and instructed him to inject the sick goat. MaDlamini warmly greeted her husband, “Khabazela wami”. Khabazela replied rudely “You must be delighted for coming to earth with Khabazela”. “Haw baba, how can you harshly respond to my greeting?”. Khabazela paid no attention to her question and instead asked for his daughter: “Where is that useless lazy daughter of yours? I have not seen her.” “Hawu baba, you can’t say that she is your daughter too. I sent her to buy bread so that I may make breakfast for you. I have also prepared clothes for you so that we may go to church” said MaDlamini.

Khabazela laughed mockingly and said, “MaDlamini, how many times must I tell you that the church is for women and men are supposed to go and drink. You are swearing me in the yards of Ngunezi, you have some nerve woman!” Khabazela left her standing like that. He stopped not very far from her and pretended to beat her “Ngizoku... phinda!” MaDlamini nearly fainted but was glad she was not beaten. Soon after her husband had left, she cancelled making breakfast and left for church.

Meanwhile, Mr Langa was in high spirit in the morning after his son's ceremony. He called both his sons to make preparations for the men who were to arrive for a traditional beer and some leftover meat from the ceremony. The sons obeyed and the men arrived. Xolani brought traditional beer. Soon after he left, Sphe came with a bottle of an expensive whisky. The men triumphed at the arrival of Sphe and asked him questions about his well-being and what he does for a living. He explained calmly that he was a social worker and is based in Durban. They also asked what does a social worker do. He thought to himself, this was the chance to pass the message to Khabazela and he started speaking:

"My job as a social worker is to work closely with homes that are affected by violence. This is picked up from a child's behaviour at school and we are trained to probe a child into speaking the truth. We cannot run away from the fact that in some homes there are lions who roar loud and are ready to devour anything on their way. The kids may run away and hide but the poor woman becomes the devil's prey. If need be, we involve the police and we take the lion and lock it in the zoo with other lions so that there may be peace at home. It is better to be respected than to be feared. Work on earning your respect as a man and not to be feared because that may affect the children psychologically. What example are you setting to your sons?"

He was so pleased with himself at the thought that he got through to Khabazela, who seemed not to be paying attention to him but the traditional beer in his hands. However, He picked up the mentioning of lions and asked for clarity. He got furious and chased Sphe away when he discovered that by lions he was referring to men who beat up their wives like him. The men drank and had meat. Unusually Khabazela left a bit early

for his home. He was not too drunk either, he was just tipsy. On the way home, he started revising what Sphe had said earlier. He thought: "Ewu! What a monster I have become. Am I respected or feared?"

The Mkhizes must be turning in their graves for the man I have become. Is what I am what I want my son to be? I do not recall ever supporting him as he grows. What about my daughter? If I am like this will she ever want to marry and have a husband? Will I ever receive her lobola? My dear wife, I remember the day we got married, I said to her till death do us part, it seems like and I am the one killing her. Maybe she is dead already, all that's left is for her to have eternal rest. She must be a walking corpse..." He even thought out loud and got shocked as he arrived home. A moment later, his wife joined him from church, she walked with her daughter who ran away in the sight of her father.

MaDlamini reluctantly moved closer to him. She feared that she may be beaten once again since the traditional beer was not yet ready and it was unusual for her husband to be home early.

Khabazela made her feel at ease, "Fear not my wife, we are not fighting today, come and sit with me here. Lindiwe!" He called his daughter, who came quickly with his chair. "Sit next to your mother my daughter. Where is your brother? I want to speak with you as a family". By a coincidence, Bhékani walked in and sat where his father pointed. Khabazela started addressing his family. "I have had an eye-opener, or I had deep thoughts. It does not matter which one is which, what matters is that from now going forth, things will change. I know that things are not well here in my house, and I am the root cause. I am very sorry for that, MaDlamini, I have failed you as a husband, Lindiwe, I have failed you as a father. Bhékani, I have

failed you as a father and a mentor. From now moving forward, I shall support you every step of the way. Take only the good on earth and leave out the bad. By so doing, you will grow up and be a man I never was."

MaDlamini cried, thinking about what she has gone through at her home but she happy that those days were over. Khabazela is becoming the man she married, the man who loved him. Lindiwe left to prepare supper. Bhekani thanked his father and asked for permission to rehearse with his group which he led in traditional dance. Khabazela gladly permitted him and asked him to go call his group so that he too may see what they were doing and how they were doing.

He started boasting about his son, "You see our son MaDlamini? He is a leader" he said. "He took from you myeni wami. He couldn't have a better father". she replied. They looked at each other and smiled to themselves. Khabazela was deeply remorseful inside for the abusive man he had been. MaDlamini was crying inside but she had hope that her husband has changed.

3RD PLACE

For My Dear Daughter

Benedicta Makhaye

* * *

I believe that a mother and daughter should share everything emotionally and otherwise. So today I decided to write to you because some things are better written than said aloud. When it is written in ink it is permanent never to be erased, it is incriminating because I could never go back on my word and also you can always go back to read it again and again.

Things are hard without you here; little things remind me of you. The pretty baby clothing in the shops, the pregnant lady walking past, even the annoying baby in the taxi I wish was you. I fail to explain the feelings I have as I carry on with my day-to-day stuff but what I want to tell you is, you are always and will be always in my heart and thoughts. I feel an empty space and no matter how hard I try it is not filled. The love I have for you is the love I will not have for any other person. Most times I cry in remembering what could have been.

Our relationship is different because I thought by this time I would have you in my arms. By this time, you and I would be the best of friends, I would call you even after the biggest of storms. By this time, I would know that you need me, I would know that I have to hurry what I am doing because at home there is a little creature dying for my attention. Our relationship is different from the one that I have with your older sister because you were stillborn. I cannot hold you in my arms, I cannot make you calm, nor can I make you my best friend. I am not even sure if you need me. But I love you no less than how much I love your sister. You are my second child

and if someone asks me how many children I have I say two without even thinking.

As much as I know the medical term of why you died 'ABRUPTIO PLACENTA' I still fail to understand why it happened to us as only 1% of pregnancies end this way. Do all women in the same situation ask this question or is it only me? Am I selfish for asking because I can have another baby when some cannot even conceive and yearn for the 33 weeks that I had with you? Some even say it's better that you have a stillbirth than losing a grown child, but how do they know if they have never experienced the pain of having a stillbirth? I speak for all women when I say losing a child is difficult and the pain is always there no matter at which stage of their life they pass.

One day I hope I will have other children but always know that in my heart your place will never be taken.

2019

ESSAYS/OPINION PIECES

1ST PLACE

Humanity

Asanele Ndzinya

* * *

I miss my home, my community, my parents, my siblings, my dogs and their love. I miss being called the son of my father or his forefathers. I miss brothers, the brothers who taught me how to fight, how to woo women and how to survive, while I thought I was being exploited. I will forever be grateful for it is all that you taught me that has made me who I am. I miss my place of serenity. I remember the fire with which we use to warm ourselves. Every evening we used to sit together, surrounding it as a family; listening to beautifully told stories that were narrated by my granny. There in the corner lay my dog Tiger, lazy to bark, lazy to wake enslaved to sleeping. My pregnant sister always fought with it, but it could always find its way back to the corner.

I miss herding, I enjoyed watching cows coming from the veld because that is where I get to witness God's creativity, I mean the grass, variant trees blown by the gentle breeze, the melodious voices of birds singing, I like it there for I get to witness the sun on its way to bed. I miss the dung smell, the fresh milk in the morning produced by the cows. I like the colostrum more, I enjoy watching cows fighting, the experience is incredible. I miss staying in the mountains and forests watching boys turned into real men, indeed tomorrow will be way better than today. I love music for it is my therapy and my source of motivation. I do miss the musical concerts in my village that are normally held on Saturdays. The love for music here is real; music defines us; we have given our souls to it.

This community is all we have, we lookout for it, and we care for it. The support system here is inexplicable. Togetherness is power, even when the enemy was trying to break us apart, we firmly stood together for unity is what we breathe, we are unity, and unity is us. We were born of love and solidarity. As disseminated as we may be, we invariably pray for one another for we know there is no one without the other. Even our mothers back at home had starved themselves praying for our safe return, and for that, we will forever be grateful. We are the descendants that truly understand the spirit of Ubuntu. We are a garden planted with harmony, kindness, respect and humility.

None of this is practised in the city; for the city is filled with greed, cookery and violence. There is no spirit of togetherness for it is a dog eats dog setting. Here there is little love, fractured love for humanity, kindness and gentleness. Too much love for profitability and productivity. The city life has poisoned many souls; it has barricaded the world with hatred. City people prefer to think, and judge too much and feel too little, they watch too much and act too little. They have forgotten the way of life. Where I come from, we do not run away from thieves, criminals or witches but we look for them to ensure they face the music instead. Here in the city, I am greatly amazed at how so many human beings lack humanity. They would rather live with each other's misery than live with each other's happiness. City people care too much about looks, gossip, phoney stuff like fake nails and hair. The knowledge they have acquired has made them cynical and selfish to an extent.

However, the city is very big and rich and pregnant with a variety of dreams. It can provide for us all. If only we could look at one another through the eyes of humanity, only then

we would realise that together we can live freely, be happy and simple. I think there has to be more togetherness and the billboards should be encouraging love, humanity and the spirit of Ubuntu, we don't need Aunt Caroline that much. More than information, profitability and productivity we need humanity. More than looks, make-ups weaves and feigned smiles; we need true love, true hearts and true smile. These are the qualities that make life pleasant.

2ND PLACE

Is Our Government Blind?

Romania Kistensamy

* * *

Patrice Lumumba said, “Political independence has no meaning if it is not accompanied by rapid economic and social development.” A nationalist who united a nation with hope and whose ideas of an independent Congo free from the shackles of the colonizer was indeed ahead of its time. What is Nationalism though? This fundamental political ideology has been tainted throughout history. The basic notion of nationalism is valuing upon anything else your country, your people and the continued advancement of one's nation. Sadly, though I believe our current government has very little intentions of putting its people first. With a current list of failed policies, a struggling economy and basic services reflecting the very image of its corrupt gatekeepers, it is clear to see that we need help. We often hear the President and other officials speak about the Fourth Industrial Revolution, almost in biblical terms; a solution to all our current ills; an age of technology and innovations. Our government needs to be able to reach out to the pioneers of this technological era who have the knowledge to assist and the willingness to collaborate. Truly an exciting time and a time of potential great progress.

Unfortunately, it seems our South African Government is “applying the brakes” instead of accelerating us towards greatness. Our leaders hold on to certain old, outdated foreign policies and alliances which are not in the best interests of the nation. The United Nations (UN) recently released a list of the world's top ten countries that are

leaders in innovations. One country that stands out is the State of Israel. A country which our government has deemed to be unworthy of relations. According to the previous Minister of International Relations and Co-operation Lindiwe Sisulu, South Africa has "no relationship with Israel". This essentially downgraded our embassy to a liaison office that has no political mandate, no trade mandate and no development cooperation mandate. An extremely short-sighted and ill-advised decision considering what we can gain from strengthened ties with that country. Israel has revolutionised farming and agriculture.

With our countries current land redistribution project set to take place soon, new farmers would be able to benefit tremendously from Israeli expertise such as drip irrigation which reduces the water needs of a plant by up to 90% and at the same time increases crop yield by 15%. This remarkable innovation is feeding almost a billion people worldwide. According to Stats SA, 6.8 million South Africans experienced hunger in 2017. This is the reality our people face, and it is unacceptable. Israel recycles 86% of its wastewater using new technologies. A combination of drip irrigation with Israeli technology in water recycling would result in greater food security and clean water for South Africans. Given the fact that water and food security are of great concern in South Africa's growing population, with an estimated population growth expected to reach 73 million people by 2050, South Africa will have to produce 50% more food or face a catastrophic shortage. South Africa is a water-scarce country. A recent example of a water crisis in South Africa was in the Western Cape where we saw on media outlets people queuing with buckets for water as taps run dry. The good news is we have an ocean.

Desalination- the process of removing salt from water- is also

a revelatory concept. Israel is on course to produce 1.1 billion cubic meters of water annually by 2025. Israel has five desalination plants in operation currently using state of the art technology and innovation they have found a solution to their water needs.

A leading nation in the science of desalination our country can learn much from. These are only a few notable mentions. Israelis have made leaps in the medical field, safety and security as well as renewable energy, with Israel proclaiming that after 2030 there will no new petrol or diesel cars being sold. With the cost of crude oil, and coal used in coal fire power plants saving South Africa will need to look to countries like Israel to help solve their future energy needs. Unemployment has reached an all-time high in South Africa, hovering at the 29% mark while Israel is currently one of the world leaders in start-up companies. According to Start-Up Nation Central a non-profit organisation that helps Israeli businesses connect with the globe; they estimate that between 1100 to 1380 start-ups are formed every year in Israel. Better relations with Israel could create opportunities for employment and through collaboration locally and globally.

Especially amongst our youth who are characterised as being “techno-savvy” and technologically advanced. If the fourth industrial revolution was a ship, then Israel would be its captain, however, the South African government’s refusal to get “on board” is a massive barrier to the growth and development of the nation. Our government’s old political alliance should not blur our vision of what is best for our people currently and in the future. The conflict between Palestine and Israel and Israel’s “alleged” occupation of the West Bank, which was previously occupied by Jordan is one of the key factors in our government taking an anti-Israel stance. This is the *height of hypocrisy* in my opinion. South Africa has an

extremely close relationship with China, a country that has violated the sovereignty of Tibet. Invading it in 1950 and has subsequently occupied it, resulting in a million deaths. China is not a democracy. There is no freedom of speech, no freedom of religion and no democratically elected leaders.

They are also not on the UN list of top 10 countries in innovation. How is it that our government views such a country so highly yet totally disregards Israel? Israel is a democracy, in fact, the only democracy in the middle east. It has democratically elected leaders. There is freedom of speech, religion and freedom to express your sexuality. Over 1.5 million Arab Israeli live and work in Israel. Jewish and Arab serve in the Knesset, the national legislature of Israel. The Israeli army also performs many humanitarian missions throughout the world. The latest mission was in Brazil where the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) sent 130 soldiers to provide aid and rescue people from southeast Brazil when a dam collapsed resulting in hundreds of people going missing.

The BRICS alliance which includes Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa have all with the exception of South Africa renewed or rekindled relations with Israel. This is undoubtedly a decision made in the best interest of their respected nations. More and more countries and governments are waking up to the fact that Israel is most certainly a beacon of hope in a dark world. With their inventions already proving to be essential in the future of humanity. One such example was made in Cameroon where an Israeli invention helped combat a cholera epidemic. This invention uses a sophisticated filtration system, this device provided clean drinking water to people in high-risk areas, ultimately saving lives.

In the words of Sir Winston Churchill during the Battle of Britain, "Give us the tools and we'll finish the job". This is the

mentality I expect from our leaders. I am not referring to South Africa asking for handouts. I am a proudly South African, but I believe that we require collaboration rather than self-inflicted isolation. I remain hopeful that the SA government will “wake” up and puts its people first. We need not see the State of Israel as an enemy to South Africa, but we should embrace them as friends who if given the opportunity can enlighten our great nation and provide a better life for its people. This is the responsibility of a government who respects its people and a government worthy of respect in return.

3RD PLACE

A Country Reborn

Nkosinathi Mkize

* * *

Democracy is interesting from a South African context. South Africa's democracy has been experiencing many challenges in the past few years. From clashing opinions, principles and failure to implement policies that were drafted jointly for the betterment of the society. The youth is unemployed and is reverting to drugs and substance abuse. The public is frustrated and feels hard done. This becomes a domino effect that ends up resulting in a volatile society that, from time to time, boils over and clashes with the authorities. In the end, society disintegrates into a state of absolute chaos. This is somehow surprising because the same people jumping and chanting on the streets voted the leaders to power. How are people failing to appoint just and honest leaders to lead them to the next huddle of democracy, could we be missing something? Democracy and education go hand in hand. Democracy is a system of living and education is a way of maintaining the status quo by promoting existing values such as obedience to learners to ensure that the system is barely challenged.

In this piece, we are going to critically examine the challenges of our young democracy. The first being the issue of higher education. I am going to demonstrate how the higher education system is flawed and what can be done to change it. Then I will discuss the need of educating voters and leaders. Then our voting system and the possibility of improving it. Finally, I will evaluate the possibility that we are overreacting as a society as this might be just a stage in our democracy

that we will eventually get over. Our education system is divided into basic and higher education. Basic education has made enormous strides even though it has its flaws however the focus of this piece will be on higher education. It will be on how the structure of higher education is upside down and hence affects the socio-economic status of the country.

Higher education comprises of universities, universities of technology and FET colleges. Ideally, the majority of society should be in FET colleges. This is because they are supposed to provide practical courses that have less critical thinking and more day-to-day practical skills that are essential in the industry. Courses like plumbing, electrical technicians are essential for the functioning of all professional fields. If a person needs to develop their knowledge further, they then have opportunities to proceed to universities of technology where their knowledge is supposed to be improved and deepened.

Alternatively, for those people who are less practical, and logic inclined, they are supposed to take the route of the university. These people are generally few and society needs few of university graduates compared to more from universities of technology and even more from FET colleges. A recent practical example in South Africa was during the preparations for the 2010 FIFA World Cup. Artisans had to be hired from other countries in order to fill the gaping void in the project. Yet in South Africa, we keep producing more and more university graduates that will be frustrated and unemployed. The other youth will be unqualified for practical skills that could have been learnt. In addition, it is not as if they do not qualify because they only need grade nine to get to college so obviously there is something wrong at the top. There is also the issue of perception. We, as a society, take these jobs lightly but they are essential and that is where opportunities for employment could arise.

Unqualified youth that were forced in the logical route are frustrated; graduates from universities that are surplus to requirements may be employed if they are lucky or be employed for something completely irrelevant to their qualification, which contributes massively to unrest, frustration and chaos. Democracy was the system of living in the city-state of Athens and Socrates was concerned about a number of issues then that can also be identified in our democracy today. Democracy is ultimately about involving every member of the society in the decision-making process of the society. This is good because it means no person is more important than the other and that every voice counts. However, in the city where democracy was conceived, Athens, Socrates recognised that whenever a decision has to be made, it must be put to a vote.

In the sixth book of “the republic” in the dialogues of Plato, Socrates engages in a conversation with another character. Socrates asks, “If you are heading out on a journey in sea, who would you want to decide who is in charge of the vessel. Just people educated in the rules and demands of seafaring?”

“The latter of course” the character responded.

“Then why do we think just anyone should decide who leads the country?” Socrates asked. The point here is that voting is a critical skill. Socrates was against the idea that everyone can vote. Rather he believed that only people who are “well educated” and hence critical in their approach should vote. This was not to say that he was against the idea that everyone should vote but rather that people should be educated first before they are given the massive responsibility to vote: which ultimately determines the direction and state of the nation.

This is therefore a strong belief that education should enlighten people and should not just promote existing establishments and obedience but should also empower people to contribute to improving the existing conditions. There is also the issue, which I believe is key, of education. Firstly, the education of the leaders. Plato noted the carefree attitude of Athens society towards education. This meant that when people were voted to power, they didn't have training for what is to come. This presented problems when it comes to carrying out duties that are expected because the person chosen by the people may be clueless about what to come. Our democracy can presently identify with this issue.

Often, we see this in local government elections. Chancellors elected just because they may be perceived as decent and helpful to the community. However, they have no training for the position they are about to assume. Some may even be illiterate or computer illiterate. In essence, this means the person is not qualified to do the job. However, can we even draw that line because the system does not take that into account? The qualities for the job are not important in the voting system; rather it is the popularity that counts. This is a cause for concern. The capacity of the average person in a society to critically examine a situation is of utmost importance when a leader is to be elected for a position. Critical thinking is supposed to be induced by the education people receive in schools and beyond. This means that if the education system is inefficient then the election processes end up being popularity contests, which defeats the genuine purpose of voting. In the end, the people suffer because not all the promises that were made will be delivered and this will only cripple the functionality of our democracy.

The second challenge democracy experiences is that it does not provide a suitable alternative for the people who did not

agree with the majority decision. This means even though a decision has been taken democratically, there will still be tremors shaking the foundations underneath. One man, one vote sound nice. It is catchy and it makes one feel part of the process and be convinced that no one, in society, holds a higher voice than the other. The problem with voting in the first place is that the decisions are almost never unanimous. This means a portion of the society will have to endure being led by someone whom they do not fancy and will have to be miserable for the next 5 years.

This clearly shows that the system does not take into account the feelings (which are important to maintaining rest in the society). It is for this reason that I believe that the “preference voting system” is probably the better option for the growth of our democracy. This system allows voters to arrange the candidates that they would like to see lead them in the correct order. This significantly alters the landscape. It means that the victorious candidate will be someone who was first, the second or third choice for the majority of the voting population. This means that there will be less division within the society. It will help with minimizing the issue of the voting process for a serious position ending up being a popularity shootout between top candidates.

The other benefit is using the preferential system; society has a bigger influence on deciding the “opposition party”. When people feel the party that they have been loyal to for a long time is not delivering, they may feel it is time for other parties to deliver but the feelings of the average person often overpower the logic and critical decision and end up voting emotionally. Voting is not supposed to be an emotional decision but rather a logical decision. The preferential system does not take away any power when compared to a one-person vote but rather it adds power. It allows the voter to

decrease the power of one party without completely abandoning them. This makes change smoother and possible compared to dumping the party completely which is difficult and the parties not delivering rely on the emotional attachment of the people.

It should now be clear the role that higher education should be playing to society. It should allow the people to challenge systems and be open-minded. Voting alone is useless in a democracy but the real power in voting lies in the reasoning capacity of the voters. The more learned the voters are, the less emotional they will be when voting. This should lead to a prosperous democracy that grows indefinitely. It is also crucial to consider the possibility that this is just a stage that every democracy goes through. This would mean that these problems would eventually be resolved as we constantly try to find the balance as a society. As the Scottish professor, Alexander Tyler, noted in 1787, a democracy last for a cycle of about two hundred years. With just that in mind, this means we would only be ten percent in our democracy and that only screams one thing: patience. It is also important to note that it has not been all bad. The fact that as a young black man I can be able to express myself on such platforms openly about such sensitive topics is a testament to the progress we have made. Basic education is reaching most of the people throughout South Africa. Even though there are so many imbalances that still need addressing, it would be hypocritical to relegate the progress made to shadows down below.

This is therefore a call for one and all to start embracing the next step of this long walk, for many: to economic freedom and to exploring the multifaceted of our society and ensure that this system of democracy which is meant to serve the people does so and not demolish progress and be exploited by crucks who just want to feed themselves and forget about

the needs of the society, that entrusted them with the responsibility in the first place. Even more importantly, it is a call for academics and society alike to lead the transformation of our education. This will ensure that the skill of voting (due to critical thinking being enhanced) is enhanced and those who lead us are trained for such responsibilities, which will eventually breed a fruitful democracy for a country reborn.

POETRY

1ST PLACE

June 16 - The Midst of the Hectors

Khodani Ramabulana

* * *

Deep down was the sky shining,
Gasps of air was the blood drowning,
Never was I to see the redlining,
Bullets were the last Hector clothing of the last ironing.

Was it galore or resentment of tribalism?

Or the iron ore verbs breaking the barriers around racism?
Or the heartless core of the triangular colour prism?
Print out the price of the crime before the gunpoint,
Missionaries of yesterday eating off the sins of the white joint.

It was the one plus one that roamed the mind,
The one minus the pun of the colour blind,
The killing of the broad subject kind,
Educational torture was the bones that grind
Before the soul left, and the bodies behind.

Listen to the cries of the paper in their wallets,
Listen to the lies and blood they kept in their pockets,
Listen to their deception of integrity between their teeth,
Respond to their calling of the dark ground beneath,
As the curtains fell from the ashes of what the Hectors
breathe.

Peace does not say it's the fault of the black or white nation,
But the indisputable, indecisive hate after the creation,
Of the compost of every book and its dictation,

**And the claims of uneven blood that created a hole in
education.**

**Rise Earth child, be your motivation,
Rise African child, be a demonstration.**

2ND PLACE**Father don't...*****Andile Ngubane****** * ***

Even if the sun rises or sun sets or the oceans lose their
momentum
Even if the earth chasm, or clouds sullen
Even if the moon turns red, or stars shine no more
Even if the dawn ceases, or confines itself in the dungeons
Even if the natural catastrophes capricious
Father don't...

From my kindergarten to infinity
You have been living in the fantasy
In the battles fighting for my whim
In the society refusing to succumb to conspiracies
Always thinking you would come back to earth
Father don't...

Fro and back to school searching for you
Trails and marks of your existence were not found
Nor inscribed in the palms of my hands
Not even a glimpse to which your body was laid
My soul had always been meandering in anguish
My dreadful body had always been dripping in languish
Oh, how I beg to differ!
Father don't...

Father's Day celebrations turned to ferocious celebrations
You failed me, father, not even to utter the words of love
Maybe we could have been sharing the same stars or maybe
birthmarks

Maybe we could have been sharing these sphered eyes or
maybe this cheesy smile
Maybe I could have been able to have asked for my rite of
passage or recognition
You have been living nowhere else but, in my absence, and my
presence not
Your absenteeism in me triggered hatred towards men
I couldn't help their bearded and lying visages Inter alia and in
turmoil, oh I am the resident there! Father don't...

I've been confined in hostage, hurt, and held in the chains of
fear
Your absenteeism father left me with no identity
Only temptations had governed my identity
Chasing for love in the wrong places
I had developed feelings that seemed normal to me but
weren't to the society
All I wanted was a feeling of belonging and a sense of
significance to a being
Father don't...

I've been labelled and called names depriving my manhood
From the place, I felt sacred
From the place I founded refuge and security, I was banished
They took all my happiness and propelled it in the calabashes
Thought education would be the best weapon to fight them
Behold they came with spears and pistols
Behold I came with pages and pens
My heart aches, they tore it apart
I took those pieces mended and healed theirs
I was no longer a stranger to them,
I reckon
Father don't...

Even though through my entire life you had always been a
stranger

Not even caught me daydreaming about you
In spite of only knowing you when you had ceased to be
Today my curiosity is abundantly satisfied
I feel nothing but elevated from weariness
I feel nothing but liberated from slavery
For I know your free spirit is eternally immortal
Perused or not for your transgressions
I pardon all of your iniquities and irrationalities
I still love you
Father don't...

In those green pastures
Where meek and keen souls lie
Where flesh meets the famine
Where diaphragm meets the dust
Where dreams deteriorate for eternity
Where wishes are washed away for eternity
Where accomplishments are concluded
Where brains are brainwashed by the state of
unconsciousness
May your soul rest and find peace
If you ever happen to come again
By the rivers and streams of Hammarsdale
Beside that brown painted door,
where you met Sindisiwe
I'll always be steady and waiting for you
That's only if you promise not to leave me again
My daily prayer is indeed,
Father don't leave me.

3RD PLACE**Voices*****Divani Coopoosamy****** * ****Hush*

Close your eyes to open your ears
Do you hear the singing?
The people are drowning out of their fears
Up in arms, hand in hand
They stand

Tears stained please
Heart in hands
My eyes open

I hold my hands up and speak
I will be heard
My streets will be filled with this metallic smell
The roses of victory will bloom along the olive branches
My brothers and sisters, side by side
No colour in sight
We will rise
Reaching for the moon and the stars in the sky
We'll sing louder than 1000 grasshoppers
You will hear me
No sounds of gunfire

The sounds of my ancestors crying
Of my people dying
I wish to hear my people laughing
Hush

SHORT STORIES

1ST PLACE**Welcome Comrade - A rendition of Mlungisi
Madonsela's last moment*****Gugulethu Goodness Hadebe****** * *****(Packing clothes)**

“But why are you leaving so early?” asked my little sister. Before I could even answer she went on to inform me about the dates that my institution was opening as if she was my Vice-Chancellor, and she knew exactly when she set the academic calendar for the year 2019. She didn’t want to see me leave home so early, I am not sure if it was because she was going to miss me or the fact that she now has to do all the house chores by herself. I informed her that I was going to SIZOFUNDA’NGENKANI; a campaign that was made to help students who are marginalized, students who couldn’t be admitted to the higher education institution due to their living conditions back at home and those who had no registration fees but passed their matric so well. I explained to her the importance of the campaign and how it will not only help the students but the entire nation. How it will decrease crime, poverty and all the socio-economic issues that we are facing in our country. As sad as she looked her face began to light up as I could now see the curves on her cheek that allowed her teeth to show. My little sister loved helping people, so I understood what brought the smile back. “Okay then, make sure you help more than 20 students since we will be missing 20 days of our extra time with you.”, she said folding her arms like she was my boss. “Relax, this is my last year you will have all the time in the world to be with me,” I said as I was pulling my bags to the door.

Leaving home early was not easy as I was still enjoying the “freedom” of being “rich”, since at home there is no pressure. I eat what everyone at home eats without feeling poor, but it is a different story when one gets to varsity. The system reminds us that we come from poor backgrounds as one has to wait on SBUX to survive: the oppressor number three that I have encountered in the “Devil University of Trouble”. SBUX is what determines if you go to bed full or with ghost food in your stomach. Oppressor number one and two is the Registration fee and accommodation which students had to sweat like mine workers to get their things sorted. The day came for me to leave, the 5th of January 2019. I knew my old folks were not happy to see me leave home early as I was the “Trevor Noah” of the family, but I assured them that I will see them soon. Little did I know that exactly a month later...

(Three gun shots)

“Mlungisi, Mlungisi!” I could hear them screaming my name, bit by bit their voices started to fade. I feel no pain but slowly my body is giving up on me. I see their terrified faces as they wait for an ambulance, I could sense their panic and not knowing what to do. I grasp this as it was our first and only glint of what it was to be the class of 1976 when live ammunition was opened at them. I waited with them but not to be helped as I knew that my time had come. I wanted to tell them “Comrades kulungile” (Soldiers it’s fine) so that they could stop panicking because I was no longer in pain but the only word that I could utter was “comrades”, whoever heard me was lucky as this was my last word. I knew my fight against the world, the education system that continued to oppress the underprivileged students had come to an end. The world got blurry as my body got lighter and slowly, I was losing my earthly sight.

(Curtains opening)

“Wake up Mlungisi today is your big day!” said a strange young man, who looked more or less my age, whom I did not know in person, but I was certain that he looked familiar. The last time I checked I had no fiancé and today it is said to be my big day. “Here are your clothes for your ceremony,” said the strange young man, pointing at an army like uniform that was written *African Education Hero 2019*. He instructed me to get ready. With no questions asked I got ready and wore my uniform which fit me perfectly. The strange man escorted me to where my big day was to be held. The place was filled with a lot of strange people who were in uniform like I was, however, each uniform had significant writing representing their struggle. “Welcome comrade,” said a 13-year-old looking young man, “I see we left the earth the same way,” he said with a smile. “And you would be?” I asked.

(Hospital bed moving)

“Mlungisi stay with us,” said a man wearing something in white - not sure if it was a priest saying a prayer for me or a doctor trying to tell me not to shut my eyes. I kept my eyes wide open, lights moving like I was on a train, but my sight was failing me as the light suddenly became darkness. My ears could no longer collect any sound. My dear comrade by my side, I am sure he wasn't aware that I was already on the train, the train to the other life. I was gone.

(Handshakes)

“How rude of me not to introduce myself,” said the 13-year-old looking young man – he went on to say “Comrade I am Hector Pieterse and that is Solomon Mahlangu” - pointing at the strange man who had been a great help since I got here. I

asked what I was doing there. A deep but soft voice answered from behind “Comrade this is a paradise of heroes and today we welcome you as you have fought for our peoples’ liberation on earth” - as he stretched out his hand for a handshake and identified himself as Bantu Steve Biko, “Come, Mama Winnie and Chris Hani want to see you.”

Dear Comrades

Remain fighting the good fight, remain fighting for the attainment of Free Decolonised Education in our lifetime.

Remain genuine to the cause like how I have been.

Do not let them instil fear in you.

Let my death be your strength Do not be afraid.

A Luta Continua. For our people.

Madonsela

2ND PLACE

Msweli the Homeless

Thembelethu Kubheka

* * *

Employees were getting tired of working for him for he had become impossible to work for. It seemed employees could never get anything right. One minute he would want reports written in a particular format, British English, and the next minute he would change his mind and he would want them written in the American English version. The name of the man was synonymous with Terror, Godzilla, Dragon, and Hitler in the office gossip spaces of Kukhanya Computers Inc, located in the heart of Durban in Embassy Building; 188 Anton Lambede St, Durban. Msweli Mthembu was his name. Aged 35 years, he was the CEO of Kukhanya Computers Inc - the multi-million Rand company that was soon to be listed on the JSE.

Msweli started the company in the year 2012, aged 24 years old, with no investor to back him up. He did not come from a well-off family and had to learn to fend for himself at an early age. Hence his name Msweli, means the physical state of lack in IsiZulu. He invested in his IT business on a waiter's wage and tips and he was fortunate enough to have NSFAS to fund his full tuition since he was an intellect and taking a course on computer sciences. The company, Kukhanya Computers Inc, was now established, with it being the fastest-growing emerging SMME Company in Africa and having taken a few accolades for its success and innovation. With the growth of the company, Msweli became obsessive with having more in order to make up for the long fall of having to struggle for a long time. That created friction in his relationships because he

lost sight of what is important. Hence, he was projecting his insecurities on his employees and loved ones to perform at levels even he did not understand.

One evening after work, Msweli was driving his Mercedes Maybach S600 to his R16 million Balinese architect home in La Lucia. Seeking to avoid traffic, he travelled by Humber Crescent road, and just before he stopped by the robots at the intersection of Kenneth Kaunda Rd and Humber Cres, a man wearing a mask ambushed his attention by smashing the car window on the driver's side and ordered him to get out of his vehicle or face death if he disobeys. He did as told. With the ease of an experienced hijacker, the man quickly got into the driver's seat and Msweli watched helplessly as he sped away in his luxury car. At that moment there was no traffic nor anyone walking nearby therefore Msweli could not find help since it was at night. He walked about 300 meters further down Kenneth Kaunda Rd hoping to run into someone from whom he could request to use their phone, but with no luck. When he had given up all hope, he heard a voice that startled him coming from the dark shallow edges of one concrete wall. Opposite road stood Riverside hotel being lit up.

"Be still and know that I am God," the voice said in a deep masculine tone.

Msweli turned and looked in the direction of the voice and saw a homeless man making his cardboard bed for the night. Happy to find another human being in this location, Msweli drew closer to where the man was. The homeless had only one old blanket and a duffle bag. On top of the makeshift bed lay a bible that had lost its cover and its pages had aged with time. He appeared to be in his 40s and his beard had not been shaved for some time - you could barely see his lips. The homeless man's attitude caught his attention. Standing and

watching this homeless man who appears so relaxed with having nothing but cardboard to sleep onto whilst he has just lost his R4 million worth car.

The homeless man was unfazed by this new visitor; the homeless man looked up and said, “You seem troubled and tense”. It was odd for a man to be found walking in this area at 09:00 pm and wearing a designer suit.

“Yes, I have been hijacked at the intersection of Kenneth Kaunda Rd and Humber Cres and I am trying to get a phone to make a call to my friends nearby” Msweli answered. “No wife I see,” the homeless man presumes.

“Yes. My engagement fell off two months ago but that’s none of your business.” Silence. “Do you know who I am?” Msweli enquires.

“No, I do not know you. But I do know people like you” the homeless man responded.

“What makes you say such?” Msweli’s inquisitive stance has heightened because he does not know who this man is and the thought of him figuring him out this fast scared him. “I was once stubborn and was hit badly by life itself.” the homeless man offered, with regret in his voice.

“Do you know how the chicken egg develops from the chicken?” asked the homeless man out of the blue. He started to present a hypothesis that seemed irrelevant to the current circumstances that Msweli was in.

“I do not know. Enlighten me” Msweli said.

“The process starts with a yolk being a size of a single and small pearl. It is rooted on the inside of the chicken and the

mother feeds the yolk until it reaches a weight of 40 grams. Are you following?"

"Yes, I am following and please get to the point," Msweli said with an impatient tone. The homeless man was now excited because he was getting somewhere.

"Ok, good. When the yolk has reached a weight of 40 grams, the chicken releases the yolk to another compartment in its body where the yolk sustains itself and produces the egg whites. The process goes on to produce the inner layer of an egg that looks like thin toilet paper. You know that thin layer of an egg, don't you?" Msweli nods. "And then out of the thin layer comes the last stage which is the eggshell, and the egg is ready to be laid by the chicken". With that, the homeless man ends the poultry lecture session.

"And your point with this egg development thing is?" Msweli enquires with no enthusiasm.

"You are the yolk. The chaos around you has been brewing from within you." The homeless man makes the statement unequivocally and Msweli's eyes are wide open with a shock of revelation. He struggles to neither move nor blink.

"Don't make the same mistakes that we made of trying to control every circumstance and trying to force what we think life ought to give us," the homeless man counselled, took a pause and continued: "All of us on this planet are called to write a story in people's hearts. You write what you want them to remember you by. If you do well, they remember your exceptional service towards them or if you do bad, they remember the heartache you have been."

"Who are you for real?" Msweli enquires with amazement.

“Don’t ask that question”, the man responded. “The last thing that I want to say to you is that you need to let go of your past.”

The next moment, a police van stopped by where they were and a police officer rolled down the window and said, “Good evening gentlemen. Our surveillance cameras captured footage of a hijack about 20 minutes ago. Have you witnessed any such activities?” Msweli and the homeless man looked at each other with bewilderment knowing the answer very well. Msweli reluctantly identified himself to the police and was taken to the police station.

The significance of that night for Msweli was not being hijacked but it was coming across that random man in the dark who gave him a life-changing principle about himself. Msweli still drives by Kenneth Kaunda Rd till this day, on a new car of course, hoping to see him again and thank him but so far, he has had no luck. He did not even get the stranger’s name. It was a once in moment experience at night.

Msweli made drastic changes after that encounter with the homeless man. Thus, Msweli felt the need to establish a skills development initiative in partnership with other companies for the homeless and give them jobs. “We all equally created. There is light in every one of us. Just because someone is destitute in any manner, it does not define their capabilities”. Msweli said at the inauguration of his initiative in his speech.

Now Msweli has improved his relations with his employees and slowly mending his love relationship. His recent tweet was “Be still and know that I am God” and continued “thinking of joining a church”.

3RD PLACE

How I Lost My Bracelet

Andile Ngubane

* * *

It was a normal day on my way back from school to home, passing those resplendent fields of flowers and harmonising all the way. It felt as if the world was watching. I stopped by the puddle, admired my reflection, and buttoned my white and marron lined shirts. Being on cloud nine, led me not to the realisation that I was even on the road, until a dark-skinned and bearded old man shouted at me for my carelessness, and promised to reprimand me the next time he sees me standing in the middle of the main road. I didn't care about all of that. All I knew was that I wanted to be home as I couldn't wait to spill the beans to my mother about the most fascinating day I had at school. I had won the top learner award for the most performing student in mathematics. Walking around those dusty streets felt nothing but three steps back in getting myself clean and neat. I had just passed this house, an old lady watering her flowers and thought of stealing some for my mother, to my shock her eyes were fixed as the sparrow.

Walking past the small white wooden painted spaza shop, I searched for my pockets and one rand was all that I could find, I wanted to buy something sweeter than the day I had. Hoping my mother would give me more but the reality was that I was living in the past. As I was approaching home, I saw a bunch of people, loitering around the house, wondering where is my mother in all of this as she was a busy woman and usually by that hour, she would be waiting for me outside the gate. Not even my little sister screaming with her squeaky voice, dragging on my mother's long silk linen skirts, playing

with mud in the red clayed anthill or playing hide and seek with my mother for the very last time. My mind began travelling through the four cardinal points.

As I was about to enter, everyone and with their ample wrinkled faces stared at me, thinking to myself am I dirty? Oh, this woman is going to kill me! At a very first glance, I saw my grandmother cuddling my little sister, thinking about what she is doing here? Then the moment froze, could she be here to see us, why all this crowd though? Or maybe they have come to bring us prayer? However, the look on their faces resembled no good news, as it seemed they were the ones who needed more than just a prayer. When I walked into the room, I saw a new scenario, I felt a new aura, it looked as if darkness was drooling over this place. Death had walked in and made herself comfortable even though she was an unwelcomed guest.

My young, toddler mind vividly felt the presence of the strong ora, during this moment time froze and I began to look for a cartoon we used to watch when we were kids, where Jack was taken by the grim reaper smiling from a dark corner and snatched him from his home. Just as I was busy staring at this cartoon paper, I then knew... My grandmother called me, and I snapped back to reality and thought why should I be even meditating with such bad thoughts. Does this mean that my life would be as miserable as that of Lindokuhle at school who doesn't have parents? As I was imagining the grim gripper, I then remembered Lindokuhle in our class whose parents were no more, and his life had drastically changed for the worse in the past few months. Who walked in barefoot entirely the four seasons of the year and only had to feast with his eyes... Was this going to be me now? was his reality also becoming mine? I quite frankly felt as if the grim ripper had entered into my life like what it did for Lindokuhle ever

since that happened. I cried to God, not today, but even though I had cried to God and said not today, it was still coming. All these people have made my house, their home, I felt intimidation running through my veins and arteries. With a quivering voice accompanied by a shed of a tear, I started shouting " Mom, mom, mom" and all I got was an echo sound.

"Come sit grandson," said my grandmother. Then her facial expression delivered a thousand words, that felt like a thousand thorns and in that moment my heart sank... I had walked into my mother's funeral, this explained why I had not seen her since I had arrived. I couldn't believe my ears that day, I thought to myself how was this possible, as I left her fine this morning. As my grandmother was talking, at that moment, then I suddenly walked into the five stages of grief. Suddenly there was denial, although she had told me that my mother was no more, I still wanted to hear her shout my name from the kitchen but I was confused and angry, why are these all people in my house and making this whole situation real? and then I started to bargain with myself and with God, that wherever she is, wake her up! wake him up! In that very bargaining with God, I remembered the meaning of my mother's name, "Sindisiwe" which meant the redemption and the saved one, how then did she not beat this disease? Tuberculosis had become a resident in her blood, breath and bones. It had taken away her voice as she was talking in riddles, but people had been saved, I saw myself sitting in a classroom, banging a desk thinking that my future self should be a medical doctor as I couldn't let it happen to other children or family members and that's when I began to know that medicine had always been my calling till thus far.

At that very moment, I remembered that as a child I'd call to God to come down, and hastily, I stood up from the bench, sat on the bed and said God sits next to me, let's talk. We have

some reasoning to do and said come, sit here, let us talk, why are you doing this? As I started quoting in my mind thinking that I am bargaining with the supreme one, it was too sad for me to realise that she was gone. Couldn't have she had been spared just for grandmother's namesake "Nomusa" which means mercy and kindness, couldn't just for once in a lifetime her name serves its purpose? In my bargaining with God, I then started bargaining with my grandmother that where is she? I would like to see her and then suddenly I was overwhelmed, and I started feeling the tears, rage and agony coming from deep down within me, I wanted to shout out to cry and then finally when I looked into the room, saw the black clothes and sad faces, I realised she was gone. I suddenly felt overwhelmed with everything, I had found a new mother named depression, day by day the situation felt even worse but eventually I came to acceptance.

Few days posthumously felt like nightmares, drowning from deep end streams with ferocious species consuming me daily. I felt as if I was buried alive, as if I was living in separate worlds. My pillowcase had been my comforter, all that I could talk to was the wall against me. On my way from school, I would sit beside the palm tree and cry, deliver all these painful words, share my dreams and to my surprise, I would sometimes find myself laughing. I ended naming the tree, "Siphiwe" meaning the gifted one, as it had the gift of taking away all my hindrances. I had lived in darkness more than anywhere else as such, I was no stranger to it. They said to hide away, you are not welcomed here, we would not accept you, you are broken and incomplete. I had learnt to be ashamed of all my scars, they said to run away because nobody will love you as you are but I couldn't let them break me to dust, I knew that I had a place in this world, I knew that I was entitled to live and had a purpose to fulfil. As days turned into weeks and turned into months our lives suddenly changed like that child from school

whom I once referred to, as we were now forced to stay with relatives and because of the mere fact that growing up without the presence of the parental figure in my life I found myself appreciating the beauty of another man. I thought getting closer to a male figure would get me protected and fill in the gap of trying to cope with my parent's absence.

However, our culture and society condemn these feelings. I had become a stranger to myself, I ended up not knowing who I was. I have been rejected, deserted and disowned and for more than I can remember. I remembered that when I was younger, I couldn't wait to be older, now that I'm older I realised that those broken crayons and lost toys were better than broken hearts and lost beloved ones. I had been designated adjectives to which people would refer me, I lost my dignity and self-confidence. However, through it all, I thank God, for the brains he gave me as such the very same people who used to suppress me, were now suppressed by my dawn, seeking for my help, and when floods came along them, I drowned them out. It is only through God and my education that has elevated my self-worth. That even though they were breaking me down by their words which felt like sticks and stones, it was building me up. I may be bruised but I'm still brave. I am who I was meant to be, yes this is me, and my future looks nothing like my past, I am marching to the beat that I drum to myself, I am not scared to be seen. I make no apologies for who I am. I am me and I am proudly unapologetic. My only prayer is to know God in new horizons and to become free from these chains that are binding me.

This is what my struggle and my life story have produced. I am not afraid to dance to my tune, to walk my path even if it means being alone or being different. Today that difference has made me the boldest, courageous and successful person and whose dreams are yet to be held. I have embraced that even if

I had lost my bracelet of my mother; I still have one to wear with pride and confidence that is defined by my struggles and grief. I call out to the atmosphere that if you were around maybe, I wouldn't have run in the arms of another man, but as much as I am proud of what the man I have become today. I stand firm on what my struggles and how losing my bracelet have defined me as a man in the current society but let us go back to asking the questions if Sindisiwe was sitting next to me.

2020

ESSAYS/OPINION PIECES

1ST PLACE

Unity #COVID-19 #TheNewNormal

Sithokomele Mndeni Nkosi

* * *

Why speak unity, when each man is laid in his graveyard alone to rot with his sorrows and shame? “Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much more”- Keller (n.d). Out of nowhere, we as a nation felt its presence, just like a tornado it hit our ‘normal lives’ unexpected nor invited. Instead, South Africa was left a mark by this beast of a disease. It made itself known and that it was here to destroy everything we touched. I am going to share my opinions about this matter that came upon us.

Impact of COVID-19 on our lives

Hunger, thirst, anger, frustration, and death is what was brought to our nation by the virus and our government. COVID-19 and ‘high’ level corruption were unintendedly welcomed into the lives of the citizens. I never knew that such a heavyweight was going to be on our shoulders. Everybody had to adjust their lives in order to adapt to what the pandemic had brought in our lives. However, I am not happy with the way this event took place.

Our normal lives were to be ignored to survive. Jobs, businesses, education, and everything else was slowed down due to safety measures that were addressed to the public. One of the lessons preached by the media was the idea of working hand in hand as a country in fighting the battle over the virus by following the lockdown regulations although it wasn’t an easy task. The lockdown opened up inequalities between education groups. Amongst both mothers and

fathers, individuals with fewer qualifications are more likely to have stopped paid work since the start of the crisis. This may well be because more skilled jobs can be done easily from home, thus meant cutting down of jobs.

Who is to blame?

Was Covid-19 the challenger or our lack of Unity as Country As a country fought it out to fight the virus however, we struggled to retain the spirit of ubuntu. At the announcement of the lockdown, those privileged charged to shopping centres to stock up on essentials yet those less fortunate were left at the starting line not being able to buy even tissue. "We are now united by sympathies but still divided by entities," wrote Salihu (2020) in his poem (COVID-19).

In combat with this, the "14 political parties in our South African parliamentary system came together in the aims to put the interest of the people by arguing everyone to refrain from panic shopping. I witnessed local businesses (retail stores) and public figures giving away food parcels to those less fortunate over the period of the lockdown (level 5) thus demonstrating what the virus had taken a huge bite from... our unity.

Thus, I believe the word "Unity" has been used as a persuasive, abusive tool more so in the 21st century, used by politics to gain votes and to silence free speech. However, unity has been a language for most countries in the African continent but as times shifted it has been used as a blindfold to our freedom from captivity. We grow up being told Africa owns the largest minerals in the world, yet they are one of the poorest continents with one of the most impoverished countries. I find this hard to believe that we Africa as a continent could not feed our people and that we had to loan money from other institutions. With schools closed, most childcare off the

table, and very limited opportunities even to leave the house, many families are having to maintain a difficult balancing act, combining paid work, housework, full-time childcare, and perhaps even home-schooling (Fisher et al. 2020: 64).

I feel as a country struggled to display unity when it came to the sharing of resources especially in the rural parts of South Africa, where appointed councillors were hoarding food parcels from the community. Mina nje lento ivele yangenza ngaba muncu (this thing made me sick) because different businesses and one of South Africa's wealthiest individuals were working hard to raise funds so every South African has a meal. Our government was embezzling covid 19 funds left my heart drowning in the same blood that was supposed to keep it alive. It was frustrating to watch the news reports about the looting of R500 billion by our ruling government ANC. The same solidarity fund that was presented by our President Cyril Ramaphosa with the sole purpose of fighting and tracking the spread of COVID-19 and to help save small businesses and their employees.

We may not have the vaccines for the virus, do we have one for Unity?

Having written the downside of COVID-19 exposing the incompetence of our country South Africa, I feel it is only right to identify the little our government tried to put in place. I say tried because of poor delivery from our government. Amid people losing their jobs some South African citizens working abroad got an opportunity to reunite with their families based in South Africa.

The lockdown brought families together since people were beginning to work from home. COVID-19 changed the family dynamic in such a way that family members who had bad blood between them were forced to make amends for them

to be able to live in the same household. The government attempted to assist with donations, food parcels for those unfortunate. The government went as far as handing out an amount of R350 relief fund for those who are unemployed. The thought of living in fear of not knowing if your loved ones may be contaminated with the virus was one of the hardest feelings I had to bear. Sadly, so many dreams and plans would have been brought to reality and plans that were organized way before could have brought so much happiness.

Unity should not be a thing of the past but a tool to cultivate the present making way to the future. We believe as a country we should try to accept what can't be changed. It is time to prepare ourselves for the new life and its offers. The COVID-19 crisis has forced shifts in how families with children distribute their time. As the future appointed leader of the country, I strongly believe our country has a long way to go. The notion that corruption is a plate every appointed leader has to eat from should seize to live in our midst. As a youthful plea to our government and future leaders, we ask that we work together with the understanding that there is enough food for us all to eat.

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2ND PLACE

Covid-19 The New Normal

Philisiwe Khuzwayo

* * *

Covid-19 has jeopardized the academic year in all fields and levels of study. Students were forced to adapt to digital learning to avoid mass gathering and slow the untimely spread of the virus. This has hindered their academic performances as most were new to that platform. Others have argued that it has promoted inequality, as some students are from households that are not suitable environments for learning. Poor internet connection and frequent power outages were also issues faced by students while taking part in digital learning platforms. Covid-19 has changed the way we see education and portrayed it as a changing environment that cannot withstand societal pressure and not something we can hold on to.

Covid-19 has heightened the need for research as lives are being lost, economies falter and has taken the daily freedom we took for granted. Life has changed radically, and research is being shifted to Covid-19 treatment and prevention, emergency preparedness, as well as response. The pandemic has changed the way research can be used which is now to save lives and finding suitable responses while waiting for the discovery of the vaccine and treatment. It has also intensified research challenges as since the first few cases of the virus were reported, there has been many news reports and manuscripts but only limited information.

There was a significant rise in reported cases of Gender-Based violence against women as South Africa was in a

nationwide lockdown to flatten the curve of Covid-19 infections. There were 80,000 reported cases in the early stages of the lockdown and have continued to rise since. It was then too difficult on victims as the country was focusing on the matter at hand, which is Covid-19. South African Police Services were having eyes on the observation of safety protocols put in place by the government. They were monitoring illegal buying and selling of alcohol and wearing of masks on public transport and malls.

Service delivery was largely disturbed by the outbreak of the virus. Road maintenance, water and waste treatment, sanitation and environmental health services were often reported as not functioning properly amongst others. The top stock shortages were personal protective equipment (PPE) and disinfectants like sanitizers. Reasons for inadequate operations were suspended council meetings and limited staffing as only 30% of staff were at work. Due to the failure of main water treatments, residents in other parts of the world had a lack of water for five days.

Throughout the nationwide lockdown, social justice was considered, only to a less extent. It has shown a gap inequality that was masked by our daily lives. As citizens were encouraged to work remotely, those who can only work physically were left unemployed in the earlier stages of the nationwide lockdown. Permits were issued for daily movements which led to public clinics mainly catering for essential workers leaving the elderly and the poor sick in long queues outside the buildings to practice social distancing on both sunny and rainy days. In most cases, not all patients were attended. Students who were studying remotely battled power outages and poor internet connection daily although provided with sufficient mobile data. For those in rural areas, it has shown inequality in education.

Civic engagement was largely disturbed by the outbreak of Covid-19. In other forms of civic engagement like volunteering, in-person involvement is still threatened due to cancellations of organizational or event operations. Many other forms of civic engagement are unattended, and the focus is shifted to prevention and cure for this deadly virus. People who have been dependent on other forms of civic engagement like community gardening have been experiencing the effects. Issues that were likely to be addressed like HIV/AIDS stigma and Gender-Based violence are more evident. Participating in fundraising events has been prohibited as sports were no longer allowed and many places have closed off due to the nationwide lockdown. This has hindered the purpose of civic engagement which is to promote involvement and responsibility amongst citizens.

Unity is no exception when it comes to things negatively impacted by Covid-19. However, the government has tried its best to compensate citizens for their losses. The government along with citizens have demonstrated a united front and eventually reached the common goal of slowing the spread of the virus. The solidarity fund announced by the government has tackled many issues like caring for the ill and supporting small businesses. Political parties also came together, dedicated to reaching the common goal. South Africans have shown bravery and tried by all means to abide by safety protocols the government has put in place and endured a little longer.

Although the spread of the virus that resulted in the nationwide lockdown has made things difficult for us all and changed our country like never before, it was the best way to go. South Africa is proof that there is light at the end of the tunnel, and nothing is impossible through unity. Our leaders

have led us with wisdom and our best interests at heart, as we had to be obedient in order for us to enjoy our daily freedom that was taken away by the outbreak of the virus again. We as South Africans have proven ourselves to be fit for striving for change, with obedience and patience as our value. We have shown bravery and will to adapt to change to bring positive change and save our lives and those of our loved ones.

3RD PLACE**27/03/2020*****Andile Ngubane****** * ***

A date that has so many sentiments and archives. The first date to ever rewrite the history of mankind in this manner. The first date to ever change the customs and traditions of decades for decades. The first-ever to give rise to thousands of mortality statistics and incessantly dominate newspaper headlines. The first-ever pandemic to threaten our life expectancies. How are we still alive? For some, 27/03/2020 was a lucky number that changed their lives to the level best. A blessing in disguise, connecting the lost wires of the heart, a time to forgive and heal from the past, a time to be one and mould one another and, like an old vehicle refurbished and redesigned for the best outcome, to restore peace and love in their quarrels.

For me, 27/03/2020 was a date that brought many life burdens. I would cut my heart in half to reverse that day. One of the days preceding my life's greatest losses in belongings and identity. For once, I had to question my purpose for living. Everything seemed dull and gloomy, all my future dreams deteriorated. According to human eyesight, a normal person is of bipedal locomotion state; two eyes, and two arms, but little did they know that I no longer walked; I crawled with my faith and hopes, see by grace and touch by heart. A walking human skeleton, I am. Yes, we were told, we are much safer when locked on the inside, but I prefer the outside. Our home bedsides turned into pulpits since we were no longer allowed to attend services at our churches. The hospital beds became fully occupied by troubled souls, the mortuaries welcoming

the sudden unexpected visits, the graveyards lamenting for the maintenance of the laws of equilibrium. Yes, mortality statistics rose each day from the new pandemic. It's one thing seeing those numbers on the television screens, it's another seeing them again knowing your beloved family members and friends form part of it.

Yes, a normal house according to human eyesight has doors and windows. For the first time, I thought to myself, if only they knew what lies behind those closed doors and windows. What if I were to interrogate the pillows and lights bulbs, they would tell a thousand painful stories that I no longer yearn to know. As we fight against the new pandemic, men have also become the pandemic itself. As we have welcomed ourselves to the normal, seemingly the blurriness has become the new clear. Men have lost their moral compass, nobody to show them the north direction. Yesterday they were the beneficiaries of the same mammary glands from which they sucked the knowledge and doctrines of life, yet today they brutally kill our grandmothers, mothers, sisters and children. On one side we are fighting the ever-escalating numbers of our dying loved ones from the pandemic, on the other, we are fighting the numbers of our family members deliberately killed and threatened by brutal men wounded by their past and hindering our presence. We are not only losing women to these men but also men to these men. I know of men, raped, and maltreated by their fellow men, depriving them of their manhood. When they report such incidences, law enforcers mock them, amused by everything, thereby becoming the accomplices to the murderers. How much debt do these innocent souls owe that it couldn't be settled at the cross during the crucifixion?

Sometimes the law enforcement agents catch these murderers. When they are asked for the motives of their

mysterious *modus operandi*, they choose to remain mute. Even mathematicians couldn't solve them, I guess their roots were too infinite and irrational. Physicians couldn't heal them, I guess the diagnosis was never discovered. Chemists measure their life rates of reactions, I guess they yielded more than human comprehension. Readers couldn't read them, I guess their lives were beyond complexity. Teachers couldn't correct them, I guess they were too many grammatical and spelling errors. Mechanics couldn't fix them, I guess they were beyond repair. Like a sinner swimming in the ocean of sinfulness, is it too late for repentance, is it too late to erase the history, is it too late to bring men back to love?

Protests have been held, letters written to the parliamentarians, voices shouting in all radio stations, newspaper articles published. When is the deliverance? Where is unity in this? Where is the law? What is the government saying? I don't know, maybe I'm the wrong one and too emotional. I don't know, maybe I'm a little bit overwhelmed. I don't seem to know anymore. But if you happen to know, please let me know, even in my wildest dreams, I'd be waiting.

POETRY

1ST PLACE

Prayers

Qiniso Alexander Ngubeni

* * *

No more do we hide against the rumbling of guns,
Pointed at us to cease our innocent fates
Nor do we shield against daggers and knives,
Rather we squeal pleas of mercy against this disease
Pebbling mortality like raging ocean tides
Each breathing another risk of infection!
Here, under this mask,
I hide my face
Half-breathing, fearing this air might be diseased!
Washed and baptised with sanitisers,
these hands I keep pocketed so as not to touch a thing
I used to delight at a loved one's touch
Now I fright to the reach of his palm,
Stretching out to mine, lest it not be clean!

STOP RIGHT THERE, CHILD!

Or better, shut the door against the world!
Keep yourself imprisoned, seal the keyhole
For the air that is diseased might peep through
And like the Grim Reaper with a scythe, might
Harvest you from the world like the millions we've lost.
Say your wholesome prayers, pray for your soul!

Afar from you I stand alone and pray with you,
Begging to breathe, but the air just isn't clean!

2ND PLACE**Emshadweni: A GBV poem*****Siphesihle Nzuzo***

* * *

She has written a story of pain over the years
Invisible to everyone because it is written with the invisibility
of tears
What started with bitter words that scarred the heart
Quickly progressed into physical violence that scarred each
and every body part

An angel's face bruised by metacarpals and wedding ring
metals
Each drop of blood decorated the floor like her honeymoon's
rose petals
The mirror reflected back a crime scene without reverence
Selfies from her phone turned into documents of evidence

With black and blue bruises like badly applied eye shadow
And the tears tinted with blood, like drops from a bottle of
Bordeaux
Denial kicked in and blurred the lines between warrior and
victim
To make matters worse her heart was reluctant to evict him

Now a pandemic has hit and his job has had to let him go
So she is quarantined with a monster that breaks her bones
with each blow
She finally reported him, but you know how these things go
“We will look into your case, once it's processed we will let
you know”

She tried to leave him and he played the "ngakulobola" card
Even her own family said "kuyabekezelwa, vele marriage is
hard" So she held on because "ungumakoti, zehlise and play
your part" But unfortunately like the vow says "until DEATH
do us apart"

Fast forward her picture is under the title 'deceased' on the
headlines

She would still be alive, but

Evil always prevails when

Good just folds hands on the sidelines

Our flowers are dying, we are stomping on them on what is
already barren land

Zinsizwa sukumani, they are crying out for us to take a
stand!!!

3RD PLACE**WOMANDLA*****Andile Ngubane****** * ***

I hope you read between the lines

I hope you read somewhere what it means to become men of dignity.

We know more of deceased females than of culprit males

Like a wandering soul, I ask myself, are we not one?

Is there a time where nature fights against itself?

I wonder if the stars ever lust after one another or desire to kill each other

I wonder if the moon ever looks at the sun and feels threatened

I wonder if women will ever be sun-kissed by traces of liberation I wonder if the men will ever tame their wrath and menace

I wonder if we will ever fold the chapters of femicide
And preserve the lives of our women

Women, like a plethora of tulips, roses, irises, pearls, and narcissus in the wells of waters and fountains

Women, like the glimmering gemstones, diamonds and emeralds from the richest depths of the earth

Women, like a rare breed seed germinating from the Sahara and Karoo of destitution

Women, like the treasures whose worth and value surpasses that of gold and rubies

The majesties and goddesses in their own realms

The custodians of our clans and birthrights in a patriarchal society
The lionesses, no, I prefer to call them the lions
The heroines don't best describe them so maybe heroes will do

The insurmountable and inimitable personas of grit Possessing
the strength and spirit of the black panther Destined for
greatness and stargazing their own pulchritude

In the sunset boulevards of thorns and potholes, still, they
walk In the quarrels and chaos of today, still, tranquillity, they
find in the segregations and separations of today, still, they are
one
In the scarred and blood-smeared hands of their slayers, still,
they rise In the midst of wilderness raging storms, still, they
lead "WOMANDLA, WOMANDLA, WOMANDLA", greatest,
you are And yet you are subjected to living your lives in fear

How many words should be left unsaid?

How much blood and tears should be perpetually shed? How
many voices need to shout for recognition?
Men, from which wells is your brutal strength drawn?

Killing our innocent and harmless women, is this the new
normal now? Like a poem without words
They are no tears left to cry

And that is why some stories shall end in the middle.

SHORT STORIES

1ST PLACE

Rebellion

Nomali Petronela Khumalo

* * *

It all began one day a few years ago when Mother Nature called an emergency meeting with the key members of her cabinet. “Honourable Mother!” the spokesperson for the animals said standing up, “we are tired, we have been giving warnings to the human beings, showing them statistics of how they’ve vanquished some of our members.” They have already pushed some species into extinction, and by the way, many more of our members will follow suit unless we do something about it and do it now! No more warnings, they will not listen. This is our time; this is our decade. We must fight for freedom, fight for survival.

Amandla!” Dolphin chanted before sitting down.

“The platform is yours now”, Mother Nature said to Air, giving her permission to raise her concerns. She stood up, swirling with anger. “Honourable Mother, we’ve been nothing but good to this species because we have always known that they are your favoured ones. We took so much abuse from them, all in your name. We took in their harmful air and made sure to give them fresh oxygen in return, without as much as a thank you from them. Yet they continue to produce machines that belch out toxins that poison us and burn holes in the atmosphere, and if we do not stop them, they will very soon bring destruction, not only on themselves but on every living thing. We have done our best to swallow their abuse because that is what you appointed us to do, but it is rapidly getting beyond our powers to fix it. It has to stop, and it has to stop

now!” She roared, banging the table so hard that everything in the room blew straight up into the ceiling.

The old wise Baobab now stood up, fixing her glasses with her index finger. “Your Highness”, she said, “I have never been one for reacting out of anger, but I feel humans have continuously disregarded us. They’ve even decided to ignore our invitation to this gathering because they think they are superior. They feel so big that they believe they are even above you, Mother. As we speak right now, they are out there raping us for food and chopping us up for every silly thing you can ever imagine. Mother, they must be taught a lesson: this simply has to end!” she said politely before taking her seat.

Next, it was the turn of the soil to speak: “Honourable Mother, I am not going to dwell on what they do to me because it is visible for all to see: as I stand here before you I have all kinds of rubbish and plastic stuck in me, things that can never be pulled out of my body. They even try to poison me with their toxic waste. They have gone too far and need to be taught a lesson! I would like to read out a memorandum of what we that are gathered here have decided to do in order to bring calm again. Honourable Mother, here is our plan.”

“It will begin in the wild. Bat and Pangolin have volunteered for a suicide mission. She will release the venom she stores for self-defence onto the pangolin, who in turn will take it to the market. There the humans will pounce on it like they always do and think they’ve found a great catch, and that’s where we will strike. They will eat the pangolin and breathe out the virus onto each other. Air has agreed to be the medium to carry it further. Mother Nature, they will now be forced to stay in their houses, and we can relax and try to recover. We hope that after all this everyone will be given a new lease of life. We will start by targeting the grownups as they are the ones

mostly responsible: they had enough wisdom to stop what was happening but never said a word. We will take out the prominent ones as they had the tools to save the situation but refused to act, but it will eventually trickle down to everyone if they chose not to take our warning signs seriously.”

Mother Nature took a big sigh. “I hear you my children”, she said, “and as much as it breaks my heart, sometimes a mother has to teach her children a lesson since that is the only way they will learn. Go, my children, and implement your plan. Remember though that this is only temporary, for the matter to me as much as you do. Parliament is now adjourned!”

And so, they all went out and Covid-19 attacked the humans who called it their invisible enemy and began to fight against it. Maybe after their banishment to their naughty corners and their cleansing ritual of washing their hands while singing “Happy Birthday to me” two times, they will eventually emerge and tread the earth more softly.

2ND PLACE

#Covid-19 #TheNewnormal – Gender Based Violence

Ntobeko Mafu

* * *

“I paid lobola for you! I am your husband! You will treat me with respect whether you like it or not!” dad said as he proceeded to slap my mother across the face while the three of us were having breakfast. To think that all of this commotion was entirely based on my father demanding my mother’s last wages in order to feed his nicotine and alcohol addiction.

Ever since Covid-19 came about and the lockdown started, things at home have been extremely intense. My father was working as a cell phone company consultant and part-time lawyer at a local firm, but he lost both jobs due to the pandemic, my mother is now holding down the fort being the breadwinner with her risky nurse job. Every month on her payday my father demands half of her wages in order to buy illegal cigarettes and alcohol to sustain his cravings, he does not even seem to be concerned that even though we are on lockdown my school fee still needs to be paid. He beats her a lot, not always in front of me but I can always hear him hurting her, it happens less when he is drunk but every time he is sober for too long and starts experiencing withdrawal he becomes abusive, and it is neither easy nor cheap to find alcohol or cigarettes during this lockdown.

“I used the last of my money to cover Ntwenhle’s outstanding school fee’s, bought groceries and toiletries for everyone, I also paid off your debt with the loan shark now I only have R300 left that I would like to use as taxi fare for the rest of

the month Sipho please”. My mother pleaded with her face down, “Nandi, give me that money, why are you acting as I have never given you the money you and this child of yours are fat because you have been eating all my money now you don’t want to give me money, GIVE ME THAT MONEY NANDI!!” he roared back at her. My mother quickly surrendered to avoid having the situation escalate in front of me and she handed him her last R300 with tears rolling down her cheeks. As soon as he had the money in his hands, dad bolted outside and we knew we would not see him till after dark.

“Mom, you know that you don’t have to put up with this right? You do not have to put up with that man, you can go” I said as we began washing the dishes.

“What are you expecting me to do Ntwenhle? Where should I go? That man is your father and you two are the only family I have” she replied despondently.

“You can get help mom, I can help you, and you don’t have to stick it through for me or the sake that he is my father anymore. I see your scars, I hear you cry, I hear him banging you against the wall, I hear you scream, I feel your pain and I can’t even concentrate at school any more mom you need to do this for you or you will die!” I said weeping heavily.

My mother looked into my eyes for what felt like forever then started crying hysterically too, we clung to each other vigorously. Life after lockdown had become hard it gave my father easy access to abusing my mother because they were around each other all the time. The whole situation had taken a strain on both of us and during that moment we shared we agreed that enough was enough and that I would help my mother fight back.

Something shook me out of my sleep at 3 am and I got up to get a glass of water.

“Oww Sipho you are hurting me! Please stop you are drunk! and it's sore I'm on my period!!” I heard my mother cry as I walked past my parent's room.

“Come on MaMzimela, after the money I paid to your family I shouldn't be dictated to about how or when I should have sex with my wife! Now stop being grumpy” my father replied.

I listened to my father rape my mother through their bedroom door, after hearing my mother continuously crying out in pain, I grabbed my phone. While crying hysterically I video called my best friend Senamile. Senamile lived down the road and her father was a police officer but I had never told her or her family about the life I lived at home.

“Ntwenhle what's up?” she asked worriedly.

I couldn't bring myself to speak because my tears were flowing uncontrollably and I did not reply, she stayed on the line and listened to me cry till I eventually drifted back to sleep.

At 8 am I still hadn't gotten out of bed, I couldn't bear facing my parents after what I heard last night. A loud thump came from the kitchen, I heard my mother's whimpering and I decided I couldn't bear it anymore and I video called Senamile.

“Ntwenhle what's all that noise? Are you okay?” Senamile asked

At this point I could not bring myself to speak because I had started crying instead, I moved closer down the steps so that

Senamile would hear the commotion over the video call.

“You bitch, you smiled at him! Are you cheating on me Nandi with the bloody postman for god’s sake! Is he the one who you gave my bottle to?!!” my dad shouted while throwing a hard slap at mom.

“No Sipho, you finished your bottle last night” my mother cried out. Senamile rushed to get her father to witness the call and as he approached, I used the violence at the home signal for help to tell him I was in trouble, I followed the steps

1. Palm to camera and tuck thumb,

2. Trap thumb as a police officer he knew immediately what that meant and I saw him dashing out of the house.

Senamile’s father was at my house in less than a second and he practically broke the door down on his way in. My dad was too busy beating my mother for the alcohol he thought was stolen when Senamile’s dad took him from the back and brought him down on his face then placed handcuffs on him. I ran crying to my mother who was crying and drenched in blood too. An ambulance arrived a short while later and took off with my mother, a police van took off with my father shortly afterwards and I went home with Senamile.

The next morning, I went to go see my mother.

“Ntwenhle, where is your father? How much time do we have here? We need to make a plan to run away my child this has gone too far”, my mom cried.

“Mom there is no need to worry. Senamile’s father helped me call the Gender-based violence hotline and once you are out of hospital we will move into a government safe house built to assist victims of abuse, we also have a state lawyer I told them

everything and there is evidence, this is a watertight case mom he probably won't even get bail, you will be safe from now on. There are facilities out there that will help us, and you'll get free therapy at the safe house" I replied.

We spent the rest of the evening embracing one another, we both could not believe that we were finally free, after what felt like a lifetime of torture, we were given the chance to start over again.

3RD PLACE

Covid-19

Vuyisile Themba Xaba

* * *

The sun, the centre of the blues skies radiated at its peak along these daunting hours. With no moisture nor humidity present to saturate my dry vegetables which rested lifelessly over the frail wooden table. The thought of bronze and silver coins and sometimes sweaty notes replaced an aching struggle. The struggle crept over the cold mornings and scorching nights creating wholes too wide and deep to leave any cell inside your body untouched. This agony went to the lengths of keeping my mind captive was known as hunger and the money made from my tired vegetables and fruits could only help my family and I survive until the next morning.

Although there was an unforgettable pain that had coursed over my eyelids. Swiftly underneath the silent night had this agony transformed into passions which journeyed over the tender mountains inside my dreams and perfect ambitions which swam across the warm streams. It was in such lovely spaces where the link to the flawless aspects of nature did the sun meticulously tell me that

“I could be more.”

More was all I wanted to be, but in the country where women are first criticised by the obedience's which had to be tamed by a man's masculinity instead of considering the capacity of her intelligence “more” meant immense pain and inevitably being wrapped inside a shiny body bag.

Besides my devotions in seeking more from the world, I was born into. Admiring how the skies had invited the soft moon into its nightly shifts for me it served as an exciting reminder to grab my wallet and count the profit made throughout the day. Scavenging the corners of the velvet fabric its emptiness and darkness mirrored the strange anomaly throughout the exhausting day. There were fewer people on the robust streets of Soweto and those who roamed them wore masks over the corners of their faces. To me, it had been simply a series of strange events which surely left me confused but it was more than that, it was the reason behind the pain I tried so desperately to feed and protect my family from.

Walking the walk of shame with an empty wallet and a heavier heart. Mentally reciting how I would tell my family, explain to them how there isn't any money for food exposed me to discomfort which would be much greater in contrast to their faces. Instead, I knocked door to door fighting through the Delma to nourish the starving stomachs which had hopelessly waited for the dry brown bread and sweet sticky orange juices to nourish their warm souls.

Determined my strategy to sell vegetables and fruits door to door had failed dismally. Forcing me to conclude today was truly the end of mankind and humanity. The people had either slammed the door across my face, spoke to me through murky half-open widows or cursed me away.

Left inside the darkness of my baffling circumstances opening the metallic handle to what was a sorry excuse of home. I witnessed the defeated body language which was slowly released into the atmosphere which was accompanied by an eccentric element of concern.

“Thandeka quickly go wash your hands!!”

My younger brother shouted the second I found my way inside. But they aren't dirty I thought to myself. It was the following words he said to me which forced me to travel across the arid pieces of land to wash my hands near the fresh river water.

He said "Thandeka there's a monster in the air and we need to wash our hands." Before I could call his adorable face into my arms my stepfather had arrived and along with him came the potent concoction of sweat, cigarettes and alcohol which pasted itself over his skin every time he came back home.

The second he pieced together the portraits over my failure he stormed away into his room. A symphony of rage and destruction was followed while he had aggressively tossed glass against the concert walls shredding the wooden cardboards into tethered limbs. It was just the perfect time to take my little brother out into the darkness which glittered with bright diamonds and laugh long enough to replace the hunger which ached for what we had no control over. It was easier to allow sleep to make way to our most hopeful dreams.

The next day I woke up to a beautiful morning thinking my frightening step-father would have already made his way to work by 08h30 and my little brother in his oversized black school shoes receiving pieces of soft bread and warm soup for breakfast by 09h30. Seated over the wooden chair they looked at me with eyes that blossomed a profound sense of shock.

No school for my little brother meant no food and education.

But for my Step farther NO WORK meant no capital to

compensate his toxic escape from the unsettling realities. Slouched over the chair in his dilapidated state his throat had made way to a cold beer in one hand while the other ignited little ashes of tobacco to the ground.

Frantically like a vicious lioness searching for her missing cups the rhythm of my heart raced and the walls of my verticals collapsed because the plastic sack home to my tired vegetables and fruit was missing.

“Papa what have you done!!!” “We have no food or money to eat!!!”

Hysterically the fear and pain hidden beneath the shelves of my insecurities forced outrage, furious and abrupt. Foreign to the vast expression of such emotions I remembered that day like yesterday because not only did my stepfather's intoxicated mind and destructive hands abusively cut wounds to my humanity and steal flowers of my virtue with filthy swollen hands. His sinister soul planted seeds the chambers of my broken body was now home to.

My brother called it the monster the clinic called it COVID-19.

My mother called it a tummy bug the clinic called it HIV.

2021

ESSAYS/OPINION PIECES

1ST PLACE

Service Delivery

Nomcebo Duma

* * *

The phrase service delivery usually refers to any service that is being rendered to a specific market. However, because the theme is #ProudlySALiterature, I would like to look at this topic with reference to South Africa. According to Campbell (2014), Service delivery is a common phrase in South Africa used to describe the distribution of basic resources that citizens depend on. In this essay I would like to look at who is responsible for providing these services, the unreliability of them and what can be done to improve this system.

According to the South African Constitution, municipalities are solely responsible for service delivery. This means that local government is responsible for ensuring that all needs of the citizens are met. The citizens are given the opportunity to vote for their local government, they decide who provides these services to them. These services include water supply, refuse removal and street lighting to name a few. The municipality can choose to provide the services directly or outsource, whichever way they choose the responsibility still lies with them. They must provide quality services at an affordable price. These services should be delivered in an effective, predictable, reliable and customer friendly manner. The responsibility is huge but not impossible.

South African municipalities are unfortunately unreliable when it comes to service delivery, and this has a direct effect on the quality of lives of the people. Due to the fact that

municipalities are often failing to meet the demands of the communities it directly affects their quality of life.

Quality of life according to the Oxford dictionary refers to the standard of health, comfort and happiness experienced by an individual or group. Anon (2006) makes an example, if the water that is provided is of poor quality or refuse is not collected regularly, it will contribute to the creation of unhealthy and unsafe living environment. It is understandable why these resources contribute to the quality of life because they are basic survival needs.

As I have mentioned the service delivery in South Africa is unreliable and insufficient, some improvements can be made. For starters, better communication between the service providers and citizens. This will help the municipality determine the needs of the community and whether they are met or not. Another way to improve is to work on an improved financial plan. Anon (2006) agrees and states, 'Improved financial planning will help find the best possible way to use the available funds.' Outsourcing is another way to ensure that the needs of the public are met. Outsourcing in simple terms means to get/hire someone else to do the job for you. Municipalities can hire private companies/ organizations to perform certain services for them to ensure efficiency. South African municipalities are lacking tremendously but with dedication improvement is possible.

The lack of service delivery contributes more than just unhealthy and unsafe environment, it is the cause of many destructions in South Africa. If the needs of the community are not met people become angry and retaliate causing destruction. With the suggestions that I have made I believe that the service delivery system can improve and work more effectively.

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2ND PLACE

Gender Based Violence against Men

Cebo Ncube

* * *

Macmillan dictionary defines gender-based violence as, “violence against individuals and groups that is connected to their gender.” It disproportionately affects girls and women but, no gender is exempt. This essay will discuss four different types of GBV (systemic, physical, sexual, and psychological) and how they affect men, particularly in South Africa.

Systemic violence is where violence is built into structures that afford privileges to certain groups over others, and when unequal advantages are present in ideologies that govern a society. An example is, sentencing disparity in the South African judicial system. Men are statistically more likely: to be held in custody, receive more convictions, and given harsher sentences than women for the same offenses.

Physical violence is the act of intentionally inflicting bodily harm or trauma to another person. This is a huge issue in South Africa, mostly claiming women and girls as victims. Many sympathise with their plight but, almost no one cares that men experience physical abuse at the hands of women as well. It is usually domestic, intimate partner violence and mostly goes unreported because of shame that victims feel. This leads some researchers to believe the statistics may be underrepresented.

Sexual violence is, engaging in any sexual act with someone that has not, or is not able to give their consent. Unfortunately, South Africa has the highest rape rates for women and girls in the world. It is understandable why sexual

crimes against men are not prioritised however, that should not be an excuse for negligence. According to the work of Parker Lewis, “80% of 30000 prisoners in Pollsmoor prison were raped each month.” This is because prisoners sexually abuse other inmates to dominate them or extort them for “sexual slavery.”

Psychological violence is an aspect of all forms of violence, “since the main aim of being violent or abusive is to hurt the integrity and dignity of another person.” (Council of Europe Portal, 2021). It is common for men that experience violence to develop mental health issues that go undiagnosed because of embarrassment and lack of support services. South African men are four times more likely to commit suicide than women and mental health is a major contributor.

In conclusion, GBV against men in South Africa is real and just because it happens less frequently, that does not make it a less valid concern. Systems that discriminate against men, are not conducive for equality. Statistics for physically abused men are potentially higher than reported. Sexual violence being extremely high against women, does not mean that sexually abused men do not deserve support. Men rarely get treated for the trauma that they suffer from violence and are more likely to commit suicide. I think the appalling rates of GBV against women and girls is a result of men that have been victims themselves, victimising others. Unless we help them deal with their trauma in a healthy way, then we cannot solve the issue.

3RD PLACE**Proudly SA*****Bongeka Mgobhozi***

* * *

Home is where the heart is, nourishment is when the heart resides in such beauty, a centre of miracles and pride. South Africa is one of the most rapid-growing countries, a rough diamond that constantly fights for righteousness. Each year of my life I have lived to discover the struggles we conform and the strength we embody, claiming our power each day as it comes. I'm delighted about my origin, and this is me saying I'm proudly South African.

I always grow very fond of places that grow from small, timid and imperfect foundations. Seeing South Africa grow from slavery, colonisation and all forms of identity shaming have made me fall in love with the undying strength of our citizens to constantly fight the battles of previous injustices. Taking ownership of our land, not trying to crawl out of our black skins, but wearing them proudly and claiming our identity affords me the greatest form of joy. It creates within us a sense of independence and gives us fighting strength, to conquer and be bold. Living in South Africa has given me an identity, one that is so strong, one that has stories to tell, and melodies to sing, verses preaching victory. A true sense of belonging.

We are a blessed continent, animals so fierce, plants so beautiful and land so rich. How could I not be proud of being a part of that? It places me in such power and grants me such a beautiful responsibility to utilise all that we have and grow from it. Beautiful people who come from far and near; the

many different languages and cultures help us express ourselves the best way we know-how. We are very complex, multifaceted, unique and we serve it as it is. Our talents knock in all doors, gifted beyond measure, its South Africa to the world.

I'm excited about where we are going; It hasn't been a walk in the park, but I know the next generations will reap the seeds of the fruits we sow. Our struggles will be soothed by the beauty of our future. Our grandparents crawled, our parents walked, we run, and the future generations shall fly; what we have had to endure has polished and made us stronger more than it did anything else. It has given us such a great set of values; we know that a person is human before they are black or white; you don't fight fire with fire but create peace to create beautiful things like a rainbow nation. Our cultures preach love and respect, and we know we are stronger together.

South Africa is a strong nation, our accomplishments speak louder than our sorrows; we have lived to shine through our struggles. Our resources and abilities tell us we are destined for greatness, it is all given, it can't fail. Because of the people we are our future looks promising, we will build a distinctive legacy. A country is made gold by its people and so is South Africa, be a part of it.

POETRY

1ST PLACE**The last shred*****Maryam Kotze****** * ***

Woven through time the threads of life lay
bare
evident through the scars she wears.
HIS blistered hands peel away
the remaining threads that refuse to shed as the little boy lay
under his bed;
staring up at the fraying edges of his torn sheets he plucks a
strand or two
as outside black turns to blue.

Steps BELLOW beyond the bedroom door. SCREAMS ring
out, then a ROAR.

With pinched eyes and bleeding hands the last thread is freed
waft away by the breeze, into the morning light, bright.

But the shadows cast remain
encased in pain and though the light, bright
is meant to delight,
it brings sorrow and mourning as the sirens
start
calling.

2ND PLACE

**“SENZENI NA, SENZENI NA, SENZENI NA?” – the cry of
a race that is dying in the hands of its oppressors**

Tsholofelo Zulu

* * *

They know exactly what They're doing,
This is just another
Gateway to a “whites only avenue”. Senzeni na?
They don't hang us from trees anymore Instead, they allow
public servants to Gun us down
And then reward them with pensions When will it stop?
Will it ever stop?
My race is dying, and this world is broken. Senzeni na?
Broken and not ready to be repaired Are they ever going to
reach the point of enlightenment where they realise
That we are HUMAN –
And that we see things, and feel things Just as much as they
do.

Senzeni na?

How and why is there still slave trade
In these modern times?
Not only is my race a crime,
But I guess it also sells quite fast. Senzeni na?
Yini Yini Yini bo?
Yini enijabulisa kakhulu uma nibona ubuhlungu bethu? Yini
enijabulisa kakhulu uma nibona izinyembezi zethu?
Yini enijabulisa kakhulu uma nibona imizimba negazi
elingenalutho isizungezile? Yini Yini bo?

Senzeni na?

In the end, you choose What you want to see, Even in the
mirror Remember that ...

3RD PLACE**Confessions of a teenage boy (gay poem)*****Qiniso Ngubeni****** * ***

I am, right now,

As when I discovered loving me! Turning back is beyond
imagination Though I cry by each delicate moment, I have
made a decision to rather cry
In solitary than have friends who spite my nature
Though it feels like gradually I'm withering,
Standing like a haunted house
In a forgotten field;

Lonely, forlorn, abashed and silent!
But I cannot turn back to that concealing place;
More a tomb than a closet, where
Darkness fell, and thus began the true me!
No more will I bind my soul with restricting Clothing,
sheltering my soul
Against your dire religious condemnation
I have stumbled out,
Perplexed but alive!

Struck by unusual light that blurs my search
For the voice that called me by name
And I look at you
And I see that you've been crying!

SHORT STORIES

1ST PLACE

Triggers

Amanda Shabalala

* * *

Judge Dube: How does the defendant plead towards the charge brought against her?....

I know you must be asking your self-how I got here.This is not how I had imaged my life will turn out.Trust me; I am not this kind of person. I am no murderer.

So let me take you back to how it all started.

I was four years old when I first witnessed my mom bruised and bleeding on the floor Powerless as she was, pleading for her life at the feet of a dreadful monster who called himself my papa. Her voice is still engraved in my memories “*please, please stop... I’m sorry.*”

I still remember the screams in response to the kicks, which took her breath out and made her even weaker to talk or cry. The exhaustion in her voice. Every Friday night she would sing the same song, dance to his beat, as he beat the life out of her and called it love.

For years, her screaming and crying became a normal song I could not stop or pause.

When I was six, I thought that I had finally mastered the way to trap the voices, which made me cringe. I was later to find out that in this particular night she had kissed the cup of death.

Two months passed after her death, I was the one screaming for my life as he forced his way in between my thighs. I had become his dollhouse. Silenced with fear I could not tell anybody. I could only scream inside in hopes that somebody, anybody could hear me but nobody did. At the age of twelve, I told myself I only have myself to count on. That night I decided I was never going to find myself in this place ever again. That night I stood still outside and watched that old shack burn to the ground with my father's corpse inside. I had made sure he sang the same hymn he made my mother sing to the angel of death. I could literally feel my soul escape the lifetime sentence nobody could help me out of.

I grew up in houses where I was yet to become a victim of rape from the people who said they loved me.

Years passed I found myself a man who said he loved me. Well, he did most of the times. He acted right more like a gentleman most of the times. I do not remember what had happened this night all I can tell you is that he had come back from work; you could see the anger in his face. I tried to calm him down as I always do. He tried to take out his anger on me as he would do sometimes. On this day when he put his hands on me, it took me back to when I was a child. When I could not do anything to protect myself. A thousand thoughts run through my mind. I remembered the day I had told myself I would not let a man love me the way men around me love women because their love hurt. Today he had touched the wrong one. I pushed him off me. Slowly I could see his head fall towards the corner of table, which took his life...

Therefore, you ask me how I plead to the charges of murder. I plead not guilty.

The only thing I am guilty of is surviving

2ND PLACE

Thembikile

Nonsikelelo Magwaza

* * *

Once upon a time, there was a girl called Thembekile. Thembekile was raised by both her parents in a small village called Ngudwini. Her mother was a housewife while her father was working in the mines at Johannesburg. Her father usually come back home once a year mostly in December to spend Christmas holidays together. Thembekile had a strong relationship with her mother since she used to spend more time with her than her father. She was a good girl.

She used to help her mother to fetch water in the river and wood in the forest, but the most thing she loved to do was house chores together with her mother. During December times, her father was on the leave. Thembekile loved spending time with him since she knew that her father will give her money to buy chips and sweets. Her father loved taking her to the field where he will teach her how to fight using sticks so that she can be able to protect herself while he is away.

In the village Thembekile was known as untouchable girl. since she beat boys and girls even who are older than her. She was a strong young girl in her village. Thembekile started at school at the age of 7 years old. She was a bright, intelligent learner, she learned everything fast. Which resulted in her passing all her primary school grades with flying colors, but when she was at grade 7, things changed.

When her father lost his job due to the miner's strikes without payment. He was forced to come back home, now

Thembekile had a chance to live with both her parents under the same roof, she thought that it was going to be great, and they will be happy together as a family. But it was a different story. Her father began to drink alcohol due to the stress of how he will provide for his family since he has lost the job.

He would wake up in the morning and go to the local tavern till the midnight. And when he comes back home, he wants everybody to wake up, not only his wife but also Thembekile was supposed to wake up. There was no peace at Thembekile's house ever since her father lost the job. He didn't stop there, he also starts to beat Thembekile's mother, every time when he was drunk, and he usually beat her up while Thembekile is watching.

Thembekile knew that what her father was doing to her mother was not right, she had in mind that she wanted to protect her mother, but not only to protect her mother but to also teach his father a lesson that he will never forget in his life.

She believed that she had a power and if she plays her cards well, she can achieve to teach his father to have a respect for women and know how they should be treated. it was not her intentions to fight her father, but she realised that there was no other way to defeat him.

After school, she would help her mother doing house chores and after that she would go to the fields where she met a guy called Sizwe who helped her with on finding a job, so that he could be able to provide for them. Thembekile and her mother did forgive him, and he applied for different jobs and luckily, he was called back to the mines where he used to work, since there were no strikes anymore.

He specifically thanked his daughter for standing up for her mother and for being a brave girl who was able to save her family from the continuous embarrassment in the village. Thembekile and her family there were happily after. Never doubt the power of the woman.

3RD PLACE

As love crumbles...

Gcinile Magwaza

* * *

“I did everything for you! I loved you like no one else!” He said as he was shutting and locking the back door.

Themba was an ordinary man, as many would assume. He was neither rich nor poor. Life had taken its toll on him too, but he survived, we all do. Both parents had divorced and he never really knew his mother well. His sister was his pride. “You are getting bigger by the day,” she would always say. A family of a few and it is quite safe to say, life was rather another day-to-day basis for them. It was a blissful day when he met beautiful Thabile on his day to work one day. His legs shackled, suddenly he lost his voice. This was not quite normal for the well-known playboy of the town.

“I’d say let’s go for coffee, but it is rather a hot day today,” the charming man said as he was pulling over his car next to the young lady. His white Polo Vivo had been washed with its shiny rims. The leather seats had been polished quite nicely with his interior radio playing soft music.

The young lady just smiled back as she could not resist the charms of this man. The conversation went on for hours until she provided the gentleman with her contact details. Ohh it was love at first sight for these two. They could not stay away from each other as calls would come through every day. Themba would pick her up from the call center she was working for everyday and bring her home. This new love adventure had caused him to put his other “lady friends” aside for a while.

And of course, which man would not go crazy over a young, tall, beautiful and smart lady? She had this black mole on her nose which made her even more beautiful. Unlike Themba, Thabile had a large family and a brother who was not fond of her newly found lover. Her mother lived in the rural areas as a widow.

“He’s my friend, am I not allowed to have friends now?” Thabile panted as she was pushing the angered Themba away. It was unfortunate that the honeymoon phase had disappeared at such a short space of time. This once beautiful and smart girl had turned into a naïve, told- what-to-do prisoner. We all know what the saying “*the leopard will always show its spots*”. Indeed, Themba was the animal in question. “You’re embarrassing me!” Slaps! “I won’t have my woman laughing with other men!”

A few ignored slaps led to this dreadful day of more punches on the face and lying in a pool of blood. Jealousy! He did not want to “share” her. He wanted her all to himself. He could not have his woman laughing at another man’s jokes. For Themba, this was his way of “fixing” her and having her respect him more. Unfortunately for him, he killed her.

