

**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 ofunquliswe umsebenzi wokuphucula ubomi babo bahlelelekileyo. Esinye isizathu kukuba umntu omnyama akaqalanga emgceci 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 licinezelwa yile nkolelo kanye, nkolelo leyo esizibona siyilandela noxa singaqondi. Yile nkolelo eqhubelisa phambili ucinizelo lwabantsundu 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 ezihlelelekileyo zoMzantsi Afrika kwenyathelo lokuqala elinokuzala iimpumelelo ekulweni ukungalingani phakathi kwezi ntlanga. Elo ke linyathelo lokuba umntwana omnyama aqhabalake kwintsontelo 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 engqokuleka uKhayaletu akubona kuvela inkondekazi eyayihlelekile ihlala kwibhodlo lwendlu isenza isicelo sokwakhelwa indlu ngurhulumente.

“Nisathi sixhamla kwinkululeko yeli lizwe xa kunjje? Yini ukuba umntu wakowethu akhale kabuhlungu kanje ecela into ekunyanzelekileyo ukuba ayifumane? Iphi inkululeko yabantu abamnyama xa kunjje? 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. lintliziyo 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 uKhaya lethu 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 ladlula 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 nakudliwanondlebe. 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 uKhaya lethu.

“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 kuthelakiswa ubukrelekrele yengqondo yomntu omhlophe nokuba 'mnyama' kwengqondo yomntu omnyama.

“Ufuna undixelela i-lithalekhaya itshone nyani madoda?” wakhuya eqhwaba owokuqala asakubona kuvaliwe e-lithalekhaya 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-lithalekhaya 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 yokunususwa *and be spoonfed?* Hlala phantsi Nontobeko singekade sichithe le yure yonke sifundisana nawe *uthe*. Amahle Sigodi!” watsho utitshalakazi edlulela kolandelayo. Wafika wagixxa 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 ziyunifomu 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 kuhle 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 iklasi. UMatthew wayefunda kunye naye eklasini. 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 wabuya umva esihlalweni sakhe uMatthew yaqala iklasi. 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 iklasi.

“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 iklasi 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 iklasi 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* wayezakuba naye kolo dliwano-ndlebe.

“Ewe ke Qhayiya... 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 endibambele amathuba okufumana umsebenzi.”

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

“Ndiyintombazana nje ekhulele kwilokishi yaseMpinga 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. Ndisisoloko 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 ones 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.

'Bhekizwe 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.' Bhekizwe 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 Bhekizwe, 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 Bhekizwe 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 Bhekizwe 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, Bhekizwe 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...Bhekizwe 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 Bhekizwe once again. Bhekizwe'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 sodomu!* (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 Biscoombe*

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.

