

Planting the Seed

Emerging Student Voices
(Volume II)

Creative Writing

Short Stories
Opinion Pieces
Poetry



A Durban University
of Technology
Writing Centre Initiative



PLANTING THE SEED EMERGING STUDENT VOICES (VOLUME II)

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

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

**PLANTING THE SEED
EMERGING STUDENT VOICES
(VOLUME II)**

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INTRODUCTION

Gift Mheta

* * *

Chinua Achebe, the prolific Nigerian novelist, poet, and critic widely regarded as a luminary of modern African literature, passed away on the 21st of March 2013. Following his death, Chinua Achebe's life and literary achievements were celebrated in different ways across the globe. The Durban University of Technology Writing Centre decided to honour this distinguished scholar of African literature by conducting a creative writing competition in his name.

The competition was conducted to promote both academic and creative writing among students. The broad theme for the competition was *tradition and modernity*, and the sub-themes were *identity and self-representation, rural-urban divide, pan Africanism, colonial encounter and its consequences, post-independent Africa, gender, culture and society, and redefining traditional African culture*. This competition marked the genesis of creative writing competitions at the Durban University of Technology (DUT). Over the years, it has grown significantly, culminating in the publication of winning entries from 2015 to 2020 in a volume titled *Planting the Seed: Emerging Student Voices*.

Publishing winning entries is a way of showcasing past winners of the DUT Writing Centre Annual Creative Writing Competition. It demonstrates the tangible impact of nurturing creativity and critical thinking in our students. Their achievements as thought leaders, entrepreneurs, and community change-makers exemplify the excellence, innovation, and societal impact at the heart of

ENVISION2030. By celebrating these success stories, we provide current students with relatable role models who prove that writing is not merely an academic exercise but a powerful catalyst for leadership and meaningful impact. These narratives reinforce our commitment to producing well-rounded graduates who are articulate on pressing social issues and equipped to shape a better future through creative expression. Above all, these competitions and publications demonstrate to our students that writing can be a viable career path. Like established writers, they too can earn a living through their craft.

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

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

The competition, therefore, has provided DUT students with the platform to think and write critically about what it means to be an African. It allows them to appreciate and

question African traditions, values, fears, and aspirations. Above all, the competition provided students with a voice on critical topics such as *leadership, literacy, technology, cooperation, harmony, conflict management, non-violence, equality vs inequality*, and so forth.

This volume, titled “*Planting the Seed: Emerging Student Voices (Volume II)*”, curates the winning entries of the DUT Annual Creative Writing Competition, structured chronologically from 2021 to 2025. The winning entries are presented from the first prize winner to the third prize in the essay/opinion piece, poetry, and short story categories, respectively. Thirty-six entries are included in this book.

This book is aimed at anyone who loves reading. It is the outcome of a collective effort by the Annual Creative Writing Competition Task Team at DUT. Through this volume, we hope that budding writers will be inspired to write more. In the words of Eneke the bird in things fall apart, “Since man has learned to shoot without missing, I have learned to fly without perching”. Keep inspiring many readers through creative writing. Do not stop.

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

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

2021

ESSAYS/OPINION PIECES

1ST PLACE

Service Delivery

Nomcebo Duma

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

According to the South African Constitution, municipalities are solely responsible for service delivery. This means that local governments are responsible for ensuring that all the needs of citizens are met. The citizens are given the opportunity to vote for their local government; they decide who provides services to them. These services include water supply, refuse removal and street lighting, to name a few. The municipality can choose to provide the services directly or

outsource; whichever way they choose, the responsibility still lies with them. They must provide quality services at an affordable price. This says services should be delivered in an effective, predictable, reliable and customer-friendly manner. The responsibility is huge but not impossible.

South African municipalities are unfortunately unreliable when it comes to service delivery, and this has a direct effect on the quality of life of the people. Due to the fact that municipalities are often failing to meet the demands of the communities, it directly affects their quality of life. Quality of life, according to the Oxford dictionary, refers to the standard of health, comfort and happiness experienced by an individual or group. Anon (2006) makes an example: if the water that is provided is of poor quality or refuse is not collected regularly, it will contribute to the creation of an unhealthy and unsafe living environment. It is understandable why these resources contribute to the quality of life because they are basic survival needs.

As I have mentioned, the service delivery in South Africa is unreliable and insufficient; some improvements can be made. To begin with, better communication between the service providers and citizens. This will help the municipality determine the needs of the community and whether they are met or not. Another way to improve is to work on an improved financial plan. Anon (2006) agrees and states, 'Improved financial planning will help find the best possible

way to use the available funds.’ Outsourcing is another way to ensure that the needs of the public are met. Outsourcing, in simple terms, means getting/hiring someone else to do the job for you. Municipalities can hire private companies/organisations to perform certain services for them to ensure efficiency. South African municipalities are lacking tremendously, but with dedication, improvement is possible.

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

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2ND PLACE

Gender-based violence against men

Cebo Ncube

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

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

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

Sexual violence is engaging in any sexual act with someone who has not, or is not able to, give their consent. Unfortunately, South Africa has the highest rape rates for women and girls in the world. It is understandable why sexual crimes against men are not prioritised; however, that should not be an excuse for negligence. According to the work of Parker Lewis, “80% of 30000 prisoners in Pollsmoor prison were raped each month.” This is because prisoners sexually abuse other inmates to dominate them or extort them for “sexual slavery.”

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

In conclusion, GBV against men in South Africa is real, and just because it happens less frequently, that does not make it a less valid concern. Systems that discriminate against men are not conducive for equality. Statistics for physically abused men are potentially higher than reported. Sexual violence being extremely high against women does not mean that

sexually abused men do not deserve support. Men rarely get treated for the trauma that they suffer from violence and are more likely to commit suicide. I think the appalling rates of GBV against women and girls are a result of men who have been victims themselves, victimising others. Unless we help them deal with their trauma in a healthy way, we cannot solve the issue.

3RD PLACE

Proudly SA

Bongeka Mgobhozi

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

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

We are a blessed continent, animals so fierce, plants so beautiful and land so rich. How could I not be proud of being a part of that? It places me in such power and grants me such a beautiful responsibility to utilise all that we have and grow from it. Beautiful people who come from far and near; the many different languages and cultures help us express ourselves the best way we know how. We are very complex, multifaceted, and unique, and we serve it as it is. Our talents knock on all doors, gifted beyond measure. Its South Africa to the world.

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

South Africa is a strong nation. Our accomplishments speak louder than our sorrows; we have lived to shine through our struggles. Our resources and abilities tell us we are destined

for greatness. It is all given; it can't fail. Because of the people, our future looks promising; we will build a distinctive legacy. A country is made gold by its people, and so is South Africa. Be a part of it.

POETRY

1ST PLACE

The last shred

Maryam Kotze

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

Steps BELLOW beyond the bedroom door. SCREAMS ring
out, then a ROAR.
With pinched eyes and bleeding hands the last thread is
freed
wafts away by the breeze, into the morning light, bright.

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

2ND PLACE

“SENZENI NA, SENZENI NA, SENZENI NA?”

- the cry of a race that is dying in the hands of its oppressors.

Tsholofelo Zulu

They know exactly what
they're doing,
this is just another
gateway to a “whites only venue”.

Senzeni na?

They don't hang us from trees anymore.
Instead, they allow public servants to
gun us down
and then reward them with pensions.

When will it stop?
Will it ever stop?
My race is dying, and this world is broken.

Senzeni na?

Broken and not ready to be repaired.
Are they ever going to reach the point

of enlightenment where they realise
that we are HUMAN –
And that we see things, and feel things
just as much as they do.

Senzeni na?

How and why is there still a slave trade
in these modern times?
Not only is my race a crime,
but I guess it also sells quite fast.

Senzeni na?

Yini Yini Yini bo?

Yini enjabulisa kakhulu uma nibona ubuhlungu bethu?

Yini enjabulisa kakhulu uma nibona izinyembezi zethu?

*Yini enjabulisa kakhulu uma nibona imizimba negazi
elingenalutho isizungezile?*

Yini Yini Yini bo?

Senzeni na?

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

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

I am, right now,
as when I discovered loving me!
Turning back is beyond imagination
though I cry by each delicate moment,
I have made a decision to rather cry
in solitary than have friends who spite my nature
though it feels like gradually I'm withering.

Standing like a haunted house
in a forgotten field;
lonely, forlorn, abashed and silent!
But I cannot turn back to that concealing place;
more a tomb than a closet, where
darkness fell, and thus began the true me!

No more will I bind my soul with restricting
clothing, sheltering my soul
against your dire religious condemnation.

I have stumbled out
perplexed but alive!
Struck by unusual light that blurs my search
for the voice that called me by name.

And I look at you
and I see that you've been crying!

SHORT STORIES

1ST PLACE

Triggers

Amanda Shabalala

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

I know you must be asking yourself how I got here. This is not how I had imagined my life would turn out. Trust me; I am not this kind of person. I am no murderer.

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

I was four years old when I first witnessed my mom bruised and bleeding on the floor..., powerless, as she was, pleading for her life at the feet of a dreadful monster who called himself my papa. Her voice is still engraved in my memories, “*please, please stop... I’m sorry*”. I still remember the screams in response to the kicks, which took her breath out and made her even weaker to talk or cry. The exhaustion in her voice. Every Friday night, she would sing the same song, dance to his beat, as he beat the life out of her and called it love.

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

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

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

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

Years passed, and I found myself a man who said he loved me. Well, he did most of the time. He acted right more like a gentleman most of the time. I do not remember what had happened this night, all I can tell you is that he had come

back from work; you could see the anger in his face. I tried to calm him down as I always did. He tried to take out his anger on me as he would sometimes. On this day when he put his hands on me, it took me back to when I was a child. When I could not do anything to protect myself. A thousand thoughts ran through my mind. I remembered the day I had told myself I would not let a man love me the way men around me love women because their love hurts. That night, he had touched the wrong one. I pushed him off me. Slowly, I could see his head fall towards the corner of the table, which took his life...

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

The only thing I am guilty of is surviving.

2ND PLACE

THEMBEKILE

Nonsikelelo Magwaza

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

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

In the village, Thembekile was known as the untouchable girl, who would beat boys and girls, even those older than her. She was a strong young girl in her village. Thembekile started school at the age of seven. She was a bright, intelligent

learner, who grasped everything quickly. Thembekile passed all her primary school grades with flying colours, but when she was in Grade 7, things changed.

Thembekile's father lost his job due to the miners' strikes and received severance pay. He was forced to come back home, and now Thembekile had a chance to live with both her parents under the same roof. She thought that it was going to be great and they will be happy together as a family. But it was a different story. Her father began to drink alcohol due to the stress about how he would provide for his family since he had lost his job.

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

Thembekile knew that what her father was doing to her mother was not right. She knew in her mind that she wanted to protect her mother, but not only to protect her mother, but also teach his father a lesson that he would never forget in his life. She believed that she had the power and if she played her cards well, she could teach his father to

have respect for women and know how they should be treated. It was not her intention to fight her father, but she realised that there was no other way to defeat him.

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

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

3RD PLACE

As love crumbles...

Gcinile Magwaza

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

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

"I'd say let's go for coffee, but it is rather a hot day today," the charming man said as he pulled over his car next to the young lady. His white Polo Vivo had been washed and its rims were shiny. The leather seats had been polished thoroughly and the car radio was playing soft music.

The young lady just smiled back as she could not resist the charms of this man. The conversation went on for hours until

she provided the gentleman with her contact details. Oh it was love at first sight for these two. They could not stay away from each other as calls would come through every day. Themba would pick her up from the call centre where she was working every day and bring her home. This new love adventure had caused him to put his other “lady friends” aside for a while.

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

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

A few ignored slaps led to this dreadful day of more punches to the face and lying in a pool of blood. Jealousy! He did not want to “share” her. He wanted her all to himself. He could

not have his woman laughing at another man's jokes. For Themba, this was his way of "fixing" her and having her respect him more. Unfortunately for him, he killed her.

2022

ESSAYS/OPINION PIECES

1ST PLACE

Strands of justice

Maryam Kotze

It was at the tender, impressionable age of 12 that I learned what it was like to be a Muslim woman. Only now turning twenty, with the vast influence of social media, do I see it for what it was... sexism at its finest. Religion at its very core is full of controversy and can be quite fickle to discuss, even amongst family. But that does not mean that it is free from discussion.

“Cover you hair!”, “Astagfirullah!”. A common occurrence for me as I was not one for scarves. They felt suffocating and restrictive, a cause of many a discomfort. But in the eyes of one of my teachers, I was naked, apparently. Well, at least in the eyes of God. That’s what I was taught. That women’s hair must be covered at all times for modesty. Yet it did occur to me strange that many of the boys would pitch up without their toupees. They were occasionally reprimanded, however I did not hear the same phrase being used on them. They were never told that they were walking around naked. Of course not. They were boys, but we were Women.

And thus the great divide grew more apparent. And yet here I was, living in South Africa, with the privilege to choose. The moment I left primary school I refused to wear scarves, even at the cost of a daily lecture from my grandmother. But that's all it was... a lecture. Words. Not bullets. Not like the ones raining the streets and schools of Iran. All started because of a single woman. Only two years older than me. Mahsa Amini. In the dark reality we live in, we face the truth that she was not the first, and she most certainly won't be the last. When I open social media my ForYouPage is flooded with videos showing the devastation being wrought on the women of Iran. From honour killings to being gunned down in the streets.

It's everywhere; it is pervasive. Its message persistent. And yet when I look to my Muslim brothers and sisters from all over the world: the ones who cry for Palestine, the ones who scream for justice for the Muslim woman of France, I see them clearly. They remain silent. Voiceless. Not because they can't speak out but because they won't. "They are disrespecting Islam...How dare they burn their scarves!" They don't know it, but I hear them. I know what they are saying. I know what they believe. It is these falsehoods that we are raised with and taught to whole heartedly believe. I cried for them when I watched them burn their scarves and dance around the fire. When they shaved their heads as a symbol of revolution. Do you know why they do it? It took me a while to actually realise the significance. When I

eventually came to the conclusion I realised how much power and strength these women yield. If a single strand of hair deems you naked and immodest, then what will they do when you have none? When they have nothing they can hold over you? What excuse will they use then to persecute the women of their country?

The world stands by and watches as protestors flood the streets of every city in the country. As the so called “morality police” enter primary schools and the girls stand together, throwing bottles at them until they leave. As university students are barricaded into their campuses and the police fire on them all irrespectively. As a little girl dies in the crossfire. As teenagers are murdered and artists and athletes taken into custody for speaking out. Is this really what’s happening in the 21st century, under the false pretense that this is all in the name of Islam? I may not be the most pious or most devout, but I do remember the words of the holy Quran, “There is no compulsion in religion.”

Finally, to the girl, who stood tall in the face of soldiers, who tied up her hair to take her final stand without an ounce of fear or regret, who was executed right after the video fades to black... your fight was not in vain and it will never be in vain. For today you will not be forgotten. You will not fade to black. And neither will we. This is not a fight against religion, it’s a fight against oppression. It’s a fight for the basic human right of choice. Even if it means starting a revolution.

2ND PLACE

Turning a new page

Dhashen Sevenundan

Formed by the soil of my mother's womb and the water of my father, I was merely a seed planted into the fortress of a new beginning. One so valuable that it could be considered gold. The sun's rays penetrated the surface of my skin, which caused the protective barrier that encapsulated me to collapse. I rose from the ground like the true warrior I am and reached for the clouds. With my roots embedded into the soil and my trunk a lateral pillar, I stretched my arms to surround my body and lazed in the brazen sun. As time elapsed through the many years, I bore luscious greenery and mature fruits. Abandoned in an empty space of land, I stand tall in honor of my existence. Just like humankind does in the forests, allow me to disintegrate every perimeter of my wood-like skeleton and elaborate on my tree of life...

Growing up surrounded by daisies was nothing like what the flower itself represents. They are picked and adored by all those who set their eyes on them. They are even selected to be tossed in the occasion of marital bliss and be an omen of love's purity. However, in my case I was merely another plant surrounded by these daisies. The irony is a fine line between equality and inequality. Being in the center but never the

attention in the scope of the public iris. We are always neglected and rather tossed to the side like discarded trash simply for not meeting the standards of a constructed society that does not have room for the queer.

I used to sit puddled in my thoughts while the superior daisies alongside me were adored by the affection of people who visited and strolled past. They would smile and take pictures of them. I was used to the lack of affection from those who compared me to the other plants. Initially, it was simply words of affirmation that they were gifted but that soon turned into them being lifted by their pots and taken to a place called “home”. What did I get instead? Filthy stares, empty sighs of breath, spat on and sometimes they look the other way. They cut me down before letting my leaves reach their full potential. It reminds me of the several times at school when the other kids never picked me for the teams during sport activities and said the occasional “you are on the wrong team” or “he swings the bat the other way” as an excuse to devalidate my existence and being chosen like everyone else does. I am taken for an ordinary thing that is invaluable. They all sliver my stems with their piercing tongues that spit words that diminish my value. They remove the tobacco from between their chapped lips and extinguish its fire in my soil along with my soul causing my frivolous leaves to crawl into hiding.

As the time passed, I was left abandoned on a shelf. This garden store had no more place for a mere plant like myself.

Customers never showed any interest in me and thus I was left behind and then discarded into an open field in the backyard. It is always the same for us plants whose parents leave us once our flowers start to bloom. A plant is supposed to be nurtured with fertile soil, water and sunlight. They say that talking to your plants affectionately helps them grow better but in this shop, nobody even fumbles a sentence at us. How are we expected to flourish when our basic necessities to live life are not met by society. We are shun upon, murdered and discriminated against at home, work and in public. Our lives do not matter therefore men may use our bodies as they please. Ironical considering the fact that the very same society that keeps us in the shadows to "protect" themselves are the very ones to leave us scarred and impaled, bleeding till the drip ends. But when does it ever end? When will we be finally seen as equal?

I believe that us plants who are tossed into the mud are the purpose of God, for if it were not, we would simply disintegrate. However, that is where society is wrong. No matter how much you grind a seed and throw us in mud puddles, we will still rise. This garden shop is a distinct symbolism of what the world is. It houses us all and draws in its customers for them to dictate and mold its "perfect" world. These customers are a society which applies labels to people, a price to give them value and a look to fit into the criteria of their affiliation. What they fail to realise is that at one point, they too were mere seeds, housed in the same

garden store as us. Queer individuals are the plants of today's society, tossed into the mud puddles in the backyard. We are not given the freedom and rights that we deserve. Rights to freedom of speech and expression, rights to live a life not harassed by society, the right to live a life not in fear of being harmed, the right to equal job opportunities as others and the right to equal rights in the scope of the law.

These are rights that society does not have to fight for on a daily basis so why are we required to? Why do we thrive on success and obtain high qualifications in hopes that it would soften the blow to society? Why do homosexual people constantly feel the pressure of conforming to a society that does not need to accept us because we are indeed not a question of acceptance? We are a statement.

Homosexual people are looked down upon and are expected to perform restricted tasks such as wearing a certain type of clothing or obtaining a specific degree. We were brainwashed into believing that ordinary objects, both tangible and intangible, can be given genders such as colours, cars, clothes, degrees, hobbies, music etcetera. It is even worse when black women are a part of the LGBTQ+ community as they are already battling for their rights against gender abuse, racism, abortion choices, equality and still have to fight for rights of acceptance into an obscure society. Enough is enough! Despite our environment, us plants will continue to flourish into trees of life like I am

today. One with branches that provide a home for birds and bear fruits for society, abundance of leaves for shelter from the rainy storms and shade from the blazing sun. Perhaps they were right. We do not have a price tag for our leaves because our value cannot be measured nor can our rights be bought.

Society could cut us down just like they do in deforestation, but we will continue to serve our purpose. We are here to stay. We are the very books that educate the same society that burn us to the ground. We are not asking for rights. We are taking it back. The previous chapter in this book called “life” features the history of our struggles. It is time we start turning a new page....

3RD PLACE

World leaders and their responsibility

Katlego Sekhwela

#OneWorldOneFamily

World leaders and their responsibility to build a culture of harmony and zero conflict in all the countries of the world.

Introduction

From time immemorial wars of men have plagued countries, leaving behind unimaginable and unforgivable consequences. The world as we know it today has come full circle from all the torment of the past. It is cemented in the knowledge of history, the woes that mankind has inflicted on themselves, and it cannot be undone. However, the dent of past misfortunes is not entirely the description of our future; mankind is working tirelessly to change the tide. The psychological imprints and indignation that remain in the aftermath of a war are incomparable (Hunt and Robbins 2001). Mankind remains scarred from civil wars that have plundered their very existence, pillaged communities and families, displacing millions at once. The wars of the past have no share in our hopeful present and glorious future. Unfortunately, remnants of wars are still pestering our countries to this day; from the continued civil wars in the Sub-Saharan Africa to the wars in Middle East, the ghost of

distress is still amongst us. Conflicts between countries are a global concern. The United Nations records have recorded tens of millions in displacements of human beings and the negative outcomes it echoes to refugees (Bove, Salvatore and Elia 2022).

Building a functional society requires intention and will to do so. Nothing will come on a silver platter. It will take an enormous amount of communal will power to bring a society that is fully functional and performing at a global scale. Resolving conflicts between two parties, either countries or societies requires oneness from parties involved; conflicts are not insurmountable but can be conquered. World peace is at the centre of functional countries and ultimately thriving economies. The inability to facilitate peace on a global scale has a hierarchical ripple effect, with countries forming the base of the hierarchy suffering the most. A look at disunity in one country could possibly be attributed to the non-harmonious regional and global governance, and their non-involvement and turning of a blind eye.

Refugees face more than the conflicts televised on the screen; they are physical victims of the war. Experiencing the injustices and the horrors of conflicts firsthand; we imagine it, they live it. Being a refugee is being set up to be a reset button in life, displaced from your familiar environment to a completely new environment that requires you to fend for

yourself. The inability of the UN to gather resources for refugees in some camps has found refugees enduring intense levels of hunger and hopelessness (Bargu 2022). The ordeal of children losing their parents in transition and never finding them ever again is broadcasted frequently. Confrontation with leaders that subject the people to such inhumane experience is minimal from influential political heads, and should the matters be left unattended the scale of inequality will soar to worse heights.

There is a need for revival and renaissance of governance; a fresh perspective on how human rights is handled. Political correctness is on the periphery of humankind and their issues, core to their being is their individual right to live and thrive in any environment they find themselves in. Policy makers who are not sensitised to human suffering and afflictions are majorly to blame on having war and conflicts under their stewardship. The socio-political discourse of the time is also failing to charge these human issues and direct proper dialogue to influence change and create a socio-political environment where accountability is a pre-requisite to leadership.

Accountability of leaders is a great recipe for prosperous and growing countries, flourishing at a socio-economic level as a consequence. Accountable leaders who are consultative and open to debate make healthier societies than those who lead with iron fist and whose ideas are never argued. A

discussion into which political theory is more successful and appropriate than others should be secondary to what accountable leaders need to cater for, the human right to life. Political theorists historically postulated based on their presenting situation, which might be irrelevant and negligible to the current affair, rendering the theories ineffectual to the current political climate. Leaders should be able to adapt and learn and allow each generation of leaders to find out their individual mission and seek to fulfil it.

New fresh ideas should take the platform in the arena of global engagement, to necessitate the pursuit of peace and harmony. Facilitation of such fresh unbiased and unprejudiced way of thinking should take precedence to make the world a better place for everyone not the inferno the refugees experienced. Cultivation of new ideas and thinking is necessary for the development of people, where people are consulted and democratic culture is endorsed. People will differ in ideology, it is inevitable, but that should not create indifference between parties. Different ideologies widen the chances of options, and this is how leaders should think about divergent thinking or philosophies. In the words of Nelson R Mandela, "I dream of the realisation of the unity of Africa, whereby its leaders combine in their efforts to solve the problems of this continent..." which is well applicable globally.

Conclusion

In creating leaders that will build cultures of harmony and zero conflict in countries of the world, we must do so intentionally. A harmonious and non-conflicted country starts in our individual small communities by nurturing leaders and fostering the spirit of leadership in young people; they are the leaders of tomorrow. If accountability is not practiced at a community level, it cannot be practiced in national governance stage. Imagine a world where leaders lead us to a place of no conflict, a place where no one is living with fear of uncertainty, a place where war is not even imagined. That is the world we are building. A world of fair opportunity and stability, equality and fairness. Conflicts birthed by religion, tribes, and regions will be a thing of the past. We aspire for such a future.

POETRY

1ST PLACE

Dear Marilyn Tracy

Tamika Colbeck

I woke from a nightmare my back drenched in sweat
releasing puffs of unfinished breaths.
There was that sweet melody again,
pulling me from fear and dread
I had to find this stranger to thank him for paying off a debt.
Barefoot close to midnight I tried to find the mysterious
dream catcher and every time I failed
but this time he was closer,
I could feel his puissant presence cover me like a veil.

"Why don't you play for the choir?" I asked watching him
pack away his violin.

Dark brown hair swaying in the wind against his freckled
cheeks
he smelled like leather and rose and it quickly stuck to my
senses for keeps.
He ignored me but I could tell he heard and packed up,
signaling the show was over.

I followed him onto the train
still he ignored my presence as I watched him drum a
melody
on his thigh.
Only then did I remember someone teasing him for being
deaf and blind.

It was a big night and the arena was at its quota.
It was broadcast live for the world to witness such
greatness.
Conducting an orchestra while being blind and deaf sparked
up quite the conversation.
To me, he was still Marilyn Tracey.
I still remember how he rode with me back home to make
sure I got home safely.

I wanted the best view so I sat on the balcony immersing
myself in his work.
I had heard it a billion times,
I put my hand on his heart and I felt his warm hand on mine.
I was there for every practice and each time it sounded
brand new,
I watched him get frustrated at himself and struggle too.
We stand in different colours playing a familiar tune,
every instrument was perfectly in sync
it was a privilege to see how cooperation and teamwork
made this artwork what it is.

The camera on his face sweat glistening from the intense and beautiful piece.

Deafening silence until loud applause erupted through the arena as they rose from their seats.

I know we are not supposed to whistle and scream,
but I screamed.

2ND PLACE

One World, One Family

Onke Gwentshu

As the sun peeks through the clouds,
as the sky opens.
A world so desolate,
a flock of sheep without a shepherd.
Echoes of corruption and confusion,
loud as a trumpet, can be heard by many neighboring
nations.

Oh, how lovely would it be?
If we could abide in harmony.
Holding hands,
tapping our feet in rhythmic rhymes,
of those who endured the bittersweet trials and tribulations.

Rise Sun of Unity! Set Sun of Division!
Harmony, heal the wounds of revenge.
For you are as sweet as honey,
you make our hearts overflow with humanity.
So, streams of selfishness gush down in serenity.
You are a pillar of this Southern African rondavel,
therefore, we ought to spread out our wings and fly
together,
sharing the good and bad times, for we are one big family.

3RD PLACE

Non-violence

Sibusiso Zakade

The soil of our rainbow is watered
with the blood of missing women and children.
From the ground, you can hear their voices.
Women are terrorised and brutalised
by nefarious and sanguinary men.

Soldiers armed with verbal and physical abuse.
Vampires that suck your
shadow and confidence.
Cowards to the core
but petty-minded.

A man, a male Homo sapien
Inheriting an X-chromosome from his
mother and a Y from his father.
Why did that chromosome not only
give him his masculinity?
But also transported a gene with a
generational defect.

Can someone please tell Adam
that Eve is not a crime,

and he cannot continue to sentence her
to his lust and malicious actions.
It could be anyone who loves enough
to return Adam's rib.

I am a man; we are men,
our innocence is not a pardon,
our silence makes us an accomplice,
our identity makes us associates.
I'm talking remedy to rectify,
and end gender-based violence.
And so, we are responsible for a change.

SHORT STORIES

1ST PLACE

The family tradition

Yvonne Phiri

‘Sipho is my Son, Mom, and I am going to let the cat out of the bag this time,’ Sam said, seething with anger. ‘I understand, Son, but you can’t do that, it is going to destroy the whole family,’ his mother begged him. ‘I am sick and tired of the mockery Mom, after all, that boy’s blood runs in my veins, and I don’t care what the family will say anymore. I am done,’ Sam said, standing up and bolting out of the living room like a flash of lightning. In her old age MaNyathi summoned her strength and half walked, half ran after her son outside, grabbed him by his shirt, and said angrily, ‘You will never dare do that, don’t test me, Sam’. Sam turned around, and his mother’s facial expression said it all. It reminded him of that day twenty-eight years ago, when he broke the news to his parents that he had impregnated a part-one student while he was doing his part-three at college. MaNyathi was shivering with intense anger, Sam couldn’t even utter a word, and he knew he had crossed the line...

Sam was born into a family of three, one girl and two boys. They were a closely knit traditional family. Tradition was the silk that wove them into a fabric of times, uniting their past, present, and future years. In all this, their father was the custodian of the family, and their mother had embraced the family traditions and cherished them as an honourable daughter-in-law. The brewing of traditional beer and burning of sage, especially after an achievement in the family, was a well-known norm. Years had passed by, and Sam and his siblings left home to work and start their own families.

Eight years later, Sam had been called home by his parents to discuss a sensitive issue. His brother Joel had been married for six years and had no children while he had been married for a year and his wife was already expecting. Sam was asked to do what he thought was 'the impossible'. His brother was the greatest blessing to him, and hence his responsibility for him was of the same measure. So it did not come as a surprise that he would move mountains for his brothers' happiness. His loyalty to his family and tradition were other pushing factors that compelled him to comply with what his parents asked of him.

Joel was the quiet one, an introvert, a genius, and their father's favourite. He was a successful pharmacist who owned a pharmacy and had opened branches across the country. Sam was the outspoken one, never took things seriously, an average student, and mommy's boy. They were

the sweetest of brothers, each creating sparks of joy in the other. They would do everything together, and that was how that fraternal bond was forged, and that was how it grew stronger each passing day. Whatever came, they were there for each other. That reliability and trust were what built and sustained them. Their family had their struggles as any other, but at the end of the day, they found common ground.

He remembered vividly a year later, after doing 'the impossible', the smile on Joel's face at the birth of his son, Siphon. The boy had brought warmth into the family. Years later, Sam had sired two girls with his wife, and Joel had one boy and a girl. The patriarch of the family passed on, and Joel was given the task of taking care of their mother and the farm since he was the eldest. MaNyathi managed to keep the family intact. Their children grew up to be close to each other, something which they learnt from their parents.

It was when Siphon got a scholarship to go and study Chemical Engineering abroad that all hell broke loose. Sam had brought the news home, and it was not well received. His wife scorned him for being treated like a doormat by his family. She went on and on about how Joel was treated as their parent's model child, how he took over the family farm, how Sam was a nonentity, less successful compared to his brother even though they shared the farm proceeds equally. Joel's children were also doing well compared to theirs, all because Sam concentrated on his brother and mother and

not his own family. Family meant a lot to Sam; he knew his wife was a troublemaker but he had managed to keep that in check over the years. Yet what she said might be true, he thought. After all, Siphos was his biological son, why were all the good things happening to Joel and his family? Enough! The truth had to come out. Yes, he couldn't match his brother's wealth, but at least he could father children. The venom that his wife spewed blinded him such that he did not think deeply about the gravity of what he wanted to do.

'I will not allow you to destroy the unity in this family, the love between you and your brother, between your children,' MaNyathi said with a quivering voice at the same time fighting tears. 'You had to do what we asked for to help your brother, to make him a man amongst other men, and there is no price tag for that, my son, you are a hero, if not for your brother, then do it for me my boy', she pleaded, tears now streaming freely down her cheeks. Sam was heartbroken to see his mother's wrinkled face drenched in tears. Secrets had a way of coming out but let it not be him who would blurt out the truth. It was better to let sleeping dogs lie. Let them fight over other petty things. All that he wanted for this family was peace, to live in harmony. 'It's alright Mom', he said, fighting back tears.

2ND PLACE

Rough edges of success

Olwethu Nyathi

I fill the coffee in the big teapot and waltz to the boardroom. I hear chatter as I approach, I open the door, and my eyes first meet Mr Mthembu, the boss. He frowns at me, annoyed. I close the door and place the coffee on the floor. I knock, and I hear him saying I should come in. I pick up the coffee and enter the room; I place it on the table and pour for everyone in the room. Others were kind enough to show gratitude. I leave and go back to the kitchen. I'm the kitchen girl here. Everything relating to the kitchen is done by me; it gets too much sometimes, with all the abuse I receive here, but I have no choice. When you are not educated like me and you have a family to feed, you have no choice but to grab any job that you find.

I am married, with two beautiful girls. My husband is currently unemployed, but he is so supportive. He helps around the house. I always come home to a cooked meal; he doesn't wait around for me.

I work like a dog every day. I don't find peace here, because these men see me as an object that they can pass around. Being a tea girl was never my dream, I wanted to be a boss

lady, have my own money. But life didn't go according to my plans.

I wipe the tables and prepare for my lunch break, where I will finally sit down. Other ladies dressed smartly in expensive pants and heels come through the kitchen carrying their lunchboxes; their expensive colognes fill the room, and I find myself inhaling their scents. They have made it in life, they scream rich. Even their laugh is fancy, not us who just open our mouths wide and laugh like we are swallowing the sun.

I can already see myself wearing an expensive blouse like this.

"What is this dirty girl doing?" I hear one of them ask, annoyed. I look up and realise that I was holding one of them on their shirt. I remove my hands and look down, embarrassed.

"Do you know how expensive this shirt was!? It costs your yearly salary. Stick to making tea and stop touching people, okay!?" She snaps at me. I nod vigorously, not wanting to get in trouble. Before I have my lunch, I have to warm Mr Mthembu's food and bring it to him. The things I have to endure here! I gallop to his office with his food, I knock, and he gives me permission to enter. I place the food on his desk, shaking. This man is intimidating. I always hold my breath near him.

He takes his food and nods, I stand by. He looks up. "Did you need anything else?" he enquires.

"I was just wondering, Sir. Last month I pitched an idea to you and you said you would get back to me, but you didn't. Then I heard that you scored a deal with another company, using my idea." I said, playing with my fingers. Last month, I came to Mr Mthembu with the idea to open a small restaurant outside the building, since most people work late and others don't bring lunch to work. So they would have food at their disposal, he said he would get back to me, but he never did. I heard rumours that he bagged a deal with my idea.

He looks at me up and down and starts smirking devilishly.

"What makes you think you deserve anything good? You are a woman, and women belong in the kitchen, not in the business world. You should be happy; I took your idea and turned it into reality."

"But it was my idea; you didn't give me credit. I came to you with the hope that you would be fair, and I would finally get a more stable job" I complain with my tears already falling. I honestly had hope that it would change my family's situation.

"Oh dear Felicia, the world isn't black and white, sweetheart.

You should be grateful that you even have a job. We wouldn't want you to be jobless, now would we?" he asks, raising his eyebrow at me. I feel so oppressed right now. Is it because I'm a woman? Is that why he's doing this to me? Life is not fair.

Weeks later, I was still doing my job and not bothering anyone. My soul was troubled by what Mr Mthembu was doing, but I had a plan. Today they were launching the restaurant. All well-known businessmen are here to bear witness. The event has already started. Mr Mthembu was grinning like an idiot, taking credit for my idea. I sneaked into the front while the MC was speaking and snatched the mic from him. People looked at me and gasped, probably wondering what this dirty girl was doing. I cleared my throat and told them everything, that I was the one who came up with this idea, I told them that Mr Mthembu has been mistreating all the female workers here for years. I was just taking my chances here, but at least they would know the kind of man they work with. I gave the mic back to the MC and ran out.

Hours later, I was called to the boardroom. Mr Mthembu was also there, with the other investors. They asked me if what I said was true, and I confirmed that it was true, Mthembu also agreed, ashamed.

The day ended well, because they gave me the position to lead the restaurant. I wanted to scream and jump, but I had

to control myself. This was finally the breakthrough I had always prayed for. My family will be happy. I am a victim of inequality, and I'm proud to say I came out victorious.

3RD PLACE

Awakening call

Nosipho Gule

In the forever green forest, the winds are blowing softly, and water flows down the valley accompanied by this beautiful sunrise. People are up already as the new king is about to be crowned deep down in rural KwaNongoma. Everything is in place; the royal maidens are running like headless chickens putting the final touch to perfection. It is the coronation of their new king after all.

Sun rays hit my skin, and as I tried to wake up, my head was pounding. I had a lot to drink last night, and my eyes are blocked by the sun as I try to open them. I woke up and did my morning routine. I was avoiding my family because I did not want to be crowned king, and what I did last night made matters worse. I liked living my life in Gauteng, the soft life, by the way, I'm Mholi Nkosiyo Zulu, 30 years of age, the first son of the late Velabahleke Zulu, whose death took a toll on me. I have three siblings, and I have a degree in Business Administration. Well, join me on this bumpy road of understanding leadership and being a leader.

INSIGHT INTO WHAT LEADERSHIP MEANT TO THE LATE VULABAHLEKE ZULU

The late king was very intelligent. His words were of wisdom, a very humble man and a true believer in both God and the ancestors. There is a museum that was built by the king, and it gave a lot of citizens jobs. He gave shares to the families that were poor and powerless. He listened to his people, used his charismatic self for people to listen to him, and follow whatever he said. He instructed people to build riverbanks so that if ever there were floods, nothing would be destroyed. That is what leadership meant to the late king.

CHAPTER I

Mholi's point of view

Maidens started singing, males dancing, poets reciting poems, and others were blowing whistles, a great combination to welcome the soon-to-be king, indeed, it was a great start. As I walked in, everybody bowed down in acknowledgement of the king's entering.

Before the ceremony started, there was a meeting by the elders to enlighten me more on leadership.

RECAP

Ndabezitha

Zulu kamalandela

*Ngokulandela inkomo zamadoda Zulu omyama ondlela
zimhlophe Wena phunga noMageba*

Those were my clan names recited in respect of the king. After that, the meeting proceeded.

Elder 1: Son, we called this meeting so we can enlighten you on this journey you are about to embark on.

Elder 2: Leadership is taking responsibility, it is being accountable, it is taking risks, it is not easy, but leaders are not made, they are born, and you were born for this, we just had to push you to do it.

END RECAP

You see, I got an insight into what leadership and being a leader meant. I was just not ready, I suppose. The coronation was done, and I was the new king of KwaNongoma, but it didn't feel good like it was supposed to.

Months later—narrated

People were dying, the rivers were dry, cattle were destroyed, maidens and palace guards lost their jobs, and the forest was no longer attractive. Mholi sold the land of his great grandfathers and he escaped, leaving the people to suffer. People were treated like slaves. Being a leader requires someone to sacrifice their happiness, but in the long run, they shall find happiness in what they do. Mholi was a selfish and incompetent leader.

Mholi's point of view

(Dreaming) Father, no, please don't do this, don't kill me, father. I woke up drenched in my own sweat. I have been having dreams about my father since I turned my back on the land of my ancestors. I am running out of funds; all the money I gained from selling the land is almost finished. I went to buy bread on my way back to my apartment and was focused on my phone, boom! I got hit by a car, and I don't feel my legs. People were taking pictures instead of calling an ambulance. Finally, I got help, but I still couldn't feel my legs. The doctor said I was okay, but my legs were not functioning at all. That is a game changer. How am I expected to live my life. Life has been rough; I've decided to go back home and fix my wrongs.

KwaNongoma—narrated

Gasps and shock are visible on the people's faces as the king arrives in a wheelchair; he came in a taxi like a commoner. It is now the time when the king must take responsibility and claim the land back for its owners. Mholi was now determined to do whatever it takes to fight for the people of KwaNongoma. Mholi took a big risk and he borrowed money from the bank and bought back the land of his forefather. Thereafter, he went to appease his ancestors, asking for forgiveness; the last step was to address his people.

Mholi's speech

Mazulu Amahle, Sizwe Sambunga noMageba, words cannot describe how sorry I am. I am sorry, I'm willing to do anything to rectify my wrongs. I failed to be a good leader, and my people suffered in the process. It took almost losing my life for me to see I was wrong. The state the land is in saddens me; people died because of my selfishness. I won't bring back lives, but I'll try to improve the lives of the ones alive. I now understand leadership. Leadership is the capacity to have power over your followers, creating a clear vision for people to follow, establishing achievable goals, and providing knowledge on how to achieve those goals. I wasn't all that, but I am willing to change and make this land better than it was.

LESSON TAKEN

LEADERS DO MAKE MISTAKES, BUT THEY HAVE TO OWN UP TO THEIR MISTAKES AND RECTIFY THEIR WRONGS. BEING A RISK TAKER, THAT'S TRUE LEADERSHIP AND HOW A LEADER SHOULD BEHAVE.

2023

ESSAYS/ OPINION PIECES

1ST PLACE

Ilizwi lolutsha loMzantsi Afrika

Bulela Njemla

Ubukulo ngokwebala lomntu sisimbo esithi ngenxa yokomelela kweengcambu sabe sivamile nakwimihla yenkululeko eMzantsi Afrika. Lo mkhwa awanelanga ukucinezela nokuphatha ngqwabalala abantu abamnyama ngexesha lobandlululo kodwa ukwadale umsantsa omkhulu phakathi kwentlalo yabantu abamhlophe nabamnyama. Ubomi obuphilwa luninzi lwabantu abantsundu eMzantsi Afrika namhlanje luyinkumbulo yobomi olwaluluphila phantsi kwengcinezelo kuba nangona umthetho wobukulo ngokobuhlanga watshatyalaliswa emva kwexesha lengcinezelo, intlalo yomntu omnyama ayitshintshanga ngokugqibeleleyo. Yiya wena kwiingxelo ngobume bentlalo yeli lizwe ufumanise ukuba loluphi olona hlanga luhlelelekileyo. Ngumntu waliphi ibala oyakufumana kusithiwa akalifumananga ithuba ngenxa nje yebala lakhe. Ewe, zenziwe iinzame ngurhulumente wenkululeko kodwa uninzi lwabantu abamnyama alukaboni tshintsho luncamisa umxhelo. Kaloku ngokwengqokelela-

manani izinga lentswela- ngqesho yabantu abamnyama liphinda-phinde intswela-ngqesho yabantu abamhlophe kahlanu. Izikolo ezikumgangatho ophantsi uyakufika kufunda kuzo umntwana womntu omnyama kunqabile ukumbona owomhlophe umntwana. Nangona urhulumente elilisela ngokwakhiwa kweeklinikhi neezibhedlela kwiindawo ezisemaphandleni, ukungaqhubi ngendlela ebekumele ziqhuba ngayo ezi zakhiwo kwenza kungabikho mahluko kuba uninzi lwabo bantu lusakolola ukufumana iinkonzo zempilo ngokwanelisayo. Xa unokubukela kumabonakude okanye umamele kunomathotholo iindaba, akungeke uphoswe ngumntu obala limnyama esenza isicelo seenkonzo zokuphucula ubomi kurhulumente. Ndithetha mna inkondekazi ehlala kwibhodlo lendlu engawa nanini na isenza isicelo sokwakhelwa indlu ngurhulumente okanye ulutsha lucela iingqesho.

Naxa unokuthelekisa iindawo uninzi lwabantu abamnyama oluhlala kuzo neendawo uninzi lwabamhlophe oluhlala kuzo, akungevumi ncam ukuthi umntu omnyama uxhamlile kwinkululeko yeli lizwe. Mandikutsho siqala ukuba inxalenye yokungalingani phakathi kwabantu abamhlophe nabamnyama yenziwa kukusilela kukarhulumente ofunqulise umsebenzi wokuphucula ubomi babo bahlelelekileyo. Esinye isizathu kukuba umntu omnyama akaqalanga emgceeni omnye nomntu omhlophe kolugqatso lubesemva kwexesha lengcinezelo. Yiyo ke le nto abantu abamnyama basuka babengabaphelelwe lithemba kwizinto eziphathelele nokulinganiswa kwabo

nabantu abamhlophe kuba kwakudala umntu omhlophe ebebonwa njengobaluleke ukodlula olunye uhlanga. Ilizwi labantu abamnyama licinezela yile nkolelo kanye, nkolelo leyo esizibona siyilandela noxa singaqondi. Yile nkolelo eqhubelisa phambili ucinizelo lwabantu kuba nokuba akasekho umntu omhlophe obukula ngokuphandle umntu omnyama ngenxa yebala lakhe, basekho abo bayisebenzisa ukuvalela abantu abamnyama amathuba aphanalaleyo. Oko ke kukwandlalela ibali endizakuthi ndikubalisele lona mfundi onokuzibhaqa ufunda ngcono ngendlela le nkolelo engathi ichasane nenkqubela-phambili kwiinzame zolutsha ukuphucula bona neelokishi abaphuma kuzo. Eyona nto endifuna sigxile kuyo apha kukujongelwa phantsi kwiilokishi ezihlelekileyo zoMzantsi Afrika kwenyathelo lokuqala elinokuzala iimpumelelo ekulweni ukungalingani phakathi kwezi ntlanga. Elo ke linyathelo lokuba umntwana omnyama aqhabalake kwintsonkelo yenkolelo yokuba umntu omnyama ungaphantsi kunomntu omhlophe. Undoqo weli bali yilokishi iNyanga, eKapa.

Uyokhumbula ukuba le yenye yeelokishi apho intlalo yoluntu ingentlanga kwaye izinga lentswela-ngqesho nolwaphulo mthetho liqabele ngaphaya. Omnye wolo lutsha lwaluswele ingqesho yayinguQhayiya Mvula okwakuyiminyaka emine ekhangela umsebenzi. Wafunda iminyaka yakhe yesinala kwisikolo sikarhulumente esasilapho eNyanga awathi akugqiba wafundela isidanga awasithweswa ngo-2019 kwiyunivesithi yaseNtshona Koloni.

Kwakungemnandanga ukuhlala ahlale nemfundo engaka kodwa kubenzima ukufumana umsebenzi ingakumbi kuba yena nabazali bakhe babehlala etyotyombeni. UQhayiya wayequqa ephindelela exelisa izulu laseMthatha, enkqonkqoza kwiindawo zonke ecela umsebenzi kungekho nto ilungayo. Kwakusezintsuku ezinjalo xa kwakusemalanga engekabuyi kokwabo. Uyise, uKhayaletu Mvula, wayebukele iindaba zeSABC kumabonakude kunye noTolo owayehlala kwityotyombe elaliyame kwelo labo. UNosakhe, inkosikazi kaKhayaletu, wayelungiselela isidlo sangokuhlwa kwalapho endlini. Waziva engqukuleka uKhayaletu akubona kuvela inkondekazi eyayihlelelele kile ihlala kwibhodlo lwendlu isenza isicelo sokwakhelwa indlu ngurhulumente.

“Nisathi sixhamla kwinkululeko yeli lizwe xa kunje? Yini na ukuba umntu wakowethu akhale kabuhlungu kanje ecela into ekunyanzelekileyo ukuba ayifumane? Iphi inkululeko yabantu abamnyama xa kunje? Akungeze kubekho nkululeko yamntu omnyama abantu abamhlophe besahlutha kangaka ngeli lixa thina sihlupheka olu hlobo. Wawukhe wambona umlungu ekhalela ukwakhelwa indlu? Nakanye!” watsho uKhayaletu echukumisekile.

“Phinda utsho Dlamini mfondini, asizange silungelelaniswe kwantlandlolo. Ukulahlwa kwalaa mithetho ye*Apartheid* nokwenziwa kwemitsha akukabinagalelo lingako kwisiphumo esinqwenelwa lilizwe; isiphumo sokulingana

kweziintlanga ngamathuba onke okuphuhlisa ubomi,” watsho ngokuzola uTolo.

“Uyabona Tolo ndingabacacelanga nje abantu abamhlophe yinto yokuba bazele ubuqhetseba. Bafika kumntu omnyama banga bazakuhlalisana kakuhle nabo kanti bathi lala gusha ndikuchebe. Kudala basijongela phantsi aba bantu kwaye abanakwanjongo zokwakha uxolo nabantu abamnyama. Iintliziyo zabo zivuyela le miphumela ye*Apartheid* mibi kangaka ejamelene nabantu abamnyama. Uyabona intombi le yam yathi indixelela ngenye imini ukuba ibizwe kwi-*interview* ndayixelela ukuba ingazihluphi ukucinga ukuba iyakuwufumana loo msebenzi ukuba abaqeshi bamhlophe. Namhlanje uye kuzingela umsebenzi edolophini, ndimyale ukuba angazihluphi ngokuya kubaqeshi abamhlophe. Phofu kusenobanzima ukuwufumana nakubaqeshi abanebala elimnyama kuba umntu ontsundu usuka ajikele umntu lo wakowabo akulungelwa,” waqokela watsho uKhayaletu ejonge uTolo ezinkalweni.

“Unani ukuthetha olo hlobo emntwaneni ekhangela umsebenzi na Dlamini? Awumthezi amandla xa usenjenjalo?” wabuza ebukothuka uTolo.

“Ndimtheza amandl’ antoni ndimxelela inyaniso nje Tolo? Abantu abamhlophe ukuba bafuna ukuqasha umntu omnyama bayakumqasha ze kuthi ukuba bavukwe likakade labo bamcalucalule ngenxa yobumnyama bakhe. Bonke bayafana injalo nje!”

“Kowu, noko ndithi masidlule kwinto eyenzeka kudala Zizi, sijonge phambili. Inobungozi into yokucinga njalo ngabo bonke abantu abamhlophe ngenxa yento eyenziwa luhlanga lwabo ngexesha lengcinezelo. Akuncedi ukugxwala emswaneni, ixesha lobandlulo ladelula kudala. Xa sisagxile kwinto eyenzeka kudala sizakuqhubekela phambili njani njengomntu omnyama?” wabuza uTolo.

Wagungqa uKhayaletu esihlalweni sakhe kucaca ukuba uchukumisekile yile ngxoxo wathi, “hayi inene umfamekile Mchenge, ndincamile. Oku kokuba ungaboni ukuba ulawulo lwe*Apartheid* lusashiyekele eMzantsi Afrika. Andinako ukungagxili kwinto eyenzeka kudala. Into yokuba abantu abamhlophe bangakwazi ukusihlukanisa kubo njengoko bababesenza ngexesha lengcinezelo ayithethi ukuba basamkele njengabalingana nabo. *Iracism* kubantu abamhlophe kwabamnyama asiyonto engapheliswa nje kukutshatyalaliswa komthetho we*Apartheid*. Inyani yona ithi asingeke silindele ukuba ezi ntlanga zijongane ngombono omnye kusekho ukungalingani okungaka. Uzujonge xa ibuya le ntombi yam ukuba izakuthi iwufumene na umsebenzi,” wathi akuba atsho, galakangqa uQhayiya. Wafika wabulisa waziphosa esofeni edinwe kanobomi.

“Uhambe njani na sisi?” wafika wachopha ecaleni kwakhe uNosakhe. Wasuka wanikina intloko uQhayiya zehla iinyembezi. Le minyaka mine ekhangela umsebenzi

kwakungathi kukho into engumqobo endleleni yakhe. Ubunzima bayo babumgqiba amandla engekafiki nakudliwano-ndlebe. Lo mqobo wawusuka umenze angakwazi ukuzivakalisa kakuhle, azibone enovalo noloyiko olugqithisileyo. Kwakubanzima nangakumbi ukuba kulo ndlu kukho umntu omhlophe. Inggondo yakhe yayisuka ibaleke ziingcinga. Ingaba bazakumthatha na umntu osuka ematyotyombeni njengam? Lo umhlophe akayi kuyidela na indlela endiwabiza ngayo amagama esiNgesi? Ingaba andizukuwufumana lo msebenzi ngenxa yebala lam? Nditsho mna uhlobo awayesuka athethe isiNgesi wayesuka avakale njengomntu owayengazange waphumelela emagqabini kolo lwimi esinaleni.

“Ibingabantu baliphi ibala abo ubunabo kulo *interview*?” wabuza uKhayalethu.

“Hayi suka, yinto ezakufike ithini na leyo umntwana ekhathazeke elo luhlobo?” wamhesha uNosakhe, esanga intombi yakhe.

“Anindimameli kaloku aph’ ekhapha. Ukuba benindimamele ngengaphoxekanga kangaka lo mntwana.”

“Akufuni ukusibalisela na ukuba bathi siyintoni isizathu sokuba bangakuthathi?” wacenga watsho uTolo.

Wafixiza waphendula uQhayiya, “kukungabina-*experience* tata uTolo. Kwezinye ndifumanise ukuba andinazo ezi *skills* bazifunayo,”

“Tyhini, amaqhinga abanawo! Bathi uzakuyithathaphi na i-*experience* uhleli iminyaka emine ungaphangeli?” wadlokova uKhayaletu eyivela intombi yakhe.

“Hayi kuzakulunga mntwan’ am ngelinye ilanga. Ungatyhafi, le uThixo akubekele yona uyakude uyifumane. Andilithandabuzi icebo uThixo analo ngolutsha lwaseMzantsi Afrika nditsho nakule *racism* ingaka. Iyeza wena imini apho abantwana bethu bayakuma kwimihlaba ebesifudula siyibona njengenokufikelelwa ngabantu abamhlophe kuphela. Iyeza imini apho ulutsha loMzantsi Afrika luyakuzimela lungaxhomekeki ngokupheleleyo kurhulumente, luphuhlise ubomi babantu abantsundu. Asingeke sikwazi ukuzilungisa iintliziyo zabo bakhetha ibala elithile kunelinye, nguSomandla kuphela onawo amandla okwenza lo nto kwiintliziyo zesidalwa saKhe kakade,” wamomeleza ngelitshoyo uNosakhe sele echiphiza naye ukubona umntwana wakhe ekwesi simo.

Yayingekho ntsha kuQhayiya into yokujongelwa phantsi komntu omnyama. Kaloku kwa indlela awayesiva umntu omhlophe ephakanyiselwa phezulu ngayo ngumntu omnyama kwakuse kwamnika isiqnisekiso sokuba ngenene umntu omnyama ungaphantsi kunomntu omhlophe.

Wayengafike kuthalekiswa ubukrelekrele yengqondo yomntu omhlophe nokuba 'mnyama' kwengqondo yomntu omnyama.

“Ufuna undixelesa i-Ilithalekhaya itshone nyani madoda?” wakhuya eqhwaba owokuqala asakubona kuvaliwe e-Ilithalekhaya eyayivenkile eyayithengisa impahla yokwakha eyayiphethwe ngumntu omnyama.

“Uthini ngale yokuba bekuphithizela abelungu kwezi ntsuku pha? Ndiyasola iyakuphathwa ngabelungu ukusukela ngoku.” wahlomla owesibini.

Wangenelela owesithathu esithi, “awu, uthini na ngoku? Uthi ithengiselwe bona?”

“Ewe, tyhini sudlala apha. Abantu abamhlophe bayakwazi ukwenza imali. Banengqondo gqithi kwaye banestrategy sento yonke abafani nathi bantu abamnyama. Xa besenza into bayenza bemise ingqondo ngeziphumo zangoku neziyakulandela ngengomso. Ke thina siye senze ubudenge bokucinga ngenzuzo yanamhlanje. Ndiqinisekile nangoku ivaliwe nje i-Ilithalekhaya kungenxa yokungenzi iplan eyakuqinisekisa ukuba isvenkile ihala imile,” waphendula lo wayeqale incoko.

“Yitsh’ uphinda mfazi ndini. Thina kaloku sicinga apha eqhutsu, sicinga ngoyolo lwangalo mzuzu singacingeli

abantwana bethu nabantwana babo. Uthi kutheni na intswelaningqesho ingekho ngaka kubo? Kaloku bona kwimali abayenzayo nezinto abazithengayo benzela ukuba bangashiyi iintsana zabo zilamba bakusweleka bona. Uyoze ufike isigwili esimhlophe sishiyi umntwana waso nezigidi akusweleka.”

“Kwalo mntwana akazichithi nje nakanjani ezo zigidi, uqinisekisa ukuba ezo zigidi zizala ezinye izigidi. Si, ngamanye amaxesha usuke unqwenele ukukhe uphile ubomi bomlungu nokuba kulusuku olunye,” wathi akutsho lo wesibini baqhuzula intsini.

“Benza ngantoni na bona nathi senze?”

“Umlungu umisa ingqondo ndikuxelele mna, akabe ephuca. Umntu omnyama usoloko elindele ukucela okanye enzelwe, kanti ke yena umntu omhlophe uyazenzela. Ngamavila kaloku abantu bakowethu, izinto eziphelela kwalapha kwezi lokishi bakhulele kuzo. Ukubakho kwedemokrasi akuncedanga nganto kuba iyasihlula, asazi ngoku ukuba senze ntoni ngayo. Abantwana bethu abaqhubi kakuhle ezifundweni ngenxa yokungamizelisi kuba kaloku ngabantwana bedemokrasi kwaye awungeke ubenze neyokuqala.”

Ukanti nakwisinala awayefunda kuso uQhayiya kwakunganqabanga ukuva umntu omhlophe ephakanyiselwa phezulu ngaphezulu komntu omnyama. Wawungava ititshala isithi,

“Yebethuna, anikwazi ukudlala eklasini ngelixa nifanele ukuba niyafunda ngalo. Yinto ongasokuze uyibona isenziwa ngabantwana babelungu leyo. Abantwana babelungu banengqondo kwaye abadingi kuxelelwa ukuba benze ntoni nini. Bayazazi ukuba bafuna ntoni apha ebomini.

Umntwana womntu omnyama uyoze kufuneka ube uthundezana naye ngencwadi zakhe kuba kaloku ingqondo imnyama, izele ilize.” Yayithi yakuphuma loo titshala kubonakale ukuba le nto ifike yahlaba ezingqondweni kwaye nabafundi bayayetyisa.

Ukanti naphakathi kwabafundi wawungava omnye egxeka omnye ngohlobo afunda ngalo ulwimi lwasemzini.

“Owu, Nontobeko lulukhuni ulwimi lwakho. Uhlulwa yintoni ukubiza *uthe*? Xa ufunda *iEnglish you must roll* ulwimi *marn* njengoko besenza abelungu. Akukho nto inzima tu, thambisa ulwimi,” watsho umfundi ephazamisa uNtobeko owayeme ngaphambili esenza ufundo lwencwadi.

“Uyoze asihlekise ngabelungu sana uNontobeko!” wathi akukongeza ngelitshoyo omnye umfundi yaphela iklasi yintsini. Nako ke entlimpinika ethintitha uNontobeko ejijisana negama *uthe* engakwazi ukulibiza ngolu hlobo acetyiswe ngalo ngabanye abafundi. Yavakala ikhwaza ititshala yesiNgesi ihleli emva eklasini, “Nontobeko, uqale wayintoni na bethu

uthe? Akubeva xa bekulungisa abanye abantwana okanye uze ngengqondo yomntu omnyama enisuka nayo ezilokishini, ingqondo yokunyunuswa *and be spoonfed?* Hlala phantsi Nontobeko singekade sichithe le yure yonke sifundisana nawe uthe. Amahle Sigodi!” watsho utitshalakazi edlulela kolandelayo. Wafika wagixa uNontobeko edesikeni yakhe ezigqumathelisile. Kaloku ummo lo ungowakhe wayesaziwa zititshala zonke ngokusokola ekubizeni kakuhle amagama esiNgesi. Iklasi yakhe yayimazi ngokusuka akhale akuhlaselwa ngokusokola ukufunda isiNgesi kwaye yayingenaxesha lentombi endala ekwibanga le-12 esuka ikhale yakukoyiswa sisiNgesi.

Kungentsuku zatywala wasuka wayeka esikolweni uNontobeko ngenxa yokuziva ngathi wayengenako ukufika kweli zinga lobukrelekrele bengqondo yomntu omhlophe yena engumntu omnyama. Zazimshiya exinene ingqondo uQhayiya ezi zinto kuba naye wayezibona ngathi akasokuze afike kwelo zinga, ade ngamanye amaxesha arhalele ukuba wazalwa engumntu omhlophe okrelekrele nosebenza nzima, hayi engumntu omnyama ulivila, onengqondo eyoyisakala zizinto ezincinci. Wayekhe achithe ixesha kwilebhu yeekhompyutha engqina izinto utata wakhe wayedla ngokuzithetha ethelekisa intlalo yabantu abamnyama kunye neyabamhlophe. Wayekhe abone iifoto zabantwana besikolo abakrazukelwe ziiyunifomu bejongeka bemdakana, ifoto zabantu abafotelele ukuya kurhola imali yenkam-nkam kunye neefoto zabantu abahlala kwizindlu ezingamabhodlo

namatyotyombe nqwa naye. Wafumanisa into yokuba bonke aba bantu bakwezii foto ngabantu abamnyama. Kwiifoto zabantwana bezikolo zasedolophini wayefika ekhona umntwana womntu omhlophe ejongeka enxiba iyunifomu ecocekileyo epheleleyo. Wawuthanda umfanekiso wepomakazi lwendlu ekwakhulala kuyo umntu omhlophe, wothuka akubona ukuba kwizindlu ezinjalo bakhona abantu abamnyama abahlala kuzo. Kutheni kuzakubakho umntu omnyama ohlala kwindlu enje ngelixa uninzi lwabantu abamnyama luhlala kwiilokishi ezifana neNyanga? Wakhumbula amazwi kayise xa wayesithi umntu omnyama uphuncuka ngentlahla kwintsontela yobuhlwempu. Waya eyibethelela engqondweni la nkolelo besiyikhankanye ekuqaleni. Inkolelo yokuba umntu omhlophe ungaphezulu kumntu omnyama. Waziva engenathemba lakuze abeyilento afuna ukuba yiyo ebomini. Wathi esiya eyunivesithi wabe sele emoyika umntu omhlophe angazange wasebenzisana naye phofu ngaphambili. Kwakuthi kwakugqitha kuye umntu omhlophe ajonge kude. Wayengayifuni indawo enabantu abamhlophe kuba wayezijongela phantsi ethandabuza ukuba kwakumele abekwiyunivesithi enye nomntu omhlophe kwasekuqaleni. Wayesuka athule athi tu xa ethethiswa ngumntu omhlophe kuba entloko kuye wayezibhaqa ecinga ukuba angathini xa into enophuma emlonyeni wakhe ingasuke imcubhule umlungu, abeyintlekisa ebelungwini njengoko uNontobeko wayeyakukwenza isinala sabo intlekisa xa wayesehlulwa nguthe.

UQhayiya wayemhle ngembonakalo enonwele olude oluhle, aweyenconywa ngalo luninzi lwabantu. Loo mehlo akhe amdaka ayejikelezwe yimisebe emide enga ixonyezelelwe, umlomo nempumlo yakhe ithe ngcu kühle kobobuso bunomtsalane. Abantu babengamjongi kanye kuphele apho, babesenela kukumbuka, bamncome de naye azive enetloni nangaphezulu kokuba wayenjalo. Kodwa kwakusithi xa esekhempasi abafundi baqwalasele obu buhle kubekho abo babini bathathu bancomayo. Lalisuka linqume inqatha xa ebona ukuba nomntu omhlophe uyambuka.

“Hi,” watsho uMatthew ehlala ecaleni kukaQhayiya xa kwakuzakuqala iklassi. UMatthew wayefunda kunye naye eklassini. Wajiya umqa kuQhayiya, woma umlomo, lwashwaqa nolwimi. Wajonga phantsi waqaphela ukuba izandla ezi zakhe zimanzi. Wamana ukuzihlikihla empahleni kuye exakene nento yokusuka abile izandla.

“Are you okay?” wabuza uMatthew emqwalasele. Wathi akunqwala intloko wabuza umva esihlalweni sakhe uMatthew yaqala iklassi. Inqondo kaQhayiya yasuka ayazinza kukho lo mntu uhleli ecaleni kwakhe akava naleyo yayithethwa ngumfundisi. Waqabuka umfundisi ebuza umbuzo,

“Who would like to tell us what they think an economic model is?” Yathula iklassi.

“No one?” wabuza elaqaza uMnumzana Abara “Come on, I am sure you have heard of this term before. Okay I am going to pick someone. Yes, the lady at the middle row. In a pink jacket,” watsho uAbara ekhomba uQhayiya. Wawaqhala amehlo. Athini, aphenhle? Kuya kuthini xa ethetha into engeyiyo? Akayikuhlekwa na ngabelungu? Yabethabethana ingqondo yakhe akazazi ukuba athini. Waziva echitha ixesha elininzi ezama ukuqokelela ndawonye impendulo yakhe entloko suka wabona ephakamisa isandla uMatthew waphendula wathi,

“So, when I think of how the Mind the Gap Grade 12 textbook defined the circular flow as an economic model, I think it’s a simplification of how the complex world works. For example, in real life the circular flow does not necessarily mean money circulates in that exact way, but we simplify it to better understand how it circulates.” Kaloku uMatthew wayesithi uyamhlangula kuloo mehlo ayesele ejonge kuye njengoko wayembona njengomntu oneentloni.

Wayamkela le mpendulo uMnumzana Abara wayiqhubela phambili ikhosi phezu kwempendulo kaMatthew kuba babezokwenza *icircular flow* kakade. UQhayiya wayeyazi yonke le nto athetha ngayo uMatthew kuba yinto eyayifundiswe esinaleni kodwa wayengaqinisekanga ukuba wayengayichaza ngobukrelekrele obunje yena. Yathi yakuphela ikhosi wakhawuleza waqoqosha iincwadi zakhe waphuma engavuli kwasithuba sokuthetha noMatthew.

Ekhangela umsebenzi nje uQhayiya wayesenenkolelo yokuba umntu omhlophe ungaphezulu kunomntu omnyama. Wathi ngenye imini wafumana umyalezo othi makeze kudliwano-ndlebe lomsebenzi wokuba ngumamkeli awayefake isecelo kuwo. Wafikela kusisi owayekwicandelo le*Human Resources* owayezakuba naye kolo dliwano-ndlebe.

“Ewe ke Qhiyaya... Qhayiya Mvula,” yatsho le ntwazana iphengulula iphepha awayeliphethe emva kwencokwana engephi. “Igama lam ndinguNomvuyo Kwezi, ndizakuba nawe kule- *interview*. Ndifuna si... O, mandiqale ndikwazise ukuba ixesha elininzi sizakuthetha ngolwimi lwethu into leyo endicinga ukuba uzakuyonwabela,” wathi akutsho uNomvuyo kwathi qabu unoqolombe efile nje kuQhayiya.

“Ndixelele ngawe ke sisi. Ungubani?”

“Igama lam ndinguQhayiya Mvula, ndiphuma eNyanga kwaye ndikhulele ndafundela pha ndaze ndafumana isidanga sam se*Bachelor of Economics* kwiyunivesithi yaseNtshona Koloni. Ndineminyaka emine ndingaphangeli.”

“Yintoni ebangele ukuba ungaphangeli ixesha elingaka?”

“Kukusokola ukufumana umsebenzi. Andiphumeleli xa ndifuna umsebenzi kwaye ndiye ndingathathwa sele ndisuka kwi-*interviews*.”

“Ndiyabona apha kwiCV yakho awuna-*experience* kwaye awubhalanga kwanto owawuyenza mhlawumbi eyunivesithi. Ingaba ikhona mhlawumbi imisebenzi owawuyenza efana *netutoring, class representative, societies?*”

“Hayi sisi.”

“Yintoni ke esingathi siyizuze kuwe ukuba ungawufumana lo msebenzi?”

“Ndi... ndingasebenza ngokuzimisela njengoko izakuba ngumsebenzi wam wokuqala kwaye ndizakuba ngumntu wokuqala ekhaya ukuphangela. Ndingasebenzisa eli thuba njengento ezakukhuthaza mna nabantu abaninzi abakule ngxaki endikhe ndakuyo, ingxaki yokukholelwa ukuba umntu omnyama ozalelwe etyotyombeni uyokuphelela kwelo tyotyombe. Bendifudula ndikholelwa ukuba umntu omnyama ungaphantsi kunomntu omhlophe kodwa ndithe ndakucinga nzulu ngamazwi kamama athi umntu ngumntu kaThixo phambi kokuba abengowohlanga oluthile, ndacinga ukuba yile nkolelo endibambeke amathuba okufumana umsebenzi.”

Waziva echukumisekile uNomvuyo yile mpendulo waze wathi, “Ndinomdla kulento uyikhankanyayo, ngawukhe undichazele ukuba utheth’ ukuthini. Bekusenzeka ntoni?”

“Ndiyintombazana nje ekhulele kwilokishi yaseMpunga eNyanga, ndikhulela kwityotyombe endisahlala nabazali bam kulo nangoku. Ekukhuleni nzima kwam ndiye ndabona uhlobo

umntu omhlophe aphakanyiselwa ngayo ngumntu omnyama ngelixa kusetyenziswa amagama ajongela phantsi umntu omnyama. Ndithetha mna amagama afana nokuba ingqondo yomntu omhlophe ikrelekrele ke yona eyomntu omnyama 'imnyama' icinga ilize. Kwakude kuthiwe umntu omnyama ulivila waqhela ukwenzelwa. Esikolweni ndibonile kuhlaselwa enye intombazana uNontobeko ngenxa yokusokola kwakhe ukubiza amagama athile esiNgesi ngohlobo lwabelungu. Ndasisoloko ndizibuza ukuba liphi ke ikamva lomntu ongakwazi ukuthetha isiNgesi kakuhle kodwa ekwazi ukuluthetha lwakowabo. Olu hlaselo ndiyacinga lwamenza waziva ngathi akanako ukufika kwizinga lomntu omhlophe engumntu omnyama yena kuba waye wayeka esikolweni. Le nto yayisenziwa nditsho naziitshala zam kuba zazifika zisithelekise nohlobo abantwana beskolo abamhlophe abakrelekrele ngayo ukodlula abantwana besikolo abamnyama. Umnqa ke yayingowokuba ezi ntetha zazingaphumi kumntu omhlophe kodwa ziphuma kuthi.

Endlini utata umchase kanobomi umntu omhlophe ngenxa yokungalingani kwabo nabantu abamnyama nam endilubona mihla yonke. Zonke ezi zinto zandenza ndakholelwa ukuba umntu omhlophe nguye oye wanengqondo yokuzakhela izinto zakhe angadingi nto. Eyunivesithi ndandisoyika ukuthetha nabantu abamhlophe, kwakuvele kome umqala ndibile ndibemanzi ngenxa yoloyiko lokuzihlekisa ngomntu omhlophe. Yilo nto endathi ndayiqaphela kwezii *interviews* kudala ndizihamba ingakumbi apho kukho khona abantu

abamhlophe. Uvalo noloyiko belusuka lundenze ndingakwazi ukuzivakalisa ngokwaneleyo. Ngelanga elithile endandinghamba kakuhle kulo ndabuya ndikhala kumama. Waye wandixelela ukuba uyakholelwa kwi-cebo analo uThixo ngam ngako ke mandingalahli ithemba. Ndathi xa ndilala ngobo busuku ndaziva ndithandaza ndicela kuThixo ukuba andiphe amandla okuzikhulula kolu khonkxo ndizibone njengomntu odalwe wadana nqwa nomntu omhlophe. Kungako ndisithi xa ndinokufumana lo msebenzi ndingawusebenzisa njengento ezakukhulula ulutsha lweli lizwe kwintontela yenkolelo yokuba umntu omhlophe ungaphezulu kunomntu omnyama.” Nangona intliziyo kaQhayiya yayilijaja ligazi, wayiva ikhaphu-khaphu kwaye esiva kanye la mqobo wayesiva ngathi umvalela amathuba utyhileka. Wabona uNomvuyo esukuma eyokugalela amanzi kwenye yezotafile kuba wayebindekile. Wabuya wachopha wajonga uQhayiya ezinkalweni wathi, “Ungoyena mntu okrelekrele esikhe sadlana naye indlebe oko siqalile ukufuna umntu wesi sithuba. Wenze into eyohlula ulutsha oluninzi apha phandle, uyanyamezele. Ndiyakuxhasa xa uthi ulutsha luphantsi kwengcinezelo yale nkolelo. Kudala ndibabona apha, bezijongela phantsi kwakuthi gqi umnye umqeshwa ongumlungu. Le nkolelo yiyo evalela abantu abantsundu amathuba kuba ibenza bathandabuze iindawo apho uThixo afuna ukuba beka khona. Inyathelo lokuqala kukuzikhulula kula makhamandela njengoko wenzile Qhayiya, *the construction of white supremacy by the society fades away when we see everyone, black or white as being one*. Kufuneka thina

bantu abamnyama sizibone sinayo ingqondo yokufika naphi na apho sifunayo. Akukho mntu ungaphezulu komnye. Ukanti nabantu abamhlophe kumele baphume kwingqondo yokuzibona bengaphezulu kuthi. *I will talk to my team about you, and I can assure you that this job is yours,*” wathi akuthi umsebenzi uwufumene wazikhulula iinyembezi uQhayiya wabulela isizungu sento. Waphuma apho ezinike umsebenzi wokunyathelisa ulutsha lwaseNyanga inyathelo lokuqala ekuvakaliseni ilizwi lomntu omnyama. Uyakuse uzicingele ke mfundi uhlobo awavuyelwa ngayo ngabazali bakhe.

Ngeli bali ndirhalela ukuba sithathe intetho kaNosakhe ethi “Asingeke sikwazi ukuzilungisa iintliziyi zabo bakhetha ibala elithile kunelinye, nguSomandla kuphela onawo amandla okwenza lo nto kwiintliziyi zesidalwa saKhe kakade.” Ebunzimeni esibuvayo kwiinzame zokulwa ubukulo ngokobuhlanga, inga singakhumbula la mazwi. Mhlawumbi ukuze luphumelele ekuphakamiseni ilizwi labo, kufuneka ulutsha olumnayam luqhabalake kumgibe ozithiyisele kuwo ngokukwawo. Kumele ulutsha lufundiswe ukuzazi nokuzimela, izikolo ziqaphele indlela ezifundisa ngazo abafundi kwaye abazali bafundise abantwana inyaniso ethi: akukho mntu ungaphezulu komnye. Kodwa ngaphezulu kwako konke, masifunde uthando, uxolo nentsebenziswano njengabantu bakaThixo.

2ND PLACE

VOICES - What Is Voice and How Do We Claim it?

Phumzile Nqobile Ndlangamandla

"You have everything it takes to win this singing competition. Your voice is unique and beautifully constructed. Do you know how many lives you can save using your voice? Take this opportunity to express your outrage here. Through your music and your art, you can change many people's lives and steal hearts." Digging deeper into this statement, simply, we might consider voice to be a sound that a person employs for communication through the mouth, particularly in spoken words. But there's more to it than that. Voice symbolises feelings, emotions, opinions, or views presented in various ways as experiences so as to deliver a certain message or acquire insight into something of interest. We tend to express our feelings and situations differently as we age and mature, rather than just sobbing, yelling, or talking as we did as children. As we venture into a world of exploration, we discover ways to assert ourselves and make our voices heard. We are surrounded by people who are confined and without a voice. Such people are in situations that they cannot solve on their own and have no means or tools to break their silences. There is positivity and value in standing up for ourselves and others, and this requires the ability to take ownership of our voices, letting it all out confidently for some reasons and with the right tools, with the goal of being

heard and understood, and to find meanings behind our experiences and feelings. Voice can be crafted in different ways when we address certain things to various people, and it has the power to remind us of things that can influence our present life.

Absence of Voice

Most of us, if not all of us, endure events that, even today, we can't come to terms with, fail to grasp, and can't find the correct words and ways to express our sentiments and voice out our outcries. These experiences might include feelings of sexuality, depression, loss, doubt, spirituality, worthlessness, subject to abuse, or despair. Speaking up is never an option for many because they are afraid of being mocked, judged, criticised, ignored, or even insulted by individuals who mostly have never been in such situations before; therefore, many choose to remain silent and die inside. People out here lack the ability to express themselves, lack backup, and are mute. The longer they are hushed, the more they become victims of their own grief, unsettled, and vulnerable to confusion and suffering... until they decide to speak up.

It takes boldness for one to open up about their struggles. To be able to go about seeking answers for our experiences and break our silences, we must first assess our difficulties before addressing them and look for suitable ways to express our feelings. As the media becomes a vital central part of our lives, we evolve into a network society. As a person seeking

answers and assistance to your experiences, I believe that social media has the power to be your voice. It can be an extremely useful tool to convey your concerns to the right individuals. Online platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok are not solely for entertainment purposes. Yes, toxicity, criticism, and bullying exist in online societies just as they do in physical society, but it's up to you to be wise enough to know where to seek answers and aid on these platforms. You can look for support groups on any of these platforms, particularly Facebook and Instagram. Since they involve sensitive concepts, these groups normally have rules and restrictions and are administered. You can post in these groups as an anonymous participant or show up as yourself. You can post questions concerning things you are experiencing or have already experienced. The post can be an audio, textual, or visual representation of yourself.

People will react to your post by commenting on it and responding to it. Many of those who do so are likely to be people who can relate to your experiences because they are in those groups for a reason. Such people tend to give the best advice, answers, and solutions. They can also refer to their experiences or those of people they know. Some people gather the courage to finally voice out their situations as well, particularly under the comment section or inbox. I've seen so many people, including public figures, share their personal experiences on social media, opening up about their challenges and seeking help and answers. Some

of these people may have overcome their difficulties and found clarity, and they may later, after they have healed and gained the strength to speak up, do so. They speak up in order to assist people who are afraid to speak out. Many people are given the opportunity to finally express themselves to others or their families as a result of these posts. We tend to realise that we are not alone and that such experiences are not limited to us, and in this way, we have voiced our own and others' outcries, and social media has become our voice as the voiceless.

Consulting aid centres is also a smart move for a person seeking help and answers to his/her situation. In South Africa, we have various support centres and organisations that help every person deal with their situation. Organisations such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can be of great help to people who want clarity and help, and free counselling may be offered to participants. Centres such as the LGBTQ community or Mental health centres are also available to offer support to any kind of person. It's up to an individual to know what they're dealing with and look for appropriate centres that can offer them help. Visiting, calling, or consulting online with such organisations and centres can be beneficial to an individual who is on a path to voice out his/her experiences.

Voices As Ownership and Authority

Freedom of expression is essential for all humans since it broadens and empowers one's voice. It is very likely to bring

about positive transformation in one's life. As many people are reluctant to stand up for themselves, they lack the ability to speak in their own voices and struggle to articulate what they see or experience. We need to stop being silent about what we see going on around us, things that affect our well-being and the well-being of others. We must be confident and effective enough to raise our own voices. Confidence is cultivated and must be fostered. Building confidence requires an introspection session with oneself first. To develop a powerful voice, we must have enough words, courage, motivation, and optimism; consequently, practice is necessary for one to be able to stand firm on their voice. It is crucial to write down your thoughts and ideas on what you see going on around you.

Take notes on your feelings, opinions, and ideas as they emerge in your mind. You're gathering enough words to back up your voice this way. Find the ideal spot, schedule some alone time, and practice spitting out your words. Consider yourself to be in front of an audience and discover the appropriate tone and posture to match your attitude and reaction, depending on the topic at hand. Taping yourself is also useful for practice. Pretend you're having a meaningful conversation with someone, ask yourself questions, and offer yourself responses as you practice. The more you practice, the more confident you will get and the stronger your voice will become. Watching real-life historical films, impactful movies, and reading books also gives an insight into how

voice is constructed. Anxiety and fear must be overcome. It is not easier said than done, but once one dedicates oneself to something, anything's possible.

When you speak up, you open doors for many people who are otherwise mute. When someone sets a good example, people are more likely to come out. Consider the case of rape victims. When that one individual decides to speak out and expose the culprit and draws huge support in the process, other rape victims tend to speak out as well. They also get the courage to finally tell their story after realising they have support and a powerful voice behind them. People have various motives for choosing to speak up at a certain time. Some express themselves when they believe they can no longer handle their predicament alone. Seeing their situation, getting out of hand, they feel restless, lonely, or powerless, and they want social or emotional justice or support for themselves. Once they encounter such, they may finally break free from silence. Even when they have no backup, once they find strength, reasons, and ways to speak up, they likely do so.

Individuals have developed various techniques to express themselves without fear, given that we now live in an era where freedom of speech is for everyone. The many various ways we as humans may express ourselves include creativity, protests, discussions with trusted people, or even expression through our body language. It all depends on what kind of

issue we want to voice out, who we want to speak out to, and whether publicly or privately. Creatives express their feelings to the world through their creations. Consider authors who express themselves or other people's life experiences through books, novels, or films. Their writing may be fiction or nonfiction, but both have a significance obscured behind reality. Their writing always leaves a mark on their audience and readers, in the sense that they make them relate to what they portray in certain films or books. Musicians tend to pour out their emotions, past traumas, or what they see happening around them through their music. Music is therapy itself, the best medicine for many out here. There are many songs with deep meanings, from the beat and lyrics to the visuals, that carry a heavy message, and touch hearts, heal, and bring hope to the hopeless. Artists/painters use their art drawings to express themselves without using words. Art is more than just adornment; artists may use it to express their sentiments and the world's outcries. Art communicates a deep message that does not need to be read or uttered out loud but rather analysed with the eyes and mind.

Protesting is another way for individuals to express themselves. People protest mostly for political change, but they are also protesting for personal reasons these days. For example, some people are victims of emotional, physical, or sexual abuse. Activist groups develop, and society joins as one, becoming one voice with posters, marching on the

streets, and seeking justice, support, and change for all people. People normally express themselves by having meaningful conversations with those they trust the most. They sit with them and vent in the hopes of being relieved and helped. Others tend to seek therapy, being more comfortable in talking to well-trained people who can't judge or mock them in the process. Our body language conveys a lot about our mental or emotional health. When we behave in certain ways, such as when we shiver or when our eyes become agitated and wander around, it may be understood that we need assistance or that we want to communicate. People use their body language to draw attention because they may be too afraid to speak for various reasons.

People who believe, stand firm in their voices, take action, and are self-assured are more likely to be heard. However, possessing such qualities may not always work in some people's favour because we live in a world full of insensitive, ignorant, and caustic people. Thousands of voices are more likely to be heard during protests as numerous voices join to bring pressure to whoever and whatever they are acting against. Making an example of students who marched in 2015 as part of the #FeesMustFall movement, which aimed to stop rising university fees. Due to extreme pressure, the government made a final decision to introduce free education in South African institutions. Through this protest, the voices of disadvantaged students were heard and acknowledged. There are also numerous songs, books, and

films that have successfully saved lives, and brought hope, motivation, solutions, and change to people. Even creatives do comprehend being saved by their crafts, getting support from people and their fans. Even those who express their emotions and experiences through their body language run a chance of being noticed by others, who may then question them about their mood or behaviour and offer assistance if they are in need. Others who speak out to their close ones are heard by those who love, care, and want to assist them. Overall, voices are heard by those who are willing to hear, mostly relate, understand, guide, and want to help where necessary. But those who care less and don't bother to hear other people's voices turn a blind eye to people's outcries.

Voice as Relational

The way we construct our voice varies based on the subject matter we discuss with people. When we speak with different individuals, the tone, mood, and reaction that shape our voice change. The tone of a voice might be harsh, calm, slow, loud, unsteady, or deep. Our moods and reactions coincide with our tone, whether we are pleased, sad, angry, or scared, and how we react to particular situations will also manifest through voice. As we address our issues to different individuals at different times, our voice is certain to vary based on the type of relationship we have with the people we communicate with. Consider yourself pouring your heart out to your loved ones; you may be discussing your sexuality. Your tone of voice may be shaky. Your mood will be fearful,

and you may sweat and stutter as you respond in an uncomfortable way. But once you've gone through that, when you tell someone about how you came out as gay, your tone and mood will be different from when you told your loved ones. Your tone may be loud or calm, and your mood is all right because you might even find the experience funny at the time, and you will react normally. Even when our parents yell at us, we try to explain ourselves in soft and calm tones to show respect, but when our peers or strangers shout at us, we respond in harsh and loud tones. It all relies on the type of relationship we have with certain individuals or their status, and then we address them with the voice and manner we think fit, based on how they craft their voices for or against us.

Voices From Memory Offering Materials to Describe the Present

As our minds function like machines, capturing and storing events and voices that become memories; memories that loop in our minds and activate or resurrect something in us in the future. Our inner voices, which play out randomly in our minds and tell us things, can sometimes control us. We sometimes dispute with or follow these voices. We have voices living among us as we develop, voices that we don't forget, whether they make or break us. It can be family voices, a family credo that we live by wherever we go. As you grow older, you tend to remember the words and voices of family, especially when times get tough and you feel like

giving up, but then you remember your family's encouraging voice and words, and you learn to live with it or live by your family motto.

The environment that surrounds us, the people, and the type of lifestyle we grow up under usually determine our present life. Our upbringings aren't the same. Some grow up in toxic environments, where strong language is used, and are mostly surrounded by violence. Some grow up in healthy environments, surrounded by love, taught words of wisdom, and exposed to a good variety of ways to live. When we mature and perhaps change our environments and choose our own lifestyle, we are likely to inherit what we were exposed to or taught in our childhood. A person growing up in a swearing and violent home is likely to be haunted by these negative memories and voices, creating anger in them, and he/she can apply this to his/her current life. It's the same as a person growing up in a healthy home. They are likely to live by the rules and teachings they were exposed to as kids, and as they age, they always remember the good words and ways they were taught to live by, thus applying them to their present lives.

Most of the time, our inner voices tell us negative things or remind us of some suffering we once experienced. Harsh remarks aimed at us are difficult to erase from our minds and thoughts. There are voices that are always present to remind us of our past experiences, voices that linger in our

brains for far too long and haunt us, sometimes causing uneasiness and restlessness. We are mostly reminded of terrible things rather than good. When you achieve something pleasant, it is likely that someone once told you, "That dream is far from your reach, or even if you succeed in this, you will not generate enough money." Such a voice may sneak into your head, ringing in your ears, and even make you doubt your achievements. Such negative voices of the past are likely to haunt us in the future, invading our peace and happiness, but it is up to us as humans to have ways that will defeat these voices and prevent them from invading our presence.

We live amid numerous authors and their books, and some of us are enticed to read. We frequently come across words that amuse or motivate us while we read. Authors always make an effort to make their voices heard through their writings, resulting in powerful words that cause the reader to standstill and scrutinise certain sentences. Such words can remind us of our past, describe our present, and communicate to us in a variety of ways. These words are frequently quoted by readers. As we read, we hear an author's voice, tone, and mood, and we even anticipate scenarios. We capture these useful words in our minds and hearts, and perhaps, live by them or use them when we motivate others.

In summary of the above, many of us encounter situations that we can't voice out to anyone due to many reasons, such as fear of being criticised. Social media platforms and public centres or organisations can be of great help to someone who's seeking answers and assistance on their experiences. It's vital for one to take ownership of their voice and speak out with courage and confidence. Individuals speak out in so many ways, including protesting and using their creativity. We craft our voices differently from various people, depending on the type of relationship we share with them, or what we tell them. Our inner voices influence us in many ways, could be voices of the past or family, good or bad, and written voices we capture as we read books.

3RD PLACE

A Message For My Daughter

Lindi Dlamini

I had suffered an insatiable hunger before you came. My stomach had suddenly transformed into a great beast with a large appetite. The change was inexplicable; it went on for months. In my pursuit of satisfying the beast, I fell into gluttony, and the beast's appetite became like that of an abyss, devoid of life and colour. This went on for months and I was becoming desperate. It seemed my only salvation was to slouch towards Bethlehem, but to what end? It was an impossible feat. I couldn't do it on my own and I knew this. So I sat passively, restlessly waiting for a revelation. At my most desperate hour, suddenly, you came and you healed me. My baby. I saw your face so clearly, filled with all types of charms like your father's mischievous disposition and your mother's sorrowful eyes. Despite what you might have taken from us, you were still indescribably, unmistakably, uniquely, you. Your sovereign delicacy was a testament to this. Oh, how divisive you would become. It was all so clear I could almost grasp it. My eldest child, my only child, where are you?

What ails me is of a spiritual nature. I cannot consult a doctor or a psychiatrist. There can be no chemical solution. My problem is a religious one; no man can help me. My baby

is gone, and I am hollow. My baby is gone, and I am hollow. My baby is gone and I am hollow. Oh my angel, but what was I to give you? I have no money; I have no home. Maybe it's God's grace that sent you away. Like Cain, I am not my brother's keeper, so I must wander. I have disgraced my mother. Oh, how could I do such a thing? She will never love me again, so I suppose I will just have to rebuild. I am in no way fit to be a mother, but I must rebuild. I will wander until I find the house I saw in a dream; the house at the bottom of the hill, a hill so green, a welcoming green very vibrant, acidic; nauseatingly so. You and Daddy and I, on the green hill, that's where we will live.

The day I saw the deep red that stained my underwear, everything began to smell of death. The blood kept coming and coming. Oh, it was the cruellest shade of crimson. Why God, do you mock me like this? You take away my joy, my vindication, my emancipation, my family...and then you laugh at me. Why do you laugh, God? What a terrible predicament this is. You couldn't have the chance to breathe air in and push it out, or to know the texture of your father's hands when he holds you, to feel the sensation of the blissful warmth of the sun, or the maternal embrace of the deep seas. You didn't even get the chance. What have you amounted to? A blood stain. Was this all a figment of my imagination? My mind spinning around in circles? Is that it? There was no baby, there was never a daughter; these dreams of her, these visions of her, they were just designed

to torment me. Why make me weep for something fictitious? If she was never really there, why do I still mourn? Where is my daughter? What did you do to my baby? Oh my child, your portrait used to give me so much joy, but now it scourges and scowls at me. I don't resent you; it is not your fault. I just miss you, and my heart has been set alight. I can't bring myself to talk to anyone about it. Even in the best moments, where everything is perfectly quiet and warm, moments where I'll prepare myself to utter the words, to recount what could've been, to confess, right when the conversation is opening its arms to me and asking me to speak. A gentle chant, it sings to me, "*Speak! Speak!*"

Speak!", but just as I am about to, like a child trying to escape a parent's prosecution, my voice suddenly runs away from me. I try to chase after her, but alas, she is almost as elusive as you. I run for kilometres, looking beneath rocks, and atop of bushes, and just when I catch sight of her, just when I feel I have almost got her, she escapes.

There was one day in particular, I tried to hunt her down. It was a sunny day, and I was determined. I ran and ran, and she was pacing just two kilometres ahead of me. With my target clearly in sight, I shifted gears, running faster and faster. As my pace quickened, the wind brushed my face with anticipation. The dust below my feet began to feel immaterial; in a truly divine way, it transformed into a conveyor belt of sorts. It felt as if the ground below my feet was flinging me forward

towards her. Nearing closer and closer, I could see my voice heading towards a baobab tree.

She hid behind it. I searched around the tree, but I could not find her. Instead, I was faced with this large figure, which stood with the strength and wisdom of a haggard matriarch. I stared into the tree's surface and was truly astonished at the sight of a sea of dejected faces staring right at me. It was an awful confrontation; one thousand visages wept and hollered. The longer I stared, the more comprehensible their unitary howl became; they were all chanting violently, 'Why? Why? Why?' The circular repetition rung through my ears, and all around my head. Why? Well, I simply don't know. Their once obscure faces became more and more clear, and I came to see that their portraits resembled mine. Faced with this disturbing image, I had no other option but to flee.

My child, are you with me still? My head is heavy, my heart is on fire, and my only aspiration is to use this fire to ignite the cursed tree. Are you still with me, my baby? A vision plays in my mind, the baobab tree burning to the ground. I envision it daily. The picture is like a scene from a movie; it's truly quite cinematic. My only wish is to be like a spectator at the theatre, sitting, waiting, and watching it all burn. Can you see it? Oh, please tell me you can see it. This is all I need to do, and then maybe you will come home. Then maybe I will be able to speak. Then maybe you will never have to know the sight of blood or the smell of death. We'll be safe. You, Daddy

and I will be safe, on the green hill, and we can start again.
We can rebuild.

POETRY**1ST PLACE****Dying voice*****Asiphe Nicholas Feni***

There are stories of despair that are never shared,
words unheard are enveloped in the tears shed.
Gratitude goes to the rain,
the showers of heaven conceal our cries and blanket our
shame.
Our voices are heard when life ends;
our lips move when graves demand sad songs to be sung.
We are quiet when life is in progress,
enemies of progress say the sounds we utter yield nothing
but problems.
So, we borrowed a language from our bodies
to speak in gestures.

We fear what happened to a black boy.
During daylight, he tried to be an advocate of black pain.
In the morning, he was an injured bird crawling on the prison
floor.
He died while waiting for an advocate.

Only an invoice is a magnet to the voice he was waiting for.
Urgent attention is paid to pay-cheques;
the world is deaf to the screams of poor boys.
The poor have lost hope in the promises of the flag.
Their pain is thrown into the fog,
and their voices are chained in the backyard like my
neighbour's dog.
The leaders have forgotten their voices.
As they rose to power,
community disappeared at the top of their tower.
Their voices turned into markets that sell lies.

Dear black boy,
we have no flowers for your grave but an oath;
our voices will rise from the low valleys.
They will claim power and proclaim healing for the forsaken.

2ND PLACE

In memoriam- The voices of an anxious over-thinker

Maryam Kotze

Here lay dead, the presumptuous voices
that lay claim to all the words that aren't said.
Watch them writhe in their graves,
their arms scratching away the dirt
that burdens and weighs down their girths.
Like the undead, they attempt to rise,
to elicit some sort of response.
Tensed shoulders, shaking hands, maybe a little sweat?
They long to feed that craving they get from my distress.
It's funny how little thoughts can grow so out of control.
Even a shovel to the head doesn't seem to stem their flow.
Perhaps if I dug a little deeper,
to hide them further out of sight?
Except, that doesn't solve the problem if new thoughts form
and voice their plight.
A Sisyphean feat that leaves me defeated,
down and out for weeks,
where all I want to do is close my eyes
and sleep.
But they travel at an alarming pace as they weave between
the graves.

Their target?
My inner peace, my mind, my brain.
I just, I Just, I JUST!
I just want some quiet.
Where my thoughts don't outnumber me and try to end me
daily,
where it can stop feeling like I'm driving myself *demented?*
Insane?
Crazy.
But right now, I'm six feet deep.
Digging a grave for its owner, I know.
As the horde circles, chanting, rocking to and fro.
With words that bite, that tear at the skin.
With words that bite, that might do me in.
And these words they spew from their broken jaws,
the ones I shan't confess,
the ones that haunt my nightmares,
the ones that steal my breath.
The ones that leave me paralysed
as a putrid figure stands over me.
His gnarled hand stretches out for a light caress,
that turns into a bloody mess
and my body slumps into my grave below.

Their words have struck the final blow...

3RD PLACE

The voice is immortal

Kamva Majo

The Voice is Immortal

Thunder strikes and clouds move on command to reveal a big golden throne.

It is decorated with skulls and hands that still have dark-skinned flesh rotting away from the bones.

On the throne sits the Coloniser with his right foot resting on a skull.

He seems to be on some cosmological location looking down at the work he has left down on earth.

The skulls are his souvenirs; their grave presence makes him vibrate with mirth.

However, his amusement dies when he sees how his descendants have been dictated to conform to diversity in the name of peace... the Coloniser scoffs with annoyance at their compliance.

But a smirk takes over his face.

The genius of his plan makes his gun-imprinted roughened hands tingle; his feet are electrified

with excitement that he crushes the skull that has always been his footstool.

The thought of the legacy he left behind on earth brings fire to his eyes with rapture.

No, it is not the legacy of the land he stole from the “savages” nor his fanaticism of race that has become the bible for his descendants.

No, the Coloniser was generous enough to leave something for his slave and their children too – he has left his voice.

It has transcended through time, and it has coiled itself to the DNA of the Black child.

It is like a long and determined sword that continues to stab generation to generation cutting through time; the voice lives on.

It makes them believe the lies their great grandparents believed about their humanness, their skin, their capabilities, their culture, and their language.

The Coloniser smiles- he may be dead but his voice lives on.

SHORT STORIES

1ST PLACE

African death, Western medicine

Lethukukhanya Mzulwini

Bhekizizwe's gravy remains untouched. The steamed bread has lost all steam. Kitchen knives might as well cut the tension in the room, for they serve no cutlery purpose. The silence across our dinner table is as loud as the wrath of my ancestors. I am the burning bridge between an outraged ancestry and its descendants suffocating inside me. Infants I bear never see the light of day. Bhekizizwe can't resist holding God liable for every futile foetus we are left to mourn. I watched him up on that pulpit today, with a crooked smile on my face. Ten years as the bishop's wife has left me with a fixed rictus. He plays God's advocate so well. I witness the transition every Sunday. Like today, for instance, he let out the words "God's servants endure the most severe storms". The congregation stood in unison, shouting "hallelujah!" and "amen!" whilst scraping for the last of loose change from their purses to add onto the collection plates. Jubilant praises and offerings rendered by the church translate into this unconsumed plate of steamed bread and chicken gravy. Bhekizizwe's verbosity and voice remain in the

pulpit. We get home, and he commences his blame game with God. “*God’s servants endure the most severe storms*”, all these words dissipate into moments of silence upon the dinner table. Moments of silence for all the babies conceived but never born within our marriage. Across the dinner table is just me, him, and the ghosts we fantasise about. Home has been colder than the ghost town residing within my womb. Perhaps this is what 3650 days of wedlock looks like. Parts of me keep dying with each miscarriage. My body has become a hollow shell, merely an empty vessel previously occupied by my husband’s deceased wife. I strip naked on the nights nature comes knocking. In the name of fulfilling my wifely duties, I let him host a search party inside me. Heavy breaths scented with communion wine conjure a trail of goosebumps from my neck right down to my navel as they tell the good lie, “*Bhekizizwe still loves me.*” I fall for it every time. He digs deeper ceaselessly, devouring with the carnal intensity that leaves my drenched walls convulsing as he hunts for parts of me that have gone missing. My husband is a necrophiliac. The candles go out in the dusk, I let him mingle with my ghost. In the wake of darkness, dawn looms, and he sees me as the devil roaming around the lounge again. I listen to the stereo with the sound off, hoping for his voice to fill the void. The blank television set stares back into my wretched eyes. Our exultation is buried in the depths of the vintage room divider. Amongst my fine China dinnerware and Bhekizizwe’s theology certificates lies our wedding album, stocky pages of euphoria. The photo book is almost heavier than the weight on my shoulders.

'Bhekizizwe weds Thandaza' stitched on the cover in bold golden embroidery gleaming on black fabric. Inner workings of the book's jacket read 'Where there is love, there's no darkness'. I should have known better than to judge a book by its cover. After 10 years, I gaze at the proverb differently. It reads like a cliché now, 'Where there is love, there's no darkness.' Bhekizizwe only loves me in the dark. Amid daylight imina isinyama (I am the dark). I have been carrying daggers in my heart ever since ubizo lami (my calling). UMamezala (my mother-in-law) keeps feeding her son a rotten broth of judgement. "This village bears so many fruits Bhekizizwe, you should consider isthembu (polygamy), a second wife like your father wouldn't be such a bad idea. Your wife is no Sarah-in-the-Bible. God helps those who help themselves. Are you really prepared to surrender your father's bloodline to isinyama salentombazane (the curse of this girl)?" UMamezala's question lingered across the room with no sign of response from Bhekizizwe until he unleashed the daggers that I've been carrying in my heart. "I'm working on it, Mama", he said in the most melancholic voice, ignorant that his words have consequences. More consequences than the words of uMamezala, who calls these gifts bestowed upon me isinyama. More consequences than the congregation, which says I'm cursed. Even though my forefathers say I'm blessed, I'm more concerned about what Bhekizizwe thinks. The drive back home from my in-laws with their son is no different, dead silence. The silence speaks

volumes with regard to Bhekiziwe's stance on his mother's suggestion of getting a second wife. My misery lingers in his absence of expression. Ever since I have been summoned by my forefathers, Bhekizizwe and I have turned to strangers. The isolation in this wilderness has become all too familiar. His arms have become untrodden plains. I bulge my eyes out, crying myself to sleep. Slumber arrives, following waterlogged pillowcases soaked in tears. Ubizo (the calling) follows me in my rest. Night terrors emerge in abundance as the waves keep crashing. My ancestors throw me in the deep end, with a promise that I will be regurgitated back onto the shores if I surrender to their call. My deceased grandmother, Gogo Zibuyile, is the lifeguard. She offers a helping hand every night. "Sabela, uyabizwa, you are chosen Thandaza, ungokhethiwe", she utters sternly whilst coming to the rescue of my engulfed soul. The negotiation invariably breaks in me rebuking it in the name of Jesus Christ. I have been wading through the waters like Moses; I always rise from sweated bed sheets. I assure myself that I am the preacher's wife, who wears that title with honour. "And that's what an ego death looks like, you are drowning in denial", the shaman's words from our last appointment linger in my brain. I have been consulting with Gogo Nomvula, isangoma (the shaman). She says my religious beliefs have me drowning in denial. I have returned once again for more of the bitter truth. My shoes remain at the door upon my entrance into the shrine. I traverse the fabrics draped at the doorway. The hut is sanctified with totems dangling from the shelves.

Indigenous textiles and animal skin ornament the plafond. Upon taking my seat on the reed mat, I keep stealing glimpses of Gogo Nomvula's grim-faced expression behind clouds of smoke. The aroma churned out by impepho (African incense) has incensed the hut extensively.

As the dried ancestral herb smoulders in fumes, my spirit is purloined by higher vibrations. I have transcended to the spiritual realm. My discernment is clearer in the metaphysical plane, where titles, ego, and status dwindle in the face of progenitors. Gogo Nomvula is the conduit to my elders. She throws the dry bones from her sacred sling bag after puffing some air into it. This is how traditional doctors embark on conducting the diagnosis for spiritual infirmity. What plagues me requires open-heart surgery. *Umsamu* (the sacred hut) is like an intensive care unit ward. "Thandaza, what sickness brings you to *umsamu* today?" Gogo Nomvula's question travels from behind the foggy clouds of incense. I let out a response monotonously, "I need to strengthen my marriage, Gogo". With no regard to my question, she asks me vaguely, "Kunjani Thandaza, how are you?". "I am hurting, Gogo..." I struggle to hold back the tears while giving an account of what I've been going through. I continue speaking through the torment. "I am hurting, Gogo. Bhekizizwe is considering taking a second wife. His mother is behind all this chaos". "I suppose the bishop is still not taking well to your calling", Gogo Nomvula says, letting the statement linger before she continues addressing me. "Strengthening your marriage at

this point is as vain as pouring water down a duck's back. Temporary solutions have already proven to you that they are spiralling you down a rabbit hole of spiritual dilemma. You have refused to be obedient to the vocation your elders have summoned you to. Many of those who came before you from your bloodline have done the same. The sin of your fathers has fallen upon you". I cut into her speech, bringing her to an abrupt halt, "Why am I the scapegoat for their transgressions Gogo? I never asked for any of this. The miscarriages...How can my own blood be so cruel to place these tragic burdens upon me?" I let out my point as I feel my sorrow slowly turning into fury. "Your elders want what's best for you, Thandaza. These burdens are gifts you are refusing to embrace. You are the compass to direct your lineage into greener pastures," Gogo responds calmly. Still vexed, I reply, "I am the sacrificial lamb for a belief system I do not believe in. What will the church say...Bhekizizwe and I do not practise such". "You are only running away from yourself, Thandaza. The spiritual warfare you want to bring these children to is bigger than you think. You have been called to be the healer for a generation of thorned spirits. No form of Western medication will suffice for these African deaths. I am aware of the measures you have taken to find an alternative cure. The exorcisms, to wash off what essentially is a makeup of your DNA. I asked you before you signed yourself up to that psyche ward. Do you wish for a bloodline of walking dead souls to come through your womb? For that is the inevitable if you choose to do as your mothers and

fathers did, letting the kids bear consequences whilst finding temporary pacifiers for a perpetual illness. These generational curses need to be broken at some point, either by you or the children you so yearn for, in strengthening your marriage. But I must warn you that even when this rotary wheel of misfortune ceases as you lean into finding more temporary solutions, your offspring will be lost in limbo, disoriented souls stuck in a chasm ruinous to their spiritual well-being, and maybe then your eyes will be opened to the fact that paying no heed to your ancestors has repercussions, your ignorance of their words shall have consequences". Her final words are a parting gift, food for thought to nibble on as I return to my dispassionate abode. Upon my arrival, I start heating the Primus stove. Gogo Nomvula's words resurface from the depths of my subconscious mind as I cement myself by the kitchen counter for hours, chopping, slicing, and dicing. These thoughts consume me until we are seated at the dinner table with Bhékizizwe once again. Bhékizizwe's gravy remains untouched. The steamed bread has lost all steam. Kitchen knives might as well cut the tension in the room, for they serve no cutlery purpose. The silence across our dinner table is as loud as the wrath of my ancestors.

The dearth of his voice has consequences, **my** misery.
The abundance of *their* vicious voices has consequences, **our** suffering.

I am stuck in a rotary wheel of misfortune.

2ND PLACE

MUTED

Olwethu Nyathi

The beautiful mountains of Eshowe stood still adjacent to each other. They were sky-piercing, and nothing was as beautiful to watch as the sun setting behind them, almost like it was going to its resting place. With the sun setting, I knew I had to hurry home. I had spent so much time admiring nature that I forgot I was sent to fetch wood from the forest. My mother would shout at me for coming back late. She was someone who expected things to be done on time, and I struggled with following that rule. I was generally a slow person; I couldn't be fast in anything I did, no matter how much I tried. I had accepted it. My mother didn't seem to understand me, though, but who was I kidding? She always made it clear that she regretted having me as a daughter. Not that I blamed her, I was a burden to her. To my whole family, I felt like that – a burden.

I put the stack of wood over my head and hurried home. She was already waiting to make a fire, to start cooking. We lived in modern times, but my family kept things old school. We did have an electric stove, but we preferred cooking over fire most of the time.

“I knew you would take long *wena sdomu!* (You stupid child)”. The insults didn’t daunt me anymore. I was used to them. They had become my reality. I put the wood down and helped her. I wasn’t allowed to cook. No one wanted to eat food cooked by me, the abomination child. That’s what they called me.

I was 19 years old at the time. I didn’t have a colourful upbringing. All my life, all I did was shed tears silently and let out muffled cries. At times, I felt like I didn’t belong in this world, that I existed by mistake. I attempted to commit suicide so many times because of my life and the things that happened to me. My mother could not miss the chance to remind me of how I ruined her life. As if I had asked to be born, as if I had asked her and my father to create me. She told me that I survived abortion; she wanted to kill me because she hated me. I was a product of an occurrence that she enjoyed, but I was a product she didn’t quite appreciate. The beatings, shouting, and slur; I had to tolerate all that. I just wanted my mother to love me and care for me, but she didn’t. She despised me; I was only living in that house because of my grandmother. She was the only one who understood and loved me.

The entire family didn’t care about me. My aunt was a drunk and didn’t give an ounce about how my mother treated me. My uncle was always making nasty comments about me and

my body, and how he wished he could have a chance to bed me. He didn't see me as his niece; he saw me as someone whom he wanted to get in bed with. Crossing the boundaries of family. My mother never believed me when I tried to express how much my uncle was harassing me and making me uncomfortable. She was convinced I was lying against her brother, and that I was trying to break the family. Gogo was the only one who believed me, but what could she do? She was old and sick. Gogo had suffered a severe stroke years back that rendered her paralysed, leaving her a vegetable, unable to do things by herself.

One fateful night, something happened that changed everything. I was coming back from fetching water at the river when I found my uncle in the kitchen. He was drunk. It was the end of the month, and people usually went to the local tavern to drink till the sun came out. I was frightened to be alone in the room with him. I looked around trying to locate my mother, but she was nowhere to be seen. I was alone in the room with him. Lily-livered, perturbed, jittery, that's how I felt as I sank into the realisation that no one was home. He had a silly, malevolent smirk on his face. I put down the bucket intending to run for my life. But I guess I wasn't fast enough; he caught up with me. He had waited for that moment when I would be finally alone with him. Drunk as he was, he managed to overpower me. He carried me like a sack of potatoes over his back. I could not scream. How could I? I was at his clemency!

I knew Gogo wasn't aware of what was happening, even if she was, there was nothing she could do. He locked me inside his room and roughly tore my shirt, leaving my upper body bare. He moved towards me and rubbed his hands together in excitement, like a child seeing candy for the first time.

He threw me on the bed, and I tried to get up, but that earned me a slap. He got on top of me, sweating and smelling like a brewery. He licked my face with his tongue, and I felt like vomiting. It disgusted me, and it made me want to cry. I wondered where my mother was so she could save me from her brother. "*Kuncono ngoba uyisimungulu, akekho ozokuzwa ukhala!* (it's better you are a mute, so no one will hear you)", he mocked me. Of course, no one would hear me, the mute girl!

Deep sigh I was born a mute, my mother said I didn't cry when she gave birth to me. Maybe that is why she hated me; I was a mute, and I had ruined her life. Everyone looked at me differently, all because I could not speak. It took a while for me to accept that I couldn't utter even a single word. Sadness, pain, grief, despair, I went through all those stages. I felt like I wasn't human enough. Many things happened to me, and I could not speak up or voice my concerns. I did not know any sign language, so it was hard for me to communicate with people. I only used facial expressions to

somehow convey to the person how I felt or wanted to say. I always envied people who could talk; they were lucky. Lucky were those who could use their mouths and emit words. I longed for that – to be able to use my voice. Be it figuratively or literally.

He was shifting on top of me, and he had removed all his clothes; my eyes were shut. I didn't want to watch as he attempted to do what he wanted to do. This was my uncle, but that day, he turned into a monster and wanted to hurt me. I was defeated! I couldn't scream or shout for him to stop what he was doing. He used my muteness to his advantage; no one would even hear my muffles. I was like an ant trying to fight an elephant. It was pointless. My soul and mind accepted my fate. I stopped fighting and just let him be. I lay there crying silently. Letting him do as he wished. The pain was eased by my mind thinking that I deserved it, that I deserved to be sexually molested. It was my life; I was used to it. Pain and heartbreak were my close companions. It got to a point where it didn't hurt anymore.

He got off me when he was done. He was satisfied, but he left a deep wound in me. He took my pride by force, which would scar me for life. It didn't seem to bother him. He got what he wanted, but he left me vulnerable and hurt. I slowly picked myself up from the bed, and there were red stains on the bed, which caused my heart to drop by a few beats. It was evidence of how violated I was. I didn't know what the

next step was from there. What would I do? Tell my mother? Go to the police? Would they believe me? No one ever did! So, what could have changed then?

I didn't say anything to anyone for a full two weeks. I continued with my life like nothing had happened. My uncle pretended like he didn't just take my pride and joy. He continued with his life. I was slowly dying inside, and I couldn't share my pain with anyone; Gogo was too sick to burden her with my hurt. She only had a few days left, according to my mother. Her condition was worsening. Heaven couldn't wait for her as she passed on a month later. There was a small, intimate funeral held for her. I had lost my shield, my comforter, and my dearest lover. She was the only one who made me feel worthy, and she was gone. She died with a heavy heart, worried about me and how I would be when she departs the world. Her concerns were valid; I suffered at the hands of my mother. She released all her anger on me; every time she looked at me, you could visibly tell that she held no love for me, her daughter. Once she said, "If I had the strength, I would be finishing you. It's not enough that you didn't die before you were born, but you just had to come out looking like him."

By 'him' she meant my father. She never disclosed the identity of my father to me. All I knew was that she hated him, just like she hated me. Maybe things would be better if I knew him. Maybe he would have treated me better than my

mother. Who was he? I yearned to know the answer to that. Three months after Gogo had died, I started feeling sick. One morning, I woke up and rushed to throw up. I thought I had a stomach bug and wanted to go to the clinic for medication. My mother saw me changing, and she frowned at me, her eyes were looking at my stomach. What for? She stood in front of me and touched my stomach in disbelief. What was wrong with her? I felt a hot slap on my cheek that almost made me fall. I held my cheek, and tears just flowed from my eyes. I had gotten even more sensitive. “*Zesuliwe ukhulelwe!?* (Zesuliwe, are you pregnant!?)”

Me? Pregnant? How and why? What was she talking about exactly? I shook my head no, and she closed the door, sitting on the bed with me. She said, “I have been pregnant before, and I know the body of a pregnant woman. Who made you pregnant?” Her tone was low but firm. She was angry. I was sure I was not pregnant. I had never even slept with a boy. Unless...

I started having flashbacks of what my uncle did to me, all the scenes and memories came crashing down like an overflowing waterfall. I relived the moment again, and my heart was beating so fast. All the pain came back. I looked at my mother with teary eyes, hoping that she would at least feel sorry for me. She kept on asking who made me pregnant. All I could do was shrug my shoulders; I couldn't tell her what her brother had done to me. She wouldn't believe me. She would rather chase me out of the house. The

person who defended me wasn't with us anymore, so I was scared to tell anyone. I'd rather die than give it up. My uncle had threatened me before to not say a word to anyone, or he would kill me. He silenced me. He knew I wouldn't say anything. Besides being mute, I feared him. If he could assault me sexually like that, who knew what else he was capable of?

Mother left the room, slamming the doors, and I followed her; I saw her going into Aunt's flat, and she got in before I could catch up with her. Trust my slowness to betray me. I heard them talking, and what my mother said caught my attention. I stood by to listen more.

"I think Zesuliwe is pregnant, *dadewethu*". Her voice had so much concern. It was the first time I heard her being concerned over me. She added, "I didn't want her to turn out like me. Men are vultures, *sisi*. They ruin your life. If she is pregnant, I wonder who the father is. She must have an abortion."

My aunt replied, "Let's take her to the clinic first and deal with it from there. Because right now you are assuming."

That seemed to calm her down, "Okay. Let's go".

I ran back inside and sat on the bed. They came in minutes later and told me we had to go to the clinic.

We arrived, and they asked the nurses to run a pregnancy test on me. The nurse took me to a private area where she did the tests. I was nervous about the results. I didn't want to be pregnant. What did I know about being a mother? I was still a child myself. When she was done, she called my mom and aunt in. She looked at me and looked at my mother. The look on her face just confirmed that she had bad news.

"She is pregnant", it was established. I was carrying my uncle's child. I didn't want it. I wanted to have an abortion right away, but then I remembered that the child was innocent. There was nothing wrong with what she or he did. It was my uncle who committed a crime by molesting me. When we got home, they put pressure on me to give up who made me pregnant. I wanted to tell them that it was my uncle, but my voice wouldn't come out; I wanted to tell the truth but didn't know how to tell them.

I noticed a pen near the table, and I reached for it. I wrote in my hand. 'Uncle did it. ' That's what I wrote. They both looked at each other. My mother asked me, "Are you sure?"

I nodded, hoping that she would believe me. She asked my aunt to leave us, and she did.

She exhaled and sat next to me, holding my hand.

She said, “You may wonder why I am so harsh to you. Truth is, I blame you for your father’s sins. I was just 17 when it happened. I was coming back from a friend’s house when I met this man, who was way older than me. He tried courting me, but I wouldn’t budge. He started being physical, like forcing me to kiss him and inappropriately touching me. I tried screaming for help, but no one came. He overpowered me, Zesuliwe. He raped me. I could never forget his face. He molested me and left me bleeding and crying by the river. Only to wake up at a clinic. The herd boys were the ones who found me. I was disgusted by what happened. Everyone in the village thought he was my boyfriend and that I was up to no good. No matter how many times I tried to explain that I was abused, no one believed me. No one. Months later, I had the exact symptoms as yours, and I found out I was pregnant. I wanted to kill myself. I had not gotten over the act, and now there was evidence. I tried having an abortion, but it didn’t work. Mom convinced me to keep you, but I hated you! You were the product of my pain. When I learnt you were mute, I thought I was cursed. Not only was I abused, but I also gave birth to a mute.”

She was a mess with tears as she narrated. I was sad on her behalf. I had no idea she went through something traumatic. A part of me sympathised with her a lot. She was just angry. The real villain was the man who hurt her. She told me the police didn’t help her; they said they won’t waste resources over something they could fix as ‘lovers.’

She waited for my uncle to come back, and she confronted him, but he denied it. He lied through his teeth; he only showed his colours when Mom threatened that we would go to the police. He laughed at us, told us that no one would believe us. It would be our word against his. He was right, people did believe him. They painted me as a liar, that I was jealous of him. He walked free.

I gave birth to a girl, and I named her Nozibusiso. A blessing in my life. The only positive thing. She gave me strength. I wanted to see the perpetrators arrested. I had to get justice for my mother and me. I wanted to be heard. I went to the police and opened a case. They tried making fun of me, but I wasn't bothered. I got a detective who helped me and was willing to listen to me. My uncle and my supposed father were arrested within a week. Finally! I was heard and recognised. They were sentenced to 25 years. It wasn't easy, but I stood up for myself. My mother and I fixed our issues, and I forgave her. My father and uncle? Only the future could tell, at the moment I didn't want to see them or think about them. They both played a huge part in making my life miserable. They deserved jail.

I loved my daughter with everything I had. I didn't care about how she was made. Like my name, my tears were wiped. Zesuliwe, *izinyembezi*!

3RD PLACE

Taxi

Cleo Biscombe

I find myself caught in the time of morning when the early spring sun begins to peep over the large mountain that shields our little valley from the harshest of winds, carrying the residual nighttime chill on its back. It is very early.

An odd, once-off responsibility has roused me from my warm bed, obliging me to detect the hint of frost in the air that is usually gone by the time I emerge from my home. The crisp air is pleasant, and I appreciate it while I can, anticipating the stuffiness of public transport. The taxi stops, two or three streets from where I live (depending on the route one chooses to get there), is peaceful, but not entirely deserted. The young child stares at me as she clings to her mother's shopping bag. First my shoes, then my clothes, and then my face. Here she lingers, her eyes focussed on a spot just above my forehead, not noticing or caring about my efforts to appear nonchalant. After a brief acknowledgement of mother and child, I stand with eyes glued to the safety of my cell phone screen. Determinedly, I stare at my screensaver, thumb bent as though I am about to tap or scroll, but inwardly, I am bracing myself for the bustle of early morning commuters as they make their way to work.

I do not wait long. When it stops for me, the taxi is not yet full, and I have my pick of seats – a rare luxury for the time of day. As the door slides open and I peep inside, I am greeted by a lady whose face I do not know, and her eager greeting, public in its volume and intimate in its content, catches me off guard. Startled, I politely respond to the eager face, seated near the back of the taxi, from where the loud greeting reverberated. I hastily sit down on the open seat right in front of me. It is the seat that is furthest from the unfamiliar face. *Did I do that right?*

Immediately, anxiously, I reflect on whether my unfamiliarity with the face was perceptible. Whether my desperation to avoid her was decipherable when I dropped into the front seat. Maybe I seemed disrespectful. Maybe I *am* disrespectful. I made little eye contact, straining to sound casual, cheerful as I spoke, and of the sparse passengers behind me, I do not know who was – still is – staring at me. I have lost my resolve to return brazen stares some time ago, when aunties and uncles became supposed equals, and I tumbled into the space between childhood and adulthood. It was so long ago that I do not know whether people still do it, whether they still stare, and I have no interest in finding out. I simply follow the procedure needed to get me through the mandatory social interaction that comes with sharing transport with the community. This requirement is fairly simple, and there is really only one rule: “You must always greet!” Once the

greetings have been delivered, I am free to be as isolated as I'd like, so I tend to do it quickly. I open the door and blanket the passengers with a cheerful and non-committal "hello," focussing my gaze just above the eyes of those whom I am supposed to acknowledge, and sit down before there is time to accidentally make eye contact with someone. But today, the lady's deliberate "hello meisie," directed straight at me, and then the keen "*hoe gaan dit met jou ouma?*" caught me off guard. "Hello antie, *nee goed*," I said, as my heart raced and eyes darted to the nearest open seat. How does she know my grandmother? Though I realise that the face's acquaintance with me is limited to undetailed, public knowledge of my family, I feel guilty for not recognising it. But now, sitting with my back to her, I can avoid further conversation. I can avoid being accused of disrespect. I can avoid risking the exposure of my ignorance. It is far too early for this.

On days when I can help it, I take the taxi to campus just after the morning rush. It is for this reason that I choose all the late morning and afternoon slots for lectures – and mainly those with compulsory attendance. Taking full advantage of these freedoms, I leave the house when the sun is high and the streets are empty, choosing a leisurely trip downtown, over being suffocated by the large, anxious crowd as it races to work.

It is in the face of this choking disorder that the drivers tend to overcrowd the already cramped vehicles in order to accommodate as many passengers as possible. Compromises must be made to get people to work on time within the busiest hours of the day, and those who are dependent on their weekly earnings suffer the discomfort, the indignity of being herded into a small tin box. Together, the uniforms of tellers and nurses, the overalls of the man who tends to the university gardens and the woman who washes university floors, the scattered casual attire of students who walk on those floors and eat their lunches on the perfectly manicured lawns, are merged into a mass of overwhelming urgency. And on some days, such as today, I would have no choice but to enter the mass willingly, for the sake of an early class, errand or test. I would have to shake and sway and stumble along with everyone else, and endure the otherwise avoidable experience.

“You’re skinny”, the driver says, suggesting that I offer my seat to someone more deserving. It is an overweight, middle-aged man for whom the taxi comes to a stop just as it begins to exit the neighbourhood. With respectful haste, I haul myself from the spacious, upholstered seat onto the cold, hard surface of the tiny ledge just behind the driver’s seat, making room for a man whose face I do not know, but a man who, by default, is entitled to my respect. Facing the empty seat – soft, comfortable and still warm – I become aware of the now full taxi behind it. With my knees drawn up, I shift

urgently, stretching my dress over my stockinged knees to maintain my modesty. It flicks up again, exposing my thighs, and I have little choice but to sit still with my legs pressed together. The man squeezes in across from me, brushing harshly against my knees. Once settled, the contact is not broken. In the cramped space, there is not much to do about the awkward knee-to-knee position. Not once do I look directly at the large man across from me. Instead, I stare out of the window in an attempt to look distracted, like I am barely aware of the broad figure as it appears to be leaning forward.

A mild jerk of the taxi causes the man to shoot forward with sudden force, his large, solid-looking frame proving to be surprisingly unstable. I am unprepared for the seemingly exaggerated movement, and from the groping hand stretched out before him – under the pretence of trying to break his fall – I am unable to shield myself in time.

I note how the pretended shock in the man's expression disappears as suddenly and unconvincingly as it came, his face clearly not communicating with his sluggish hand, which he seems to forget is still resting on my thigh. I shift uncomfortably under its heaviness, but little can be done against the solidity of a fat hand on a scrawny, trembling leg. With a supposedly distracted air, he gazes out of the window.

Next to him, the woman who waited at the taxi stop with me returns the indifference that I'd offered her before, her face hidden behind the little girl on her lap. Does she see me? The young man on his other side appears to be about the same age as I am, maybe older. He stares determinedly out of the window, sometimes checking his phone. Behind this wall of blind witnesses, the rest of the passengers are cheerful, blissfully unaware of my discomfort. The atmosphere remains unaffected, and for this I am both grateful and dismayed. The most I can say is painted on my face – a pointedly offended stare directed not only at the man, but also at those who pretend not to notice his transgression. Even this is more than I'd otherwise have the nerve to express, but it does not matter, for my silent protest is ignored. For a moment, I consider being more than silent. Would it be wise to openly slap the hand away, like a mother chastising a small child? Or perhaps it would be better to choose the less physical, but more wounding approach by verbally confronting him, announcing to those in earshot of the unwanted contact. But in both scenarios, I am the one most reprimanded, for my arrogance, my thoughtlessness and my utter disrespect. I conclude that the man's age is too sound a defence against my easy accusations.

I am too rattled to turn around and ask the driver to stop at my usual destination, so I sit through the entire trip till it reaches its final stop – the taxi rank. That I should choose to endure the discomfort for longer than I have to feels

counterintuitive, but I am frozen, afraid to speak or move. Reluctant to use my voice, for fear that it'll quiver with anger or distress. That, in its shameless ignorance, it will offend and disrespect. Again, people will stare, tutting and shaking their heads. But if I say nothing, someone will see the hand on my thigh and wonder why I do not react. Am I stupid? Do I want this?

The taxi rank is humming with people, and the large vehicle ploughs through the energetic crowd at a crawl. When it finally stops, it very slowly dispenses its contents as passengers pay the fare to the driver on their way out. I get out of the taxi, keeping my head down. Paying the driver through the front seat window, I notice the sturdy figure rising, and then stooping to duck out of the taxi. I have received my change, I can walk away, but I don't. My eyes lift to look at the audacious fat man, and I am determined to meet his in a subtle confrontation. He notices my stare, frowns and averts his eyes. When I realise that he is looking down at something, I follow his gaze to the walking stick, digging into the gravel to support his unsteady weight as it shifts out of the taxi, extinguishing my hot, unspoken accusation.

The object that I hadn't noticed had emerged from under the seat, where it was stored for the duration of the trip. There is no cast or bandage. Perhaps he is arthritic? Perhaps he has a stiff leg from the cold weather. I imagine him

shuffling to the taxi rank the night before, having finished work just in time to catch the day's last taxi at seven o'clock. When the sun sets and the evening temperatures creep into the soles of feet that have not yet made it inside, I imagine. A time of day when I'd have been home for hours. Today, wounded by the cold, he is forced to rely on the walking stick and the limbs of those around him for balance. Is that it? Is that why no one reacted, because there was nothing to react to?

A chill uncertainty replaces the burning urge to speak up, and accusations are instead flung in my direction from an invisible critic. Oversensitive? Presumptuous? Disrespectful? Doubtful, I am unable to decide whether the burning in my chest is directed at myself or the limping man. As I watch him go, a cold, hostile wind hits me in the face. The mountain cannot protect me from all angles, and certainly not when I leave the safety of the valley.

2024

ESSAYS/ OPINION PIECES

1ST PLACE

Women and peacebuilding: A catalyst for change

Keiana Joy Murthi

Hilliary Clinton once said, “When women participate in the economy, everyone benefits. When women participate in peace-making and peacekeeping, we are all safer and more secure. And when women participate in politics of their nations, they can make a difference.” (Ghate, 2014). Women are the backbone of civilisation, pillars that uphold and instil values of integrity, courage, creativity, innovation, and leadership, not only in their homes, but in society. They are advocates of peace and the depiction of strength. However, when looking at history, society has scrutinised and dismissed the power that women hold and are capable of. Silenced and belittled, since birth, women are forced to fit a ludicrous image, a portrait painted by society that depicts and praises only the outward appearance and the value of their womb, consequently shadowing and muzzling their intellectual and physical strength. This essay will highlight women, justice and peacebuilding, delving into the history of

women in society, illustrating the treatment of women and their fight for justice and peace.

‘Like pawns being moved around a chessboard’, a sentence that best describes the lives of women. In history, they were forced to accept a narrative written by a predominantly patriarchal society, where men dictated their life and behaviour. Historically, women who had strong personalities and displayed certain characteristics such as being bold, witty, opinionated, and having political views were often the most criticised and shamed. Additionally, women who were convicted of crimes that men often engaged in, like adultery, were shunned by the world and were recipients of unfair and harsh treatments, some were even accused of witchcraft for example, the Salem Witch trials. A few of the punishments women received include being stoned, beaten, amputated, degraded, and killed.

Predating modern times, women’s rights were non-existent, as they were viewed as less than human, constricted, and governed by the males in their families. They were not even allowed to make basic decisions concerning their appearances, marriages, children and future. The education of women was little to none, and if they did receive one, they were only exposed to primary levels and their curriculum completely different from that of men, for instance, while men would learn biology and science, and be able to attend university. Women were taught to read and do

basic mathematics; however they had more domesticated subjects, like needlework and cooking, which ensured that they had no future in academics. This guaranteed that for a woman to live a decent life, she had to submit and depend on males of the family.

The stifling judgement of society did not stop the revolution brewing in the hearts of women. A chance to rewrite the narrative inflicted on them, just as pressure makes diamonds, oppression breeds activists. In this case, women began to grow restless and longed to break free from the cages that patriarchy had trapped them in. They began to fight back and demand equality, but unlike the volatile nature of men, they demonstrated more peaceful methods. An instance of this would be the 1956 women's march that took place in Pretoria, headed by the Federation of South African Women (FSAW), where 20,000 women from all over the country rallied together to protest the introduction of pass laws for Black, Indian, and Coloured women. They marched headstrong to the Union buildings, in a fierce yet peaceful manner, demanding that the current prime minister, J.G. Strijdom, acknowledge their views. Witnesses to the protest stated that it was extremely impressive and depicted the women present as the picture of discipline and dignity (SAHO, 2021).

Malala Yousafzai once said, "I raise up my voice-not so that I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard ...

we cannot all succeed when half of us are held back.” (Mushayamunda, 2022). Activists and peace advocates like Malala Yousafzai, Eleanor Roosevelt, Mother Theresa, Lilian Ngoyi, and Florence Mkhize are inspirations to future generations. They, along with many others, are the foundation to keeping women in the peacebuilding initiative. They have acted as the voice for millions, who live in war-stricken environments, who are plagued daily by the oppression of patriarchy, and those who cannot speak for themselves. In order to achieve peace, women have to first ignite and embrace their voice; they have to know and understand that the smallest noise can create an echo of change. Women have the strength to not only lead but to bring communities together with a gentle but firm touch. To achieve this feat, it is fundamental that they armour themselves to fight against those who thrive in destruction and oppose peace.

Although modern society has created an environment that allows young women to receive an education and have basic human rights, it has created an illusion of peace and equality. Women still face the same issues, they have been subjected to for decades, an instance of this can be seen in the recent case of a female doctor in Kolkata, India, who was viciously gang-raped and murdered, this has sparked a series of protests in Kolkata, where doctors and citizens are demanding for improvements in women’s workplace safety (Huer, 2024). With the recent innovation of technology and the introduction of user-friendly platforms, it has allowed

women and peace activists to share their voices and stories and reach larger audiences, which helps them to widen their influence and spread their messages of peace and equality. This could potentially inspire young women from around the world to take a stand and use their voice to fight against their oppressors and to use it as a tool to achieve peace and equality, diminishing injustice and war.

To conclude this essay, I would like to say that the topic of women and peacebuilding is very meaningful to me, as a young woman myself, I find it is important to use my voice, whether verbally or written, to spread awareness of injustices and inequality and to showcase my power and abilities to advocate for peace and support good initiatives that help us achieve a better world. To create a safer environment for future generations, a place where the women of the future would never have to face the problems that many of us are plagued by. Women are leaders, homemakers, innovators, explorers and teachers. We have the potential to achieve anything we put our minds to, so we should use our voice and speak out proudly.

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2ND PLACE

Peace and justice

Aaqilah Krauser

Peace and justice are ideals as old as time, yet they are perpetually elusive, as always on the horizon but never quite within reach. From the broken chains of yesteryear's struggles to today's tireless movements, we find ourselves, time and again, reckoning with the forces that threaten to unravel the fabric of peace and justice. In this essay, I will embark on a journey through the interconnected stories of our shared past, present and future, drawing from the wellspring of hope that envisions a better world.

Yesterday: The echoes of justice denied. History, both written and unwritten, tells of endless struggles where humanity's yearning for justice has often clashed with the machinery of oppression. One cannot think of peace without first acknowledging the sacrifices made by those who sought justice in a world that denied them. Consider the story of a village at the heart of the colonial era. Bound by tradition and enriched by culture, it was a community that thrived on the cooperation of its people. But, when the conqueror arrived, bringing not just guns but the arrogance of superiority, this peaceful society was shattered. The story is a familiar one, but it is no less tragic. When European colonists

arrived in many parts of Africa, they disrupted ecosystems, both environmental and social, with forces that echoed across centuries.

The fall of great indigenous empires like the Zulu kingdom speaks to grave injustice: the theft of land, dignity and life. The people lived peacefully on their land, embracing diversity in their spiritual practices, engaging in trade and fostering relations. However, peace was shattered, not by internal conflict, but by external greed. In the aftermath, the justice they sought was to be left alone, to live in harmony with the earth and with each other, a justice that was never truly granted. These injustices cast long shadows, stretching into the present day, where peace remains elusive to many. The violence inflicted by colonisation, slavery and systemic oppression leaves scars not just on people but on the land itself. The stories of yesteryear remind us that the pursuit of justice, without addressing past wrongs, will forever be incomplete.

Today: The fragile peace we fight to keep. Fast-forward to today, where peace and justice remain critical in a world that teeters on the brink of chaos and renewal. We see non-violence movements rising like waves on every shore, seeking justice in the face of injustice. From the civil rights marches in America to youth-led environmental protests around the globe, there is an enduring belief that peaceful resistance can shift the tides of history.

Reflecting on my own journey, I think back to the #Fees-Must-Fall protests, which shook South Africa when I was still in school. At the time, I watched as university students stood up for the right to affordable, accessible education, demanding justice in a system that had long marginalised the poor. Today, as a Wits student myself, I find new meaning in those protests. What I once saw as a distant activism now feels deeply personal. The movement was not just about tuition fees; it was about dismantling systemic inequalities that continue to rob students of the opportunities they deserve. In many ways, #Fees-Must-Fall was a powerful intersection of peace and justice. The protests embodied the tension between these two ideals: the peaceful yearning for educational equity and the struggle for justice against entrenched institutional barriers. Reflecting on this makes me realise that true peace cannot exist without the kind of justice that addresses and rectifies inequality.

In this fragile balance, the story of Palestine remains etched in my heart. It's not just a distant conflict, it's a living, breathing cry for justice. I often find myself thinking about the olive trees in Palestine, whose roots dig deep into ancient soil. These trees are silent witnesses to generations who have lived and loved there. Their branches, resilient and unwavering, remind me of the steadfastness of the Palestinian people. They carry in them the stories of families displaced, homes destroyed, and dreams deferred. Yet, they also carry hope, the most precious fruit that any tree can bear.

How can there be peace when, for decades, entire generations have grown up in fear, surrounded by walls that divide not just land but humanity? How can there be justice when the world remains silent in the face of so much suffering? In Palestine, justice means the right to live, to exist in dignity and to return to the olive groves where memories of peace still linger like a soft breeze. As long as those roots remain, I believe peace will one day return.

This is where we witness the profound intersection of peace and justice. There can be no peace where justice is absent, whether in the form of systemic oppression, environmental degradation or political corruption. The youth today, like those who came before them, recognise that peace is not a passive state but one that must be actively pursued. In countries plagued by civil unrest, the dream of non-violence remains a distant hope. Women in war-torn nations, often the backbone of peacebuilding efforts, continue to work tirelessly behind the scenes, mending the broken threads of society. They negotiate between warring factions, tend to the wounded and raise the next generation with the hope that they will never have to know the horrors of war. Women are not just victims of conflict; they are architects of peace.

But while we see moments of progress, such as the peace agreements brokered by women in Liberia during their civil war or the political tolerance encouraged in post-apartheid

South Africa, peace remains fragile. It is easily undone by injustice, inequality and intolerance. The peace we experience today is precarious, maintained only through vigilance and the continued fight for justice in all its forms: racial, environmental and social.

Tomorrow: Envisioning a future of true peace and justice. The future we envision is one where peace and justice are not merely aspirations but lived realities. But to reach that future, we must confront the ghosts of the past and dismantle the systems that perpetuate inequality and violence today. To imagine peace is to imagine a world where diversity is embraced rather than feared. Political tolerance would not just mean grudging acceptance but an active celebration of differing views and cultures. Cultural understanding would flourish as we recognise the value in every story, every tradition, every belief. We would weave a rich tapestry where every thread is respected, contributing to the whole.

Envisioning peaceful futures also means addressing environmental justice head-on. In this future, we see clean air and water not as luxuries but as basic human rights. The natural resources without consequences are not held accountable for their actions. Indigenous communities, who have long been the guardians of the earth, are recognised for their stewardship and given the political power to protect their lands. Education about environmental sustainability becomes central to youth development, ensuring that the

next generation will not repeat the mistakes of the past. In this future, women are no longer on the periphery of peacebuilding efforts; they are at the centre. Their voices, so often silenced by patriarchy and tradition, are finally heard. From the grassroots to the highest levels of government, women are leading peace negotiations, creating policies that ensure justice is served, and fostering environments where violence is no longer the norm.

Youth, too, play a critical role in this envisioned tomorrow. No longer marginalised by older generations, they are at the forefront of education reform, ensuring that every child, regardless of background, has access to quality education that not only equips them for the workforce but also for life as responsible global citizens. Education is reimagined to focus on empathy, collaborations, and preparing future leaders to navigate the complexities of a diverse and interconnected world.

As we reflect on peace and justice through the lens of yesterday, today and tomorrow, we are reminded that these ideals are not destinations but ongoing journeys. Peace is not the absence of conflict and justice is not merely the punishment of wrongdoing. They are about building systems that protect, uplift and ensure dignity for all. The road ahead will not be easy. But as we continue to fight for a world where diversity is celebrated, violence is rejected, and justice is truly for all, we must remember the lessons of the past and remain steadfast in our commitment to a future where peace is not just a dream but a reality.

Palestine and so many other stories show us that the road to peace is paved with persistence and hope. As long as the olive trees stand, so too will the hope for a world where justice reigns. In the end, the story of peace and justice is not written by one hand but by many. And in the collective act of writing, we weave a tapestry of hope, resilience and renewal for all generations to come.

3RD PLACE

Pathways to peace and justice through political tolerance, culture understanding, and religious harmony

Vusimuzi Khumalo

Introduction

The modern 21st century has seen the emergence of a civilisation that has maintained great stability relative to those preceding it. Peace and justice are principles that have defined this generation. Globalisation has proven to be an attribute to this progressive society. Embracing diversity across all spheres has served as the cornerstone of achieving everlasting peace and justice in societies around the world; political tolerance, cultural acceptance, and religious harmony. This essay will unpack the above-mentioned themes and highlight how peace and justice are reflected and drawn from them in the case of South Africa.

Political Tolerance

Political tolerance is the acceptance of different and at times opposing views and the representation of all groups in society. Many countries that adhere to the true principles of a democracy are reflections of political tolerance. Maureen Eger and Mikael Hjerm argue that in societies where individual rights are recognised and maintained, a high degree

of tolerance is required (Eger and Hjerm: 2019). This is especially true for a nation like South Africa, which has one of the most diverse populations in the world. South Africa is also one of the youngest democracies in the world, only 3 decades in the making. Freedom House, an organisation that assigns a freedom score to countries, assigned a score of 79/100 to South Africa (Freedom, 2024). This is the highest score on the African continent and just 5 points behind the United States of America, which is the biggest democracy in the world.

This is an exceptional achievement for South Africa, which can be traced to the momentum that was set by the founding father of the country's democracy, Nelson Mandela. Mandela was able to capture the imagined potential of the country in many minds. The famous term of the Rainbow Nation embraces diversity in the broadest sense. As a country that has gone through racial and xenophobic tensions, South Africa, through good leadership, was able to transition peacefully in a democracy. The first democratic government in 1994 was a Government of National Unity, which included the previous National Party (BusinessTech, 2024). Initially, this arrangement was questioned; however, many scholars now agree that this was necessary to foster the national identity of South Africa.

The deliberate attempt to foster a diverse government that is reflective of its society has its justifications through

political tolerance. However, there are a number of challenges when such a path is chosen. Even within such a society, there are elements that seek to fragment this nation. It is this contradiction which is a dilemma for political tolerance. There is a tolerance of values and beliefs that at times seek to infringe on the rights of others. A politically tolerant nation/government has the duty to allow for such values to exist without necessarily accepting them. Although this is true, South Africa has been able to maintain a peaceful and tolerant nation. Many of its modern leaders have values and beliefs that overlap, and such is essential if the country is to continue being a custodian of human rights and democracy.

Cultural Understanding

Cultural understanding is one of the pillars to promoting diversity. This entails recognising and embracing them. In the case of South Africa, this includes the respect of all ethnicities, races, genders, and foreign nationals. The month of September is Heritage Month in South Africa, which is celebrated on the 24th of the month every year. King Misuzulu of the Zulu Monarchy condemned the recent remarks and attacks on foreign nationals in a speech given in a summit that embraced Heritage Day (IOL, 2024). The King's speech comes after the recent rise of xenophobic and anti-African attacks in the country by groups acting in isolation. The speech is but one of many pro-cultural diversity actions seen in broader South African society.

However, what is known and celebrated as Heritage Day in South Africa is relatively new in the country. In drafting the Holiday Bill in 1995, Shaka Day was not listed for inclusion. This was protested by Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), which had a strong Zulu support base. This Bill came after the backlash of the peak of black-on-black violence perpetuated by the IFP and ANC supporters in the early 1990s. The exclusion of Shaka Day had the potential to retrigger another civil unrest. However, it was the IFP which then suggested that Shaka Day should be rebranded as Heritage Day in recognition of the many other ethnic groups in South Africa (Hadithi Africa, 2019).

And now, a tradition, Heritage Day is celebrated by all and continues to become a platform for all cultures. It is very important to recognise how the concept of Heritage Day has come about. It abandoned exclusivity and chose to embrace diversity. It has become another pillar of the Rainbow Nation envisioned by Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu. The speech by King Misuzulu further solidifies the idea of diversity and assures onlookers that indeed, the diversity and peace of South Africa and identities that are cherished by many and all. The recent xenophobic attacks threaten this identity; however, there remains hope that this is a challenge which will be overcome.

Religious Harmony

Religious harmony refers to the peaceful coexistence of multiple and different religions and belief systems. South Africa is one of the most religiously diverse nations in the world. The country does not promote a specific religion; however, the constitution does state that everyone has a right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought and belief. There are 10 major beliefs in South Africa; Protestant Christian, Zion Christian, Islam, Hindi, and Traditional African Religions, among others (World Atlas, 2017). This complexity of religions and beliefs is a testament to the ideal identity of South Africa. The majority of South Africans subscribe to either one of these beliefs. Many businesses and public institutions also cater for this wide variety of beliefs through policies and design. This rich diversity has contributed immensely to the creation of the post-apartheid nation-state.

Late Archbishop Desmond Tutu championed the fight against apartheid. Born in 1931, Desmond Tutu became a teacher but found great injustice in the racist system of separation of children based on race. He then turned to the church, where he began his advocacy against the regime of apartheid. Archbishop Tutu became known when the National Party government banned all progressive black led parties and the unlawful arrest of Nelson Mandela. Tutu took to all forms of peaceful protest to promote a nation of peace and diversity (BBC, 2021). Such actions from Tutu challenged the very mythological propaganda of the National Party, which

claimed the white minority were God-chosen people to civilise the 'savage' Africans. Tutu also participated in the Truth and Reconciliation Committee, which helped victims of families of apartheid gain closure.

Indeed, religion has played a significant role in ensuring that the beauty of South Africa is preserved and continues to exist in the future. Although there are multiple faiths and beliefs, they do not seek to undermine one another. In fact, South Africa is one of the most religiously diverse countries in the world. Leaders like the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu shed light on the extent to which diversity is embraced in South Africa.

Conclusion

South Africa is one of the most diverse countries, and it continues to embrace its identity. Political tolerance, cultural understanding, and religious harmony are key contributors to this phenomenon. The political sphere embraces the pool of political opinions and ideas. This is seen in the vibrant representative democratic government. Cultural understanding is another essential attribute. The birth of Heritage Day signalled the move towards wider cultural recognition. This is important because it shows how many groups abandoned certain exclusivity and put effort in creating the Rainbow Nation identity envisioned by political leaders of the new dispensation. And lastly, religious harmony is not only prevalent in the country but also reflects the role

of faith-based organisations in supporting a shared identity through peaceful protest and a united South Africa.

POETRY

1ST PLACE

**Those that love the Lord and His Law would not
litter His Land**

Munaka Munyai

When we pray thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on Earth
as it is in heaven perhaps we delude ourselves of our origin
story...

If Eden and Earth were twins in the womb of mother nature:
Earth seems to have yanked the umbilical cord from Eden
and wrapped it around her neck like a noose. At birth, Earth
was blue and green, and Eden was never seen –
deported to be an aborted dream to which we scream
“demon thou art loose”.

This is the same chant we cry as we exorcise the corpses of
climate refugees because
we must exercise safety and sovereignty before we
supposedly deplete mercy and empathy. Saints and sinners all
look the same when they're in the grave don't they?

Those that love the Lord and His Law would not litter His
Land

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil cannot bear ripe fruit,

until we get to the root of what we mean when we pray and say, “a peaceful, just and equitable transition.”

Because what is celebrity concern if not serpent speak that is full of deceit and damning receipts of short private flights with distances no longer than a roundtrip from heaven to hell?

Those that love the Lord and His Law would not litter His Land

With lies of a neoliberal tongue to a rising rank on the right side of the politics and the wrong side of history.

Those that love the Lord and His Law would not litter His Land

With hands raised to the heavens singing glory but stirring in a genocide and ecocide.

When the pastor in the pulpit poaches a hallelujah and tithe turns into the title deed of another fossil fuel plant or forest to fertilise the greed and gluttony that grows like money on a tree.

Woe to us, that pray “on earth as it in heaven” but face the cross and walk backwards to hell as a test.

We fail to consider that this is the genesis of a revelation. That the promise remains in place – the world will not end by flood – when He returns, nothing will quench His thirst

for justice. Peace will come by pure fire.

Those that love, fear and revere the Lord and His Law would
not litter His Land... it is written.

2ND PLACE

Flames to history

Rea Mmethi

Burn the history Books!

Ignite flames of fury to devour the lies they contain and the deceit they sustain and the illusions they maintain of a defeated Africa. You'll ask me: "who are Africa's children?"

It is we: gyrating silhouettes with vengeance pulsing through our veins reduced on these pages to caricatures in vain.

Burn those books, with hissing consonants so profane And let *us* tell our tale. You'll ask me: "Do Africa's children believe in God?"

We believe in hunger:

This necrotising invasion of our intestines

We are Anansi's wailing descendants, outcasted and shunned like Philistines We are hanging heads, chapped lips, staggering anglophiles

We are paradoxical incarnations of Sheba's paradise

We are perplexed mothers, whose toil and result can never reconcile

So burn these blasphemous volumes and let our grumbling stomachs testify: We, who have placed our faith in tears

Who have pledged our souls to misery and the head it rears We believe in anything that replaces fear:

The determination that possesses our fingers when they grip
the plough The numbness that we find in the bottles we
drown

The naivety that embraces us nightly in the absence of a
crowd

This fire baptism feels like resuscitation

Our lungs prodded back to life by a provocation

It feels like communion

Black and beautiful find their reunion here

We are breaking bread on battered bones as honoured
sacrifice We are assuaging amnesia with heartbeats that don't
suffice? We are dancing shadows that remain unseen, are we
surprised? Grab your books by the spines and set them
alight

And let the children dance in the flames, it is our birthright

3RD PLACE***i am the land*****CHENAYDE ABRAHAMS**

many poets have written that i am the land in a beautiful,
sultry way

i am the land curved, contoured my breasts like hills
thighs like windy paths to paradise my skin reminds them of
the soil

i am realising
with time, sorrow and strife that i am
indeed the land

in a sad, vulgar way pillaged, taken, raped
my breasts like hills to be conquered thighs like windy paths
to be trodden through

with their heinous heavy boots and sweaty sticky skin my
skin reminds them of the soil

that they walk over, wet,
dig through to plant their seeds within bear fruits exotic to
my being

i am the land
their land, your land, my own?

i will bear thorns put up fences send crows plant scarecrows
fight back

with my hills, paths, soil i am the land
my own.

SHORT STORIES

1ST PLACE

Engel.

Reid Donson

January 2nd, 1967. Ernest remembered it clearly. The klopse were sounding their trumpets, banging their drums, and Ernest was regretting allowing his parents to force him into this tradition again this year. That was when he saw her. She sat near the edge of the road in a Campmaster camping chair, a can of Coke in one hand, a cigarette in the other. Ernest felt himself gravitate towards her and, without thinking, started talking.

“Jy moet ‘n engel wees, want just looking at you makes me sure there must be a God.” “Oe, kyk vir Shakespeare.”

She had replied instantly, without even looking up, as if she had heard that very same phrase a thousand times before from a thousand different guys. Ernest took a deep breath and spoke again.

But that was all a long, long time ago. Ernest had lived through the difficulties of marriage, of committed love, and now, staring at her picture on the front of the pamphlet, all he had left were memories.

Carol Engelbrecht. 1950 – 2018. Loving mother and wife. Goddienste engel.

“It was a beautiful speech, hey?” “Ja, I didn’t know he had it in him.”

Percival and Jemima entered the funeral reception hall like they entered every room, hand-in-hand. Jemima’s eyes were still red and puffy from the burial. She had never truly experienced loss before, beyond a dog when she was five whose name she couldn’t remember anymore, so when her mom passed on, she didn’t know what to do. She ate a lot, slept a lot, and cried a lot. She played a lot of online Scrabble. But besides bawling her eyes out, she had held herself together fairly well at the funeral.

She had been avoiding her father. Every time Percival would nudge her to go and speak to him, she would nudge him back, saying some variation of “Why don’t you go talk to him if it bothers you so much?” But now, seeing him standing alone next to one of the tables, staring at one of the pamphlets, Jemima felt her heart ache.

“If I were to speak to him, what would I even say?”

“You say ‘Hi Pa, how you doing? I loved your speech.’ And then you wait for him to start talking about how the ANC is the second coming of Christ.”

“Moenie blaspheme nie!”

Jemima hadn't spoken to her father in a long time. Or her mother, for that matter. Childhood in the Engelbrecht household was not a time she looked back on fondly. There were many things she had to drown out in order to survive. Her mother would always tell her, “Things may not be perfect, but at least you have both parents. That's more than I had.” So Jemima would choose to be grateful for what she had. Whenever the storm would come, she would close her eyes shut and wait for it to pass. It always passed.

“Kyk hier!”

Jemima turned to see her cousin Faizel, dressed in a black dress with her iconic white boots, waving ecstatically.

“Cuzzie, ek's jammer ek't die service gemis. My kar willie gestartedittie.”

“Dis orrait, ek's net bly om jou te sien, Faizie. Miskien kan jy vir Percy explain hoekom ek nie met my pa wil gesels nie.”

“Nee, ek dinkie ek wil tussen julle marital problems kom nie, Jem.”

Feeling the need to change the subject, Faizel turned to Adam (Jemima and Percival's 19-year-old son), who had been slogging behind his parents.

“When did you get so big!?”

Adam shrugged. Jemima glared at him.

“It's good to see you, Aunty Faizel.” “Oe, klink soos a wit man.” Adam looked embarrassed. The extended family always had a lot to say about the way he spoke and the way he was raised. Percival wasn't having any of it.

“Nee man, don't say that. All his friends speak posh. You can't expect him to speak the way we speak.”

Percival had worked hard to ensure his family wouldn't have the same life he had growing up. He dragged himself out of poverty with his bare hands. Got a job as an accountant. Built a home in a nice suburb. He could always tell that his family resented him for making it out when they weren't able to. Jemima always told him that he couldn't let them hold him back, keep him tethered to the past. She had been his voice of reason from the day he met her playing hopscotch on the school playground, to the day they got married in that old courthouse, and beyond. ‘That's why I fell in love with you,’ he would say. ‘You keep me steady.’

“I think Carol would have loved to see how many people showed up for her.”

“As ek die waarheid sê, ek hettie gedink jy sal kommie, Percival. Jy’s altyd te besig met werk.”

Percival felt his blood boil, but kept it together. He knew that Carol had always loved him, even though they didn’t come around often. Jemima would always make up an excuse not to go to family events, and 9 times out of 10, that excuse was ‘Percy has to work’. While Percival tried to encourage Jemima to go see her parents, a small part of him was always grateful that he didn’t have to see them often. Something about her parents felt *off*.

Percival attempted to change the topic with Faizel, while Jemima grabbed Adam by the hand to go get some food. The appetisers filled a long table in the centre of the room. It was always the same foods: samosas, koesisters, deljtjies, mini pies, cupcakes for those who made it to the table fast enough, and kebab sticks. Adam would always gripe about how the food was always cold at ‘these things’ (‘things’ being any coloured function; weddings and funerals had the exact same appetisers). Jemima would always scold him.

“Take a samosa, my boy.”

“I’m not hungry, mommy.”

“Are you sure? You haven’t eaten since this morning.” “It’s only 11.”

“Ok, fine. I’ll take an extra samosa on my plate in case you change your mind.”

Making their way back to Percival and Faizel, Jemima tried to point out all the different family members to Adam and explain how they’re related to him.

“That’s Henry. He’s your uncle’s mother’s godson. And there’s Essie, she’s Aunt Kulsum’s girlfriend.”

She whispered the girlfriend part.

“How long’s it been since you’ve been around so many coloureds, Adam? It must be weird for you, hey?”

“You shouldn’t say ‘coloured’ anymore.” “*Wat?*”

Adam breathed in. Maybe he shouldn’t have said anything.

“They said so at uni. In one of my English classes. Apparently, it’s derogatory and was a term placed on us during Apartheid. It’s a remnant of colonial thinki-”

“*Nee wat*, I don’t like what they teaching you at that place. First, your philosophy class makes you question *die Here* and now they tell you you not coloured. *Ai*, Faizie, *hoor hier*.”

Jemima turned to Faizel, who had been in an intense conversation with Percival over the political and economic state of the country. Once Faizel is up to speed with Jemima's account of how Adam had been brainwashed by his white university, she is livid.

"Imagine if Carol *kon vir jou nou gehoor* it, Adam! I remember when your ma used to have us over for supper, she would talk our ears off about the NP's agenda." 'If they can't make you leave or make you die, they'll make you white,' she would say. Your ma was a passionate woman, Adam. And so caring. I remember she would sometimes come back from the casino and say how she bought a homeless man a dop 'cause he just looked so sad."

Jemima looked at Faizel sharply at the mention of the casino. Faizel realised what she had done.

"*Ja nee, the gambling wassie haar fout nie. They made her gamble.*" Faizel looked back at Adam, recalling where the conversation had begun.

"You are coloured, my boy. Don't let them tell you otherwise. They've taken enough from us."

Neither his mother nor his aunt had given him a chance to tell them that the *they* in question, his English lecturer, had not been white.

Faizel had always been Carol's biggest advocate. Carol's house had become like a second home to her when she was young. Her father died when she was young, and her mother was never really around, so Faizel would often sneak into Aunt Carol's house and get into bed with her. She was never turned away. For this reason, you would never hear a single bad word about Carol out of Faizel's mouth. If anyone else said anything bad, Faizel would rush to Carol's defence.

The night Carol passed away, Faizel did indeed attempt to rush to her defence. But what could she have done? She wasn't strong enough to stop the onslaught, so she picked up the phone to dial 10111.

Sit die foon neer, Faizie!

Faizel had never learned how to disobey an order from her Aunt Carol. She placed the phone back onto the receiver.

"Looks like they're serving the cake."

Martin, husband of Miriam (one of Carol's nieces), walked to the serving table and cut himself a rather large slice of carrot cake. Everyone around and near the table scattered when they saw him coming. No one in the family really liked him. He had a penchant for telling crude jokes about women he had encountered in his single days, bragging about all the money he made as a divorce attorney, and to top it all off, he

often spoke of his lighter complexion as if it were a badge of honour. Fatima even heard from Farida that Kulsum said he was a “white sympathiser”.

Percival, who was on his way to the bathroom, made the mistake of locking eyes with Martin and greeting him. This was all Martin needed.

“Ey Percy! You’re looking so good, man! Have you lost weight?” Percival had very visibly not lost weight.

“*Ja nee*, I try to stay in shape, you know.”

Percival tried to inch his way towards the bathroom, but Martin stepped between him and his destination. He leaned in close to Percival and whispered:

“Have I ever told you about the time I was with a white girl?” “We’re... uh... we’re at a funeral, Martin.” “No, of course, of course. Don’t hear what I’m not saying, Percy. Coloured girls are beautiful creatures too. Absolutely one of a kind. Carol was no exception.”

To Percival’s knowledge, Martin had never actually met Carol. He wasn’t sure Martin even knew what she looked like before seeing her picture on the funeral brochure. And hearing him refer to his mother-in-law as a *girl* and a *creature* made him cringe.

What Percival didn't know was that Martin *had* met Carol. Two months prior, she had called him and asked to meet for a coffee. She told him that she wanted out of her marriage and that she didn't want the rest of the family to know until it was done. Martin could see fear in her eyes as she spoke. Knowing that she was desperate, he hiked up his usual service fee. Carol said she couldn't afford it. Martin said, thanks for lunch.

There was a sound from the opposite end of the room that made everyone turn. Ernest had fallen over.

"They said there wouldn't be alcohol here," said Percival to himself.

Jemima and Faizel rushed to help Ernest off the floor, with Adam trailing them. Jemima gave Percival a look from across the room, and he immediately came running over. Martin, refusing to let the others steal all the glory, followed Percival in suit.

"Oh Carol! Carol, *waar's jy*, Carol!?"

Ernest got like this after three beers. Delirious, lots of yelling. After they had helped him up off the floor and onto a chair, Jemima gave him a hug, holding him tight. He started to cry.

“Carol... Carol... *ek’s jammer*, Carol... *ek’s jammer...*” “I know, I know...”

Jemima did her best at consoling him, but it’s hard to stop a drunk man crying. Ernest lifted his head slowly, still bawling, and looked into Jemima’s eyes. Behind the tears, she could see an aggression in his pupils, a rage in his sclera.

“*Jy luister nooit*, Carol. *Nooit! Hoekom luister jy nooit vir my nie!*?” Ernest raised his fist to Jemima. It was not the first time.

Ernie had not always been prone to rage. But life had not been good to him. Growing up in Apartheid had taught him how to fight, how to protest, but not much else. When '94 rolled around, he didn't know what to do with himself, what to do with all the rage. It wasn't an anger against the white man per se; it was something deeper, more nuanced, something he himself could never describe. To Carol, it seemed that he felt short-changed by democracy. She could tell that, in his heart of hearts, he had wanted war. So he drank. But whereas alcohol can numb pain, it only exacerbates rage.

The first time he hit her was in '97. He said he would never do it again. Twenty years later, he had hit her 189 times. She kept count. At some point, she became numb to it. When he would get really mad, he would go after Jemima, too, and

Carol would step in between them, taking the punches for her daughter with a look of indifference on her face. This, of course, only made Ernest angrier.

When he started to beat her on June 6th 2018, it was nothing new. He had gone through her phone while she was in the toilet and saw a text from Martin saying, Hi there, Ma Carol. Are you sure you haven't changed your mind about using me? I might be able to cut my fee by 2%. Let me know. Ernest flew into a rage. He hadn't hit her that hard in a long time.

Faizel, who had been visiting at the time, stared at the altercation from the corner of the living room. When Carol's head hit the floor and she cried out, Faizel reached for the landline, but after being screamed at to put the phone down, curled up into a ball and cried into her knees. There was an unspoken rule that you didn't get the police involved in family disputes. Faizel should have known that. She listened as Ernest's onslaught continued. She heard the sound of Carol's head hitting the floor again, again, again, again...

Then all of a sudden, silence. Faizel looked up.

Red. Red everywhere. On the floor. On Ernest's hands. And on the bashed-in head of Carol Engelbrecht. Ernest's eyes were still red, but he dropped to the floor and, as if only now realising what he had done, burst into tears.

Faizel was out the door immediately, sobbing down the street, running frantically. She felt her breath leave her lungs, and her head started to spin. Toppling over onto a random park bench, she fumbled for her cell phone. Her fingers dialled the numbers before her brain could even process what she was doing.

No answer.

Jem iets het gebeur. Ek need jou. Help.

She waited ten minutes, trying to catch her breath. Then she heard the text notification.

Percy het werk. Sorry.

What happened next, no one will ever know, not even Faizel. She went home and lay in bed for the next three days, not moving and barely sleeping. When she finally shook herself from her delirious state, she checked her phone to find dozens of texts about Carol's death.

Het jy gehoor? Faizie, Carol's dood.

You were added to the group *CAROL'S FUNERAL*.

No one seemed to mention how she died. Some said she fell down, and hit her head. Others said she had had cancer for a while, that she had kept a secret. When Jemima texted Faizel to ask if she knew what happened, and whether it had anything to do with her text for help the other night, Faizel replied:

No. I heard it was natural causes.

It may as well have been. The truth would never come out. Faizel knew that. Even Jemima, in her heart, knew. This is what they did. The community would circle around Ernest, shielding him from any consequences. Ernest was a pillar of District Six: his home was always open, he was on the board at the local church, and he even played an active role in protesting against Apartheid. All this meant he had immunity. *Full immunity.*

But Faizel could still hear Ernest's cries the night he murdered Carol, as he sobbed over her dead body. She heard him when she showered. She heard him when she prayed. She heard him when she tried to sleep. An unending drone.

"Carol! Carol! *Hoekom, Carol!?* *Hoekom luister jy nooit vir my nie!?*"

Jemima placed her hands over her father's fist, bringing it closer. She kissed it. Ernest collapsed into his daughter's arms, spouting incoherent words between sobs.

Percival placed his right hand on Jemima's shoulder and used his left arm to hug Adam, who was now teary too. Martin used the commotion as an opportunity to sneak out, pulling Miriam by the hand. Faizel stared, but not at anyone in particular; she just looked forward, past Ernest, past the walls of the church, and past South Africa. She wore a tired indifference on her face.

The bishop, who had been staring from a chair by the snack table all this time, finally got up and walked over to the crying Ernest. He knelt down, laid his hand on him and prayed for peace.

"Amen," they all said.

2ND PLACE

Women of War

Maryam Kotze

The burden of her belly weighed her down as she bent forward, the mother's dirt-stained fingers grazing through the wreckage, sifting through someone's shattered memories. A tentative smile lifted her face, her free hand affectionately stroking her bump as the other lifted free a ragged stuffed toy. The eyeless face of a little bear stared back at her, its brown fur matted and bloody, but it did not deter her. She was determined.

The trek back to the camp was arduous on her already frail body. The blisters on her feet broke open with every rough step, her brow drenched from the heat of the sun beating down, her fist placed in the hollow of her spine in an attempt to balance her tired body. But she was determined.

Pulling back the paper-thin material that shielded them from the elements, her gaze landed upon her eldest daughter sitting in the corner beside her grandmother, struggling to read from a book of anthologies she had found days prior. She did not look up from the pages, her brow furrowing as she flicked through them disapprovingly. "Pages are missing," she murmured, but not accusingly, simply disappointed. "I'll

get you a new one,” the mother said softly to her daughter, settling heavily upon the ground to her right, the pressure building against her spine as she placed a gentle kiss on her temple. “When?” was the response, but one that came without the expectation of an answer. “She has begun to make up the missing pieces herself, such an imagination this one!” The grandmother exclaimed proudly, her voice creaking like the chair she sat in, the only piece of furniture they had managed to salvage. “She should become a writer,” the mother agreed, nodding her head as she brushed her fingers through the bear’s coat, tsking as tufts fell out occasionally. The daughter shook her head imperceptibly but smiled as she met her mother’s gaze before it dropped to the bear in her lap. “It looks like Sunny,” she laughed, the sounds so raw, as though she struggled to remember how to form them. “Because they’re both bears?” the mother asked, handing the bear to her daughter, watching as she pressed her thumbs into the hollows where its eyes should be. “Because he looked like this when we left...”

The mother studied her daughter’s face, that youthful innocence she had grown so used to no longer present. All she saw was a weary maturity that came from tragedies witnessed too young, too soon. She was too young. It was too soon.

She struggled to fall asleep that night; the sounds of the grandmother’s loud snores and the daughter’s coughs filled

the tent with a din that rivalled that of the distant explosions beyond its borders. She had heard stories in the camp. Stories that kept her gaze glued to the tightly fastened tent entrance, a vigilant guardian over the vulnerable bodies within. Men sometimes did terrible things when terrible things were done to them, turning the last place left that felt even a shred like a haven into nothing more than what lay beyond. A ravaged land of war. She cared not for their twisted reasonings, not for their excuses or their justifications. She cared only for those who depended on her. The coughing fit eventually turned her gaze, the back of her hand brushing against her daughter's forehead. A fever. "Water?" The daughter's voice croaked. A question. Was there any left? The woman crawled towards the pot kept in the corner of the tent, lifting the rusted lid. No. No water. The grandmother opened her eyes, sleep seeming to elude her as well, the chair groaning beneath her as she shifted her weight. "I'll keep my eye on her," she whispered encouragingly. It would be fine to leave them for just a moment.

She heaved the pot into her arms, her swollen fingers gripping its thin handles as she waddled out of the tent, squinting into the darkness. The moon's pale beams lit up the expanse of tents littering the beach, allowing her the briefest idea of a path between their panelled walls. She huffed a deep breath, that stench of smoke that constantly permeated the air clinging to her lungs. With heavy steps in the sand, her

feet guided her towards where the communal water was collected, a mix of rain and boiled seawater. The muffled voices that filled the silence around her provided her a sense of security, of kinship, as if their hardships weighed equally upon all their shoulders. A weight carried, a weight shared. However, as in all things, a weight that burdened some more than others.

Wherein she found herself kneeling before the pump, her arms straining to fill the pot, the comforting hum keeping her back turned even as the shadow fell on her from behind...

The pot had been long forgotten as she re-emerged into their tent, head bowed, bruised fingers tensed around her bump. But the chaos that seemed to be ensuing brought her downcast gaze upwards. There, sat between her grandmother's legs, was her daughter, tears streaming down her little face while soothing hands brushed through her tangled hair. Panic surged through her, her knees buckling as she collapsed before them, hands grasping air as she struggled to cup her daughter's crumpled face. "What happened? What *happened*?" She choked, her own unshed tears finding their way through. "I'm dying!" Her daughter cried hysterically. The grandmother laughed, hushing her with a rough sigh. "You are not—" "I *must* be! Look!" She revealed her hands, their tips stained lightly in red. The mother met her daughter's gaze, a small smile lifting her lips. She had not had the time to have this conversation yet, the novelty of it taking her by surprise. "Oh, my love," she soothed, bringing

her daughter into her arms, rocking gently like she had the first time she held her. The memory of rough hands on her was encompassed by the gentleness of her daughters as they wrapped around her neck.

She closed her eyes, a soft laugh falling from her cracked lips. “You are not going to die...you’re just— you’re growing up.” “I don’t want to...” her daughter said, sniffing against her neck. The mother nodded knowingly. “I know it’s scary, but you are so *brave*. You *have* been so brave.” She released her child, wiping her face with her sleeve before shifting to gather some strips of fabric from the torn pile of clothes they had scavenged, fashioning from it a makeshift pad. “See? All fixed.” The little girl scrunched up her nose, the discomfort clear in her expression, but she said nothing. “We’ll get you better ones, okay?” she offered with a weak smile.

“When?”

The mother’s hand cupped the base of her stomach, feeling the pulsing pain rippling through her body. The contractions had started. She held her daughter’s gaze. She was determined.

“Soon.”

3RD PLACE

Lerato and the heart of the mountains

Boipelo Katlego Molokwane

“Envisioning Peaceful Futures”

In the highlands of Lesotho, where the mountains stretch toward the heavens and the air is thin and pure, there is a village called Thaba-Tseka. This village is as real as the earth beneath your feet, a place where the people live in harmony with the rugged beauty of their land. But Thaba-Tseka, like all ancient places, has its own stories - tales passed down through generations, whispered around fires under starry skies. The village is beautiful, surrounded by lush forests and clear rivers, but it lived in the shadow of a great and terrible creature - a giant monkey known as Thabana-Tshwane. This beast, with fur as dark as the night and eyes that glowed like burning coals, roamed the mountains, terrorising the villagers below. Its roars echoed through the valleys, and its wrath was unmatched, leaving the people in constant fear.

The villagers told stories of Thabana-Tshwane origins, saying that the monkey was born from the anger of the mountains themselves, a manifestation of the earth's fury at the injustices done to it. For generations, the people of Thaba-Tseka lived under the giant monkey's oppressive shadow, offering tributes in the hope that it would spare their homes and lives. But the creature's hunger was insatiable, and its rage unending.

In this village lived a tiny young girl named Lerato. Though small in structure, Lerato had a heart as vast as the mountains and a spirit as fierce as the wild winds that swept through the peaks. From a young age, she had listened to the elders' stories - tales of a time when the land was free from the monkey's tyranny, when people lived in harmony with nature. These stories filled her with a burning desire to see the beast and free the villagers from fear.

Unlike the others, who believed that only a great warrior could defeat the giant monkey, Lerato thought differently. She knew that true strength did not always come from physical might but from understanding, compassion, and a willingness to see beyond fear.

One day, Lerato decided to confront Thabana-Tshwane herself. Armed with nothing more than a small wooden staff, no taller than she was, and a pouch of sacred herbs given to her by her grandmother, she began her journey up the mountain. The climb was steep with jagged rocks and biting winds that threatened to send her tumbling back down. But Lerato was determined. She knew that her size did not define her strength.

As she climbed higher, the air grew colder, and the sky darkened with the weight of the task ahead. When she finally reached the summit, she found the giant monkey perched on

a massive stone, its enormous body towering over the landscape. The creature's fur bristled in the wind, and its fiery eyes glared down at her. It let out a deafening roar that shook the very ground, but Lerato did not waver.

The tiny girl stepped forward; her small frame dwarfed by the gigantic beast. She raised her staff and began to speak, her voice calm and clear, carrying the weight of ancient wisdom. In the language of the earth, taught to her by the elders, Lerato spoke to Thabana-Tshwane. She told the giant monkey of the pain it had caused, of the fear that gripped her people. She said with boldness and courage: "*Nna ke ngwana wabo Ngono le bo Ntate moholo ha ke tshabe Tshwane, Tshwane o mang wena.*" She also spoke of the earth's own suffering, of how the monkey had been born from the anger and injustice inflicted upon the land. Lerato did not seek to destroy the giant monkey but to heal the wound from which it had been born. She extended her small hand toward the beast, offering it the herbs her grandmother had given her. As the scent of the sacred herbs filled the air, the monkey's fiery eyes softened, and its enormous body began to tremble. The creature, once a symbol of terror, began to change.

Thabana-Tshwane's massive form began to shrink, its fur turning to a rich, deep green, blending with the forest around it. The giant monkey, once a beast of rage, transformed into a guardian spirit of the mountains, its strength now used to protect the land and its people rather than to harm them.

As dawn broke over the mountains, the villagers awoke to find the giant monkey gone, its shadow lifted from their lives. Lerato returned to her village, not as a warrior who had slain a monster, but as a tiny girl who had brought peace through understanding and compassion. The people of Thaba-Tseka marvelled at how such a small child had achieved what no one else had dared to attempt.

Lerato's story spread far and wide, becoming a legend of how great power can come in small packages, and how peace and justice can be restored not through force, but through the strength of the heart. The mountains of Lesotho, once home to a creature of terror, now stood as a testament to the tiny girl who had dared to dream of a peaceful future, where even the mightiest of foes could be transformed through love and understanding.

This is the story of a young girl who brought peace not just for herself, but for her community and future generations - yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

2025

ESSAYS/ OPINION PIECES

1ST PLACE

Roots and routers: from a rural fire to digital dreams

Eyethu Ngcobo

“In a world where routers hum besides rural fires, I have learned to dream in two languages, one spoken by my ancestors and one coded into the future” - tracing the threads of identity, technology, and transformation in South Africa. In every generation, there are waves - some we ride, some we are caught in, and others we create. In South Africa, a country defined by movement, resistance, resilience, and innovation, these waves come in many forms: oceans that connect and divide us, technologies that uplift or isolate, migrations that build families or fracture them, and emotions that flood or heal. This is a story of waves, of how they shape who we were, who we are, and who we are becoming.

My grandmother tells stories of the sea like it's a living relative. “The ocean never forgets,” she once told me, her eyes fixed on the horizon beyond Durban's beaches. She

spoke of her father, a fisherman from the Indian community, who would disappear into the foggy morning with nothing but a wooden boat, a net, and a prayer. The Indian Ocean wasn't just water - it was a road, a boundary, a giver, and sometimes a taker.

For centuries, the Indian Ocean has connected Durban to places far beyond its shores - India, Mozambique, Oman - carrying spices, languages, and people. But the ocean also remembers the indentured labourers brought here under false promises, their sweat soaking the sugarcane fields. It remembers the stories of local Zulu fishers who navigated its moods with instinct and song.

These narratives, etched in waves, are part of the city's heartbeat. To walk on the beach is to tread on memories.

When I was in Grade 3, our classroom had one broken chalkboard and a single textbook shared by four students. Now, as a university student, I code on a laptop while watching tutorials from creators in Nairobi, Berlin, and New York. The shift has been tidal.

Technology has transformed how we learn, express, and connect. It has opened worlds for people like me. My cousin, who couldn't afford to study further, started a TikTok channel teaching isiZulu phrases. He now makes more money than most graduates. What began as a side hobby became a cultural bridge and a business.

On the other hand, my friend from a rural town still struggles with load shedding and patchy internet, reminding me that technological waves don't crash evenly. The digital device is a real fault line in our society. Still, we are witnessing a renaissance. Young South Africans are coding apps that serve local needs, filming movies with smartphones, and turning hashtags into movements. The digital world has not just changed what we do - it has changed who we can be.

Still, not all change is easy. I remember the day my father left for Johannesburg to find work. I was 10, and I watched him walk toward the bus with a plastic bag full of food and a heart full of hope. We became one of many families shaped by economic migration. South Africa's story is one of constant movement - across borders, between provinces, and within cities. Some movements are forced, like those who fled violence in the townships during the 1980s. Others are chosen, like students moving to study in new provinces, carrying their dialects, foods, and dreams with them.

Today, migration looks different. Zimbabweans, Congolese, Malawians, and others build new lives in Durban and Cape Town. Yet, xenophobia shows that old fears still run deep. "A person is a person through other people", goes the African proverb *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* but the idea is challenged daily when fear outweighs empathy. Migration

brings richness but also tension. Still, in taxis and classrooms, on factory floors and in WhatsApp groups, these new waves are shaping a shared South African future.

We often talk about the big events - protests, elections, innovations - but what about the private waves? The emotional tides that rise quietly, often unnoticed? When I failed two modules in my first semester, shame drowned me. I didn't tell anyone, too scared they'd think I wasn't smart enough. Depression is a tide that sneaks in with whispers and lingers like fog. "You can't pour from an empty cup", my aunty once told me that. It took me a long time to understand what that really meant. But so is healing. I met a therapist on campus who told me, "You are allowed to struggle. But you're also allowed to survive". That sentence stayed with me. Sometimes survival is quiet, getting out of bed, showing up, forgiving yourself.

Love, grief, anxiety, joy - all these are waves. Some come in gentle ripples, others crash without warning. And yet, we learn to swim. We learn to speak our truth, write our pain, dance our joy, and breathe through panic. Our inner oceans matter as much as the ones we see.

Every December, we go back to the rural village for a family reunion. It's a place with goats, open fires, and uncles who tell the same jokes every year. But it's also where culture breathes - where children learn isiZulu proverbs and young

women wear traditional beadwork proudly. Elders sit under trees and tell stories, and time feels slower, fuller, more rooted.

Yet, I'm also a child of Netflix and K-pop. I know how to cook umngqusho, but I also crave ramen. I can sing Brenda Fassie and Beyoncé in the same playlist. Some say this dilutes culture. I say it expands it. Cultural waves don't end; they echo. From the rhythms of maskandi to the poetry of spoken word in Soweto clubs, our culture is not disappearing—it's evolving. The youth are not forgetting their roots; they're remixing them. As the late poet Keorapeste Kgosistile once said, "If I am who you say I am, then you are not who you think you are either".

South Africa's story is built on waves of political resistance - from 1976 Soweto to the 1994 ballot box. Each wave has brought change, but each has also shown us how much remains broken. Gender-based violence, unemployment, inequality - these are the tides we must still confront. But change is not just in protest. It's in youth starting cooperatives, artists reclaiming space, and women leading community safety groups. The wave is coming - it always is. The question is: will we rise with it?

There's an old man who sells books at North Beach in Durban. His name is Mr. Dube, and he used to be a journalist during apartheid. He once told me about stories that were

never published - about women who ran safe houses, kids who smuggled letters in pencil cases, and songs that were banned. "Not everything that mattered made it to the news", he said. "But it still mattered"

These are the hidden frequencies - voices that never made headlines, but shaped the world. Like the Muslim women who ran soup kitchens during the AIDS crisis. Or the sangomas who preserved indigenous knowledge when it was outlawed. Or the LGBTQ+ youth whose identities were erased from textbooks. Our cities are full of untold stories. Sometimes, all it takes is listening. Sometimes the quietest stories are the most powerful ones.

When my friend Amida started a community garden during the Covid-19 lockdown, we all thought it was cute. Now, that garden feeds 30 families. One seed, one spade, one idea - rippling outward. Change doesn't always come with loud slogans. Sometimes, it's a girl tutoring a younger student. A boy choosing not to bully someone. A student donating old textbooks. These small acts become legacies. They shape cultures of care, of accountability, of growth.

In South Africa, where the waves can feel overwhelming, we must never forget the power of ripples. They remind us that we all have a role, no matter how small. We are shaped by waves - of history, culture, migration, emotion, and innovation. They come and go, but they always leave something behind: a changed shoreline, a new understanding, a scar, a story.

As a young South African, I am learning to ride the waves. To listen to the echoes of the past, feel the currents of the present, and imagine the tides to come. Some waves we inherit, others we create. But all of them, together, tell the story of who we are.

We are not drowning. We are transforming.

2ND PLACE

Siyabonga Nqubuka

Waves: Stories of Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

Whether it is the rhythm of the Indian ocean that is constantly changing or the swings of human life, waves are ever-present in our lives in the literal and metaphorical meaning of the word. Waves are more than elements of nature in the city of Durban which is embraced by the Indian Ocean, they are narrative tellers. They hold the memories of the past, the heartbeat of progress, the movement of the masses and the uproar of human feelings. They put into perspective that nothing can exist in a vacuum, that every action has massive ramifications, and that neither the past, nor present, nor the future actually exist; there is only time.

Ocean narratives: Durban maritime soul

The Indian Ocean does not only kiss Durban shores -it cheers the identity of the city. Since the early trade routes which introduced spices, textiles and ideas in the distant parts of the globe to the busy seaports there today, the ocean has become a highway of interaction. Townships that dot the coast have endured, advanced and developed, both with the blessings and wrath of the sea. Fishermen in the area refer to the sea and consider it a living being, on which their livelihoods depend, as well as cultural festivals of

marine life, coastal practices and roots tied to the sea. The seas beneath the surface have tales of survival, death, and endurance, as the coral reefs and shipwrecks give hidden secrets awaiting to be found. The ocean is humbling, a symbol of continuity, patience, and respect; these themes and sentiments bring resonances through Durban in all its cultural variety.

Technological waves: the impetus of innovation

As the waves of the ocean created the coast, technological innovation waves change society. South Africa, and Durban in particular, is experiencing an emergence of new digital territories, amongst which are mobile technologies transforming communication and online learning, for democratic access to education. These waves of technology do not only enable us to live differently, but they also modify how we think, create and relate. The topics covered in our lectures include the role of social media to give voice to those that have previously been ignored, how artificial intelligence threatens to disrupt established labour systems, and how creative industries turn to technology to ensure their cultures survive and reach vast new markets. However, each innovation has a dual side: it can unite or separate, it all depends on how it is more or less accessible, how it is adapted. In this respect, technology waves of ingenuity are also a kind of mirror reflecting human achievement and at the same time inequality at its root.

Waves of migration: movement and change

Waves are also metaphorical references to the migratory movement of people- the pull and push of migration. The history of South Africa is characterized by the movement of people: involuntary apartheid removals, the influx of indentured workers of Indian origin and current trans-national and intra-national migration. Durban is a city of mobility, of movement and change manifested in the neighbourhoods where individuals of various languages and cultures live side-by-side. The act of migration is both challenging and an opportunity and imparts on citizens a hybridism of cultural border crossing. These waves are never simple; they change/re-modify communities, alter the economy and re-define social norms. The strength of this flow, however, is resilience: how people bring their pasts with them into a new world and in turn contribute to a story that is shared across generations and around the globe.

Emotional tides: the human experience

Outside geography and technology, there is the topic of waves that is extremely personal. The relations, dreams and changes are characterised by emotional tides. Life in Durban is like the waves of the ocean, the highs like the high tides and the lows or grief and loss like the low tide. With deeply emotional personal stories of love, resilience, trauma, with each experience that is both unique and universal. These tides serve as a reminder that nothing is ever constant, that

each interesting emotion beats a distinctive imprint, and that often, one grows just because she/he hasn't cruised in calm waters.

Cultural Resonance: the ripples through the generations

Culture even flows like the waves. Zulu heritages, Indian ceremonies and modern art have a reputation of crossing over time thus affecting identity and cohesiveness. Those waves contain memory of all the ancestors and enable them to remain the same after changes that occurred within society. Cultural resonance could be seen in the markets, music and oral histories in Durban where the past is not passive, but hits against the contemporary world in the creation of new meanings and expression of the new. It is like a reminder which is to the effect that culture just like the sea cannot be contained but moves, changes and endures.

Waves of change and hidden frequencies

Durban has been the stage of societal actions, political shifts and people taking initiatives together. We witness history marred with examples such as, anti-apartheid riots, to current civic activism, which has demonstrated the power of communities in its efforts to cause change, and is one of the most important aspects in the future. These movements are in most instances the expressions of previously unknown frequencies- hitherto overlooked voices, suppressed groups, and forgotten history, and this history must be held up to the

light. There is also a slight and inaudible sound of women, immigrants, and the young who like to work on equity just below the radar screen of the social discourse that validates the fact that in actual sense, it is the deepest ripple with which they create just beneath the water, that is not obvious, but the catalyst of change.

Ripple effects: mountain-sized impact, molehill-sized actions
Waves also make us remember that everything we are doing is not done in a vacuum. A single choice, a stone of good action or some brilliant thought could lead into ripples that will have some implication to the generations ahead. Such waves can be seen as the means through which any history of Durban, and its present-day culture was created: the investments of the early settlers, the protests of community leaders and the developments of artists are all merged to create the Durban that is in sight today. With such ripple effects, there is an impetus to be responsible, empathetic and forward looking, and it keeps us in mind that the smallest of efforts can make a difference, ultimately.

Conclusions: the waves of embrace

Both types of waves, literally speaking, and in the metaphorical sense, are factors of nature, which defines the character of human existence. They produce landforms, societies, feelings and chronologies. Being a city on the Indian Ocean itself, Durban is an illustration of how powerful and complex the waves which can be characterised as oceanic,

technological, migratory, emotional, cultural and social are. It is through tracing, thinking and living in these waves, that we not only become cognizant of the beat of the past and present, but find that our life is used to producing the wave of the future. History clears its way amid the raging of the waves, and we can extract the teachings and experiences that the waves carry in themselves and embark in this world of learning, openness and connections that is not time bound.

3RD PLACE

Cultural waves Cultural Resonance

Lucky Mabaka

Culture illuminates the way for those who are here and will lead the way for those who will come. It becomes clear that language is not simply a means of communication; it works as a repository for our ancestors' memories, wisdom, and rhythms of life, our identity, our heritage. A library burns when a language dies. Railways follow the coast of South Africa where the Indian Ocean lapped and dipped into Durban's sea ports, basking in assorted tongues – a wave rolling through time. These waves have shaped our narratives: the waves of struggle, migration, and hope. Unfortunately, that wave has been squelched by social norms, the English language, and colonialism. Because when language is muted, a part of us is extinguished.

This essay explores the cultural wave and contends that language serves as a trigger for the ripple effect of cultural practices and identity through generations in South Africa. It will demonstrate the interruptions that have happened to bring about that decline in indigenous languages, the relevance of language as a cultural repository, and the liberation struggle, historical facts aside, the revival of their strength. To protect our language is to protect the memory

ocean that sustains our identity as citizens in South Africa.

Importance of language

Language is a home we return to when we need a refresher of who we are and what our identity is. A Setswana proverb goes, “Motho ke motho ka batho.” There’s a similar one in isiZulu, “Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu” that isn’t fully translatable to English without losing its meaning. The Setswana saying “Mafoko a matlhong” has become popular with modern society to acknowledge the power of our speech and its long-lasting effects. These proverbs are not mere words; they are semiotic codings, nursing the ages of wisdom into one phrase. They are tidal pools of stories, passed down from grandparents to future generations of grandchildren, shaping how communities understand their world.

When a grandmother shares a Venda folktale about the powerful lion, or a grandfather recites an isiZulu poem to honour and praise their ancestors, they are doing so much more than simply keeping the children entertained. They are conveying morals, values, and history that can never be taught from a textbook. This is cultural resonance at its very best. But this resonance doesn’t hold water for a lot of South Africans today. Words may be recalled only in droplets, or not at all, submerged by the tides of English. You could say it’s as though that ocean of memory has receded, leaving a dry, barren expanse of sand where once rich waters flowed.

The decline of indigenous languages

The demise of indigenous languages was not inevitable. It was the product of colonialism and apartheid, whose purpose was to control not only bodies and land but also language and thought. Mission schools often discouraged or banned the use of African languages, and advocacy took place for English or Afrikaans to be used as the language of instruction. Classroom use of isiZulu or isiXhosa could result in punishment. The subtext was clear: indigenous languages were inferior, and not to be used in intellectual or professional contexts. We thank gentlemen such as Sir Steve Biko and Sir Chris Hani, who sacrificed their lives for black excellence.

The legacy of this long-standing repression remains with us even today. Many parents choose to raise their children speaking English, believing it will offer more educational and occupational opportunities. In cities like Durban, Johannesburg, and Cape Town, English is being used as a medium of interaction for people from various linguistic backgrounds. As a result, children often do not speak their native languages fluently or feel embarrassed when they have difficulty doing so.

The pity of this disruption isn't just that words are being lost; it is also that cultural perspectives are being lost. Every language is like a new pair of spectacles through which you

can see the world. Take the isiZulu word ubuntu, whose meaning, a kind of interconnectedness that English can't quite capture in one word alone, you've doubtless heard. And the Tswana word seriti is equivalent to an individual's spiritual aura or essence, a concept English does not contain in one instance. When languages die out, it's not just that they lose some tools for looking at the world, and the philosophy and culture that came with it; future generations are also cut off from their ancestors.

This cultural amnesia is what the Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o refers to as the "cultural bomb"; it wipes out language and memory intentionally through colonial actions. South Africa experienced this too. And the cultural bomb detonated here, too; its aftershocks resonate still among young people who struggle to pray or sing or share a story in their mother tongues.

The Revolution

As with the ocean, language doesn't ever exactly vanish. That's even when the waves are pulling away, they're always coming back. Today, South Africa is in the midst of a revival of its indigenous languages, in both subtle and significant ways. The study of isiZulu, isiXhosa, Sesotho, and Setswana in schools is increasing. Blogs are stimulating research and creative writing in African languages by universities. It must be noted now that Dr Bodibadi Modungwa is the first person to ever receive a PhD in Setswana at Pretoria

University. While this cannot be measured, it confirms the extent of her language and culture, and it represents an enormous milestone in the history of indigenous African language development.

Meanwhile, in the digital realm, young creators are reclaiming their languages on platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube: telling jokes, reciting poems, and acting out skits in isiZulu or isiXhosa; making them chic once more. Music, too, has been a centre of this linguistic renaissance. From the melancholic isiZulu of Maskandi songs to Amapiano tracks that are gaining a worldwide following, mixing local languages and beats, young people in the country show that language is alive. Each song is like a wave in that it washes culture up onto new shores, tying together old and new.

In your everyday lives, you can find it. In the markets of Durban, on township streets, in family WhatsApp chats, people are incorporating indigenous languages into their conversations, even if it's just a sprinkle here and there. A grandmother's isiXhosa blessing before dinner, a Setswana saying lazily tossed off in the middle of a conversation, or bits of isiZulu slipped into an English sentence: all these things are signs of cultural echo, reminders that the wave is coming back.

Why?

Why is this important? Some may argue that in a globalised world, English is all one needs. Yet this view is superficial, veiling the essence of cultural meaning. What is 'lost' with language are the particular vantage points that make up our languages. Without Setswana, with which we construct meaning there! How do you understand full botho? How can we admire the beauty of izibongo (praise poetry) that ebbs and flows like the rhythm of drums without isiZulu? And there is no way to understand the oral tradition of imbongi (the praise singer), whose function is not only artistic but deeply political, without isiXhosa.

Language is more than communication; it is a feeling of fellowship. When you hear your native language spoken in a crowd, it makes you feel recognised; that is something that speaks to our desire to not be lone operators. To lose it is to become a stranger in your own country. It is for this reason that it's critically important to revitalise and preserve indigenous languages; it's not only an academic project, but a spiritual and cultural necessity.

Conclusion

Language is like a wave. It has encountered silence and suppression that have long been oppressed, defeated, but never annihilated. Each word spoken in isiZulu, Setswana, isiXhosa, or one of South Africa's indigenous languages is a ripple that keeps our memory alive. When we speak these languages, we're not only talking to one another; we can also

give voice above all to our ancestors. It is our generation's job to keep the wave moving. That means teaching our kids, telling our tales, singing our songs, and ensuring that English does not define us alone. It's about being comfortable in our multilingual South Africanness, which doesn't hold us back from engaging well and easily wherever we go in the world, but helps us keep one foot in our own household. In the end, speech is not unlike the deep sea of our identity. It holds our joy, our hopes and dreams, our sorrows, and answers. To mute it is to empty the ocean. Speaking lets the tide flow back in, carrying the echoes of culture throughout time. So let us swim, and breathe, as we move forward in time: whale-like minutes that don't linger only in the past, but well up to oxygenate our being, to remould itself into the present.

POETRY**1ST PLACE****The Breaking Tide*****Luke Krishnan***

Waves don't ask who stands in their path.

They come.

Some bring foam.

Some bring blood.

I was nine years old the night the ocean taught me fear.

Driving along the coastline, the waves beside us whispered against the shore. Blue lights arose in hindsight—violent and sharp

Dad gripped the wheel tighter than usual. I felt the silence between his breaths. The siren swallowed our car whole. Hands—pale and commanding—tore him from the driver's seat

I remember rain, not because of the cold, but because it made it harder to see him. Every drop blurring my father's outline as he vanished into a storm of fists and boots.

From the window, the colours melted: black under white, red over black.

I stayed still like he told me to. Even when the screaming stopped. Even when the flashing lights faded. Even when it was just me and the rain

Some waves break bones.

Others break silence.

Years passed. The ocean stayed. But I stopped visiting it. its rhythm reminded me of a heartbeat that stopped that night.

Apartheid ended...

But where does my pain go?

Where do I bury the screams that never made it to the headlines?

The new generation cannot be blamed for the sins of their fathers...

But where do I place my rage? What shore do I cast it toward?

Can injustice be dissolved like salt in water? Can blood be rinsed from memory?

Yesterday, I drowned.

Today, I remember.

Tomorrow, I rise.

Waves are not only destruction.

They're also movement.

And in 1994, a country exhaled. A tide of voices washed over ballots and borders. We didn't just end something—We began.

My father's name was never in textbooks.

But I carry him forward.

His blood didn't just stain the road,
it watered the roots of a new South Africa.

Waves do not end at the shore.

They return.

2ND PLACE

When the machines began to dream

Sibusiso Zakade

A tide of glass and code rolls in,
humming through copper veins beneath our streets.
Once, we carved stories in red dust,
now machines script our memories,
their circuits dreaming louder than drums.

Wi-Fi winds sweep across township rooftops,
carrying laughter and sorrow in emojis,
while AI tongues translate our voices,
turning whispered prayers into global echoes,
and lullabies into livestreams.
AI eyes scan the horizon of our hopes,
predicting tomorrow in binary whispers.
It translates our tongues,
counts our heartbeats in data streams,
and teaches us truths we never asked to know.

Children scroll galaxies in their palms,
elders seek wisdom in electric oracles,
and the village fire burns inside glowing screens.

The classroom is a cloud now, teachers are voices of code,
and the future blooms in algorithms
that see further than our ancestors' stars.

We are a nation riding a storm of silicon,
our laughter stored in endless archives,
our pain compressed into silent servers,
our dreams mirrored in machine made visions.

The ocean roars not of water, but of thought,
an intelligence that learns and grows without rest.
And still, we rise surfing these waves of light and steel,
unshaken, unbroken, glowing.

3RD PLACE**Emotional tides*****Asive Dlamini***

I am not always whole
sometimes I am sea foam,
scattered by winds I cannot name.
Love came like high tide,
rushing in with salt and sun,
flooding the quiet corners of me
I thought were long abandoned.

We danced in the shallows,
barefoot and brave,
until the moon pulled you away
and I was left with driftwood memories
and the ache of receding waves.

Grief is a slow current,
it doesn't crash, it carves.
It reshapes the shoreline of who I am
without asking permission.

But healing,
healing is the still water at dawn,
where reflections return,

and I see myself again, not as I was,
but as I've become.

Each tide teaches me:
to let go,
to hold gently, to rise again.

And so I do.

SHORT STORIES

1ST PLACE

The Undertow

Pikolomzi Qaba

A Personal Story

The waves never lie. They crash, they recede, they return honest in their rhythm, predictable in their chaos. Unlike people. Unlike promises. Unlike the person I thought I knew better than the sound of my own heartbeat.

I'm writing this on the same bench where Imamazi and I used to watch the sunrise over Durban's Golden Mile, where we planned our future with the confidence of two twenty-somethings who believed love could conquer anything. The Indian Ocean stretches endlessly before me, its waves rolling in with the same persistence they've maintained for millennia. But I am not the same person who sat here two years ago, dreaming of weddings and baby names.

My name is Pikolomzi, famously known to my friends as Pkay, and I am learning to drown in silence.

The rising tide

Love, I've learned, arrives like a spring tide, gradually, then all at once, lifting you higher than you ever imagined possible. Imamazi entered my life during my first year at university, a brilliant communications student with eyes that lit up when she talked about helping vulnerable children across KwaZulu-Natal through her own pocket and using communication to find sponsors for that work. She had this way of making even the most ordinary moments feel extraordinary. A simple walk to the campus library became an adventure. Sharing bunny chow on Florida Road became a feast fit for royalty.

"You know what I love about you, Pkay?" she said one evening as we sat on this very bench, the lighthouse beam sweeping across the water in its eternal rotation. "You're not afraid to show your feelings. You're going to change the world with that public relations degree and that big heart of yours."

I believed her. More importantly, I believed in us.

We moved in together after graduation, a small flat in Berea that overlooked the harbour. The walls were thin, the neighbours loud, but it was ours. I landed a position, while Imamazi was working in a retail store for a short period. Our schedules were demanding, but we made it work. We always made it work.

At least, I thought we did.

The storm

The signs were there, subtle as the shift in wind before a storm. Imamazi staying out later with her "girlfriends." Phone calls taken in the bathroom. A new perfume that made my stomach turn because it wasn't the scent I'd grown to associate with home. But love, especially when you're a man taught that showing doubt makes you weak, has a remarkable capacity for denial. I explained away each red flag, told myself that real men trust their women, that questioning her would make me controlling.

"You're being paranoid, baby," she'd say when I asked about the late nights. "The girls and I were just catching up. You know how it is."

But I didn't know how it was. I only knew that something fundamental had shifted and admitting it out loud felt like admitting failure.

The truth crashed over me like a rogue wave on a calm day. I came home early from a site inspection, excited to surprise her with tickets to see Black Coffee perform at the stadium. The sound of laughter from our bedroom stopped me cold. Not her laughter alone, but his too- a laugh I recognised because it belonged to X, her closest friend apparently. I

stood in that narrow hallway for what felt like hours but was probably only minutes, listening to the soundtrack of my world collapsing. The waves outside our window continued their ancient rhythm, indifferent to the tsunami tearing through my chest.

The silence of drowning

What they don't tell you about betrayal especially when you're a man is that society hands you a script for how to respond. You're supposed to get angry. Fight for your woman. Confront the other man. Show dominance. What they don't prepare you for is the hollow ache that makes you feel like you're suffocating even though your lungs are working perfectly.

I left that day without confronting them, walking the streets of Durban like a ghost until I found myself here, on this bench, watching the sun set over the water. The waves seemed to mock me with their consistency. How dare they maintain their rhythm when mine had been shattered?

When I finally told my close friend, his response was predictable: "Molo, Pkay. These things happen. Get another woman. Show her what she lost."

My other friend laughed it off: "Haibo, Pkay! There are plenty of fish in the sea. Don't be soft about it."

Even my cousin, usually the nurturing one, seemed uncomfortable with my pain: "Men don't cry over women. You'll find someone better."

But what happens when you can't simply "get another woman"? What happens when the person you trusted most in the world shatters your ability to trust anyone, including yourself? What happens when you're drowning in plain sight, but everyone expects you to swim like nothing happened?

The statistics of silent suffering

I started researching, desperate to understand if what I was feeling was normal. The numbers terrified me. In South Africa, suicide rates among young men are climbing. We lose bright minds like Riky Rick, the rapper who seemed to have everything but couldn't escape the darkness that consumed him in 2022. Internationally, the statistics are equally stark with men like Robin Williams, who made the world laugh while dying inside, or Chester Bennington of Linkin Park, whose music spoke to millions of broken souls before he succumbed to his own demons in 2017.

Closer to home, I learned about the rising rates of male suicide across Africa, where traditional masculinity often becomes a death sentence for those struggling with mental health. Even global figures like Anthony Bourdain, who seemed to live the dream life of travel and adventure, couldn't escape the undertow of depression that claimed

him in 2018. On the other hand, the football world mourned the loss of German goalkeeper Robert Enke in 2009, who battled depression silently while the world expected him to be unbreakable.

These weren't weak men. They were human beings crushed under the weight of expectations that men don't break, don't hurt, don't need help.

I wasn't suicidal, but I understood the silence that kills. The expectation that men should bounce back, that heartbreak is temporary, that showing vulnerability is weakness. I was expected to be angry, not devastated. To seek revenge, not healing. To move on, not process.

Learning to surface

Through seeking help all the people around me became unexpected teachers during those dark months. Young apprentices, some not much older than teenagers, carried burdens that would crush most adults. Seventeen-year-old Kamva, whose father had abandoned the family when he came out as gay, taught me that survival isn't about meeting society's expectations of manhood; it's about defining your own version of strength.

"Pkay," he said one afternoon as we worked on a foundation, "my uncles say I'm not a real man because I don't like girls. But I work harder than any of them. I send money home to my mama. I protect my little sister. What makes a man real?"

His question haunted me for weeks. What did make a man real? Was it the ability to suppress emotion? To pretend betrayal didn't cut to the bone? To smile through the pain because admitting hurt somehow diminished my masculinity?

The turning tide

Recovery, I discovered, isn't linear especially when you're constantly told that recovery shouldn't be necessary in the first place. Some days I felt strong, capable of building a new life from the ruins of the old one. Other days, well-meaning friends would ask why I wasn't "over it yet," as if heartbreak operated on a masculine timeline that I'd somehow missed.

But slowly, gradually, like the patient work of waves reshaping a coastline, I began to change. The pain that had initially felt like drowning transformed into something else not the absence of hurt, but the presence of hard-won wisdom. I started seeing a therapist, who specialised in helping men navigate emotional trauma.

"You're treating her betrayal like a verdict on your manhood," he said during one session. "But her actions tell her story, not yours. Your worth isn't determined by your ability to remain unaffected by pain."

For the first time in months, I cried in front of another person. The therapist didn't tell me to man up. He handed me tissues and told me that tears were proof of my humanity, not evidence of weakness.

New foundations

A year and a half after that devastating afternoon, I was offered a training position with an NGO focusing on men's mental health awareness on a part time basis. The irony wasn't lost on me - the breakdown that had nearly destroyed me became the foundation for work that might save other men from similar devastation.

I moved to a new flat, this one in Morningside with a view of the Berea Ridge rather than the harbour. I needed distance from the ocean for a while, space to rebuild without the constant reminder of what had been washed away. But eventually, I found myself drawn back to the water, to this bench, to the waves that had witnessed both my breaking and my rebuilding.

That's when I met Mamazi².

She wasn't a dramatic entrance, no love-at-first-sight moment that would make for good storytelling. Just a quiet woman reading on the next bench over, who offered me half her sandwich when my stomach growled loudly enough to disturb the seagulls. We started talking about the book she was reading, a collection of poetry by Maya Angelou and discovered we shared a passion for breaking down societal barriers and terrible jokes.

"I should warn you," I told her on our third coffee date, "I have trust issues. And I cry during movies. And I talk about feelings more than most women expect from men."

She smiled, the kind of smile that reaches the eyes and makes you believe in second chances. "I should warn you that I snore, I'm obsessed with rugby, and I once dated a man who thought crying was attractive. You're in good company."

The new normal

Mamazi² and I have been together for three years now. It's different from what I had with Imamazi I, less desperate, more grounded. We don't avoid difficult conversations because they might make me seem "unmanly." We take things one wave at a time, building trust like careful architects rather than rushing to completion like eager children.

Sometimes she asks me about my journey, about the depression that nearly swallowed me whole, about the therapy that saved my life. She doesn't flinch when I tell her about the nights I considered joining the statistics, about the shame I felt for feeling anything at all.

"The bravest men I know," she says, "are the ones who admit when they're drowning."

Lessons from the tide

Betrayal, I've learned, is a peculiar teacher especially for men raised to believe we're immune to its lessons. Harsh and

unforgiving, but thorough in its instruction. It taught me that masculinity without emotional honesty is just elaborate pretending. That strength includes the ability to be vulnerable. That my heart is more resilient than society taught me to believe, capable of breaking completely and still finding ways to beat.

The young men I work with now continue to astound me with their courage in admitting struggle. Sande, now nineteen and studying part-time while working construction, still checks on me when I seem overwhelmed by our workload. Last week, he told me he'd started seeing a counsellor about his family rejection.

"You showed me it's okay, Pkay," he explained. "Real men get help when they need it."

The rhythm continues

As I write these final words, the sun is setting over the Indian Ocean, painting the sky in shades of pink and gold that would make poets weep. A group of children are playing in the shallows nearby, shrieking with delight as each wave chases them up the beach. Among them, I notice several young boys, maybe seven or eight years old, who cry openly when the waves knock them down, then get up laughing and run back into the water.

No one tells them to toughen up. No one says boys don't cry. They're simply allowed to feel whatever the ocean brings them.

My phone buzzes with a text from Mamazi2: "Dinner at 7? I'm making my famous disaster pasta."

I smile, gathering my things from the bench. The waves will be here tomorrow, and the day after that, and long after I'm gone. But today, I have somewhere else to be. Someone who makes me laugh, who holds my hand during scary movies, who knows my story and loves me not despite my broken places, but because of how I've learned to heal.

The undertow that once threatened to drag me under has become the current that carries me forward. Not backward to who I was, not even to who I thought I wanted to be, but toward who I'm still becoming, a man who knows that strength isn't the absence of pain, but the courage to feel it fully and still choose to keep living.

Too many good men have been lost to the silence society demands of us. Ricky Rick. Robin Williams. Chester Bennington. Anthony Bourdain. Robert Enke. Each name represents countless others who drowned in plain sight while the world expected them to swim.

I refuse to be another statistic. I refuse to pretend that men don't break, don't hurt, don't need the same compassion we freely give to others.

The waves never lie. They crash, they recede, they return. And so, it turns out, do we, if we're brave enough to admit when we're drowning, and wise enough to accept the hands that reach out to pull us to shore.

2ND PLACE

WAVES: Emotional Tides

Kekeletso Nhlapho

Based on a true story

For it ambushes one while dwelling in their still state of mind, where the happiness declared reflects the calmness that is felt inside. A still moment that remains prey to change. Change that I had regarded as unmerciful, unless it is a good one. The kind that disfigured a woman's life, reshaped it into something unfamiliar, something she least understood, and which completely stole her peace. Peace that came wrapped up in shame and made her out to be a social leper, for a baby was not conceived out of her own desired will.

Suddenly, eyes could speak louder than mouths. Streets had echoes of judgement at every corner, and the silence in the household concealed the rage her parents felt from their broken hearts. She had become an example, but the one not to follow. Overwhelmed as she was, it felt like the world had left its place and sat on her shoulders. The brutal reality she now had to face turned her dreams and goals into delusions. The universe seemed cruel to have set such a destination for her, and life was unkind to have accepted it.

The disbelief toward her new reality threw her into a hollow of thoughts, irrational and tangled, even she could not resolve them. And each time realisation hit her, she shed a tear. It felt like a dream she was impatiently waiting to wake up from, but the only time she truly woke up was when she was about to welcome a soul into her life. A son was born. One that her family had no history of. A pure soul that lit up a mother's weary spirit. A life that poured its bit of living into the lifelessness of a woman. A boy who gave her the chance to love shamelessly, by just existing.

It was truly a beautiful moment, bringing home the genesis of sons to follow. The silence in the household broke into scolding. His hands touched on everything, and his name would frequently fall on their tongues. Suddenly, everything became so interesting, and according to him, even the neighbours' cars needed some fixing. So, he would sneak his way underneath them to give them the fixing they clearly needed.

For a three-year-old, he had the most eidetic memory and would remember even the smallest detail about his day, so he would sometimes give vivid and captivating accounts of his day. He was the joy of the house, and replenished peace of his mother. She might have felt angry at the destiny that gave her a child at 18, but perhaps the universe knew better. That she had to understand the concept of true love through herself, though in a way that first seemed to be the worst.

Little did she know that her son was just a phase, like a clearing in a fog that appears when the sun shines through. A fleeting phase of love, hope and encouragement that became a memory carried behind a name. This was her first pregnancy, the one that taught her both the sweetness of love and the bitterness of loss. He was no more, that is what she was told, and what her eyes saw when the machines fell silent.

Seeing her son being deeply rooted in those machines felt so unnatural, especially with his eyes open. Her heart was heavy, so were her lips to utter a word. The strongest communication was between their eyes, with his always brimming with hope and encouragement, always bound with his identity. It felt like an assurance to his mother that he was going nowhere, yet that was the exact moment he left her. She could feel the lifeless beeping of the machine through her beating heart.

Doctors clung to his bed like thorns on a rose as they pushed her away from his bed and out of the room. Inaudible and blurry as everything was, coming her way was one doctor, and all she could see was mumbling, trying to explain the situation she already knew. It was a reality she denied accepting this time, the brute her heart could not bear. Like any other mother, she could not imagine losing her son. So, when she later began to see him again in her mind, it felt like snapping out of a déjà vu of loss, as though her heart insisted, he had returned.

Unlike the days when she was woken up by an alarm, her grief, heavy as the sea, began to paint visions for her, dreams so vivid they felt like life itself. She now imagined freely opening her eyes at the exact time he used to stir, as if to wake him for his little nightly pee. In her mind, she never missed a single part of his routine, from getting ready for daycare to eating, playing, and falling asleep. She replayed each detail with vigilance, making sure he did it all perfectly. A feeling of failure haunted her conscience, so she did everything she could, at least in her imagination, to extinguish that spark.

Although his rambunctious behaviour often got to her, the visions always carried his true nature. It would not have been a complete or true reflection of him without it. It was the signature of his presence. So, she would hear herself calling him to stop, even when he wasn't there. The sound of his name filled a void whose origin was untraceable, yet the void never closed; it leaked because it never felt enough. These nightly visitations were never flesh and blood, only memory and longing, but they went on until the night he decided not to visit anymore. She waited for him the following night, but one night became ten, then forever. That silence was when she fully knew: her child had truly died.

But her suffering did not end there. Children in the community, even those of her family, became thorns in her side. Their laughter pierced her like sharp glass, their play

sounded like mockery, and she found herself hating them for carrying what she could not keep. The pregnancies that followed, one after another, ended too soon. Each loss deepened the crack in her heart, and slowly bitterness began to grow where hope once lived. Her womb had become a grave, and her soul recoiled from the sight of life outside it. Hatred became her shield, though it was heavy and suffocating.

What had completed her had truly died, and with it a part of herself, her peace, her joy, and even her faith in her Creator. The fantasies she had clung to could no longer withstand the weight of reality. Pity grew in the eyes that met hers. The street corners, once filled with echoes of gossip, now fell into silence, as if they too felt her grief. Her loss had snatched the breath from her life and thrown her into a dark pit with walls too thick for her cries to escape. There she flailed, hopeless, until a hand of grace reached down.

She was not alone in her pain. Her Creator knew it, too. He brought her the gift of acceptance, though at first it came clothed in hurt. Grief crowned her like a king of misery, making her sorrow visible as if it were an age-old scar, tattooed into her being. Her questions multiplied endlessly, as though drawn from a bottomless well. Yet no one had answers, except the One who knew the time to reveal them. Her life had become a strange and bitter reality, too heavy to live alone. On the edge of losing herself, God caught her and

breathed life back into her. In the midst of her hurt, confusion, and permanent scars, His hand reached deep into her broken heart, piecing it together again. Pain that once threatened to define her turned into a testimony. Shame that once shadowed her transformed into the light of a conqueror.

And slowly, her hatred softened. The sound of children's voices no longer cut like knives; instead, it became a distant echo of what she once longed for. Where she once saw a threat, she began to see a possibility. Where she once saw a wound, she began to see healing. Her Creator was loosening the chains around her heart, preparing it for joy once more.

Her peace finally rested in its rightful place. She embraced her reality, but this time she did not walk alone; her hand was held. Though her questions were not directly answered, the void within her began to fill. Her life calmed, like gentle waves settling on the shore, and she could at last hear the whispers of her mind. At the perfect time, she gave birth again, to a son. One who carried on the rare family trait of bearing sons. With his birth, the broken part of herself that had died during her grief began to grow again. What seemed impossible through human eyes, God made possible. Not only did she bear this one son, but she was blessed with another, two beautiful children whose lives became the proof of her victory over storms. She named them in a way that declared His blessings and His holiness. Her life, once

crushed by storms, now flowed again with the rhythm of waves, yesterday's sorrow giving way to tomorrow's hope.

3RD PLACE

The Moon Only Pulls So Far

Andile Bhengu

Part I: Yesterday – The rise

“The first time I heard her laugh, it tasted like salt-bright and fleeting, like a wave catching sunlight.” They never warn you that the hardest part of love is watching it vanish while you're still in its light.

He wasn't looking for anyone when she entered his life, yet she arrived like a quiet tide, rising steadily until he was knee-deep in a relationship he hadn't dared imagined. She was calm, soft-spoken and intelligent. She didn't need to raise her voice to be seen; she simply was herself. What started as casual chats quickly grew into late-night conversations, voice notes filled with warmth and inside jokes that stitched the two of them together.

Soon, he was timing his day around her replies, refreshing his messages with the giddy anticipation of someone rediscovering joy. Everything felt like the beginning of something special, like the shore bathed in early morning sun. He found himself eagerly waiting to hear her thoughts on music, life and the world. She softened him, shaping him into a man he never imagined he could be.

Her laugh was like light through a cracked door. That sound lingered long after their calls ended, echoing like a melody in his head.

There was a quiet grounding about her, a magnetic stillness. She didn't demand space; she invited it. With her, vulnerability came naturally. They shared fears and dreams as if sketching blueprints for the future. They stayed on the phone after everything was said, breaths overlapping in a silence that felt sacred.

One of his most treasured memories came after the academic year ended. He stayed in a university residence while she, not studying at the time, had been away for months. When his roommate left for the holidays, he invited her over and sneaked her in. Just like a scene from a cheesy campus film. They spent a week tucked away from the world. Days filled with video games, movies and endless talking. They danced in that cramped room to their favourite songs, offbeat, carefree and glowing. Time seemed to bend around them, granting them a perfect, brief eternity.

Then came his birthday, a day he'd never cared to celebrate. To him, it had always been another mark on the calendar. But not to her. She planned every detail with care, turning an ordinary day into something that felt like it was made just for him. She made him dress up, took him out to a fancy

restaurant and smiled at him like he was a marvel. At that restaurant, under soft lighting, they glowed - not just because they looked good together, but because they felt good together. She handed him a gift, but the real present was her presence, her effort and her love.

They took pictures that day, laughed until their cheeks ached, and came home late with their fingers entwined like a promise. For the first time, he felt celebrated, not by the world, but by someone who saw his worth before he did.

It was perfect. A memory suspended in warm saltwater, untouchable by time.

Part II: Today – The fall

But tides always shift.

What they had didn't collapse all at once. It eroded, slowly, like waves pulling away from the shore, inch by inch, until the sand was bare. At first, it was subtle: texts became shorter, silence became the new norm and warmth slowly faded with time. He told himself it was temporarily a passing wave. He clung to hope like driftwood, whispering to the tide instead of her. But tides, he learned, don't always return.

There was no explosion. No dramatic goodbye. Just the quiet retreat of something once vibrant. Morning texts arrived late, or not at all. Phone calls went unanswered. Conversations once rich became brittle. He began sending longer messages,

pouring his heart into every word, only to receive replies that shrank like low tides.

One evening, he couldn't take the silence anymore. He picked up the phone and called her.

It rang. Once. Twice. Then, she answered.

"Hey," she said, her voice distant. "I'm kind of busy right now... can we talk later?" "Yeah," he replied quietly.

But later never came.

That silence echoed louder than any argument. It was her answer without having to say it.

The end didn't break. It dissolved.

When his next birthday arrived, the silence was deafening. No message. No call. Not even a whisper. The phone stayed dark. The room stayed still. He didn't eat. Didn't move much. Just lay there, staring at the ceiling. Does she even remember? he wondered, and What if she doesn't?

It wasn't just her absence he mourned. It was the self he had become through her, the brighter version of himself, the one who smiled more, who believed more. With her, he had bloomed. Without her, he wilted. He had to grow used to waking up without reaching for the phone, how to laugh

without expecting an echo, how to exist without a shadow beside him.

Some days, anger replaced grief. Others, he felt hollow. He would scroll through old photos, drinking in a life that no longer belonged to him. Once, he even drafted a message: I miss you. His finger hovered over the send button. What's the point of casting words into an ocean that no longer answers? he asked himself, just before deleting it.

He thought healing would be a straight road. But instead, it curved and doubled back, like waves retracing the same shore. He wore a mask in front of friends, smiling, nodding, and then fell apart in private, cliffs crumbling beneath waves. He waited for closure that never came. No explanation. No goodbye. Just his own thoughts echoing where her voice used to be.

Part III: Tomorrow – The healing

Healing didn't burst in like sunrise. It moved like water, receding, returning, never quite the same.

It arrived in small moments: the day he heard their favourite song and didn't wince. The morning, he walked past the restaurant they used to visit without looking in. Healing came in fragments, soft as shells. It wasn't loud. It was a daily promise, not to his heart, but to himself.

One evening, he found their old playlist, the one they curated together. His thumb hovered. He pressed play. He expected tears. Collapse. But the music washed over him gently. He listened. He remembered.

He smiled. Just enough to know, I'm okay.

He understood that not every ending is a failure. Some are transitions. People change like water, uncontainable, beautiful, ever flowing. Some loves are a season. A storm. A stillness. A tide.

He still carried her, not as a burden, but like salt in his skin. Still present, no longer painful. Her laugh, her kindness, that restaurant glow, and that week in res, they lived inside him like driftwood from a ship that once sailed proud and full.

But most importantly, he carried himself. The boy who once loved her still lived within him, but now he walked forward. He understood that some people are oceans, vast, breathtaking and impossible to hold.

And that was okay.

A Letter Never Sent

I hope you're well.

I hope your smile still finds you in quiet moments.

I hope you remember us - not with regret,
but with warmth we once shared.

Thank you for teaching me how to love with my whole chest
and how to let go with grace.

Wherever the tide has taken you,
I'm grateful we swam in the same ocean,
even if only for a while.