

**2016**

## **ESSAYS/OPINION PIECES**

## 1ST PLACE

### Why would you hurt my sister?

*Adryan Ogle*

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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***

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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 MacLennan 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**

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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***

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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*

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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 Sibiyi***

\* \* \*

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 Sibiyi 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.