

2020

ESSAYS/OPINION PIECES

1ST PLACE

Unity #COVID-19 #TheNewNormal

Sithokomele Mndeni Nkosi

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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.

Reference List

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2ND PLACE

Covid-19 The New Normal

Philisiwe Khuzwayo

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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

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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***

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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***

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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

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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

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“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 fees, 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 Siphon 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 Siphon 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 Siphon, 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

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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 windows 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.