

2024

ESSAYS/ OPINION PIECES

1ST PLACE

Women and peacebuilding: A catalyst for change

Keiana Joy Murthi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

References:

Ghate, A. 2014. 5 Inspiring Women: Our Favourite Quotes. *United Nations Foundation*, 7 March 2014. [Online] Available at:
<https://unfoundation.org/blog/post/5-inspiring-women-our-favorite-quotes/> [Accessed: 8 September 2024].

Huer, M. 2024. India's doctors strike after female colleague's alleged rape, murder. *UPI*, 17 August 2024. [Online] Available at: https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2024/08/17/world-india-doctors-strike-colleague-rape-murder/5981723929888/ [Accessed: 8 September 2024].

Mushayamunda, F. 2022. 50 powerful women empowerment quotes that'll leave you inspired. *Today*, 15 August 2022. [Online] Available at: <https://www.today.com/life/quotes/women-empowerment-quotes-rcna42474> [Accessed: 8 September 2024].

The 1956 Women's March, Pretoria, 9 August. 2021. *South African History Online*, 16 August 2021. [Online] Available at: <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/1956-womens-march-pretoria-9-august> [Accessed: 8 September 2024].

2ND PLACE

Peace and justice

Aaqilah Krauser

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3RD PLACE

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

Vusimuzi Khumalo

Introduction

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

Political Tolerance

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

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

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

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

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

Cultural Understanding

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

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

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

Religious Harmony

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

POETRY

1ST PLACE

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

Munaka Munyai

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

for justice. Peace will come by pure fire.

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

2ND PLACE

Flames to history

Rea Mmethi

Burn the history Books!

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

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

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

We believe in hunger:

This necrotising invasion of our intestines

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

We are paradoxical incarnations of Sheba's paradise

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

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

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

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

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

This fire baptism feels like resuscitation

Our lungs prodded back to life by a provocation

It feels like communion

Black and beautiful find their reunion here

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SHORT STORIES

1ST PLACE

Engel.

Reid Donson

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Moenie blaspheme nie!”

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

“Kyk hier!”

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

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

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

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

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

“When did you get so big!?”

Adam shrugged. Jemima glared at him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Take a samosa, my boy.”

“I’m not hungry, mommy.”

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

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

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

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

She whispered the girlfriend part.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sit die foon neer, Faizie!

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

"Looks like they're serving the cake."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

No answer.

Jem iets het gebeur. Ek need jou. Help.

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

Percy het werk. Sorry.

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

Het jy gehoor? Faizie, Carol's dood.

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

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

No. I heard it was natural causes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Amen," they all said.

2ND PLACE

Women of War

Maryam Kotze

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“When?”

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

“Soon.”

3RD PLACE

Lerato and the heart of the mountains

Boipelo Katlego Molokwane

“Envisioning Peaceful Futures”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

