

**This document consists of two (2) parts:**

Part A: Thesis (Creative Work)

Part B: Portfolio (Coursework)

**Part A: Thesis**

**A Council of Women**

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the

degree of

**Master of Arts in Creative Writing**

of

Rhodes University

by

**Lelethu Anathi Sobekwa**

November 2022

## Table of Contents

<b>Part A: Thesis</b> .....	4
Abstract.....	4
A Council of Women .....	5
<b>Part B: Portfolio</b> .....	100

## Part A: Thesis

### Abstract

This thesis comprises extracts of life writing written in short prose forms. The work reads like a novella and I have been inspired by Margaret Patton Chapman's approach to the novella, where she condenses "the telling of a long story time wise", so that a story occurring over two years can be told over two pages. The thesis explores relationships between mother, daughter, grandmother and granddaughter, each with different life experiences and each teaching the next generation about how to navigate life as politically, socially and economically disadvantaged women. I have also drawn inspiration from authors such as NoViolet Bulawayo who explores the hypocrisies of the church and the government in *We Need New Names*. In Kate Bernheimer's "Fairy Tale is Form, Form is Fairy Tale" she writes about fairy tales adopting "intuitive logic" or telling in the form of "this happens and then this happens" while the explanation behind the events is not spelt out but rather exists between the lines. My thesis adopts this style of writing by allowing the reader to understand what is being said without over-simplifying. To this end, I have used the concept of place modelled on Es'kia Mphahlele's *In Corner B*, where characters are inscribed in relation to the spaces they inhabit.

## A Council of Women

When I was a child I cried because an aunt called me dark skinned. I wouldn't stop until she apologised and told me I wasn't dark skinned.

“You’re too young.”

“I’m too young? But Nolu is going to school and we play together,” I whined.

“Nolu is not your agemate, she is two years older than you. You will go to school in two years and graduate when the time comes.”

“Will I have a school uniform?”, I asked as I saw myself wearing the black and white colours the students wore.

“You will have a school uniform and you will be in a classroom with a teacher learning everything you need to know”, Mama tried to comfort me.

So I watched Nolu in her black tunic, in her short sleeved shirt because it was summer, white socks and black shoes – I watched her go to school and come back. I watched her with new friends with other schoolgirls. All the while uBhuti carried me on his shoulders. I held onto his head for balance. We walked to and from creche before and after he went to school each morning and afternoon. From up in the air on his shoulders I waited for my turn.

The one time I almost got a hiding from Tata he picked up a piece of a hose pipe from outside and brought it into the house to hit me with it because I had stolen a R2 coin and spent it on sweets. Mama walked in screaming for him to not do it and I had already been crying awaiting the worst. With Mama's intervention I evaded that beating.

I stood in front of the mirror in Dabsi's bedroom and thought about it all, I even went as far as the incident at school where two boys who were even younger than me, in Mzala's grade, pulled my book sack from my hands telling me that I must repeat after them and say I was ugly and dark skinned if I wanted it back. I was dark skinned and ugly. I was dark skinned therefore I was ugly. They had come to me with the mission of addressing my ugliness in their eyes and making sure I was aware of it myself and never doubted it, however, they then realised I carried my books using an old 10kg rice bag and they made fun of that as well. It was double the fun for them. It was one of those hard material 10kg rice bags with a handle. Makhulu assured me it was so hard that my books would never know any rain and I knew she was right. It was a temporary situation until I could get a schoolbag. I did not mind the situation until students started pointing it out as though I was the only who carried their books with anything other than a schoolbag.

As I stood in front of the mirror in Dabsi's room examining my supposed physical faults, I realised there was someone else in the house, and that was not necessarily strange as I had left people in the rondavel so it was natural that people would make their way from one house to the other in our homestead – maybe Makhulu had guests after all. What I did not understand, however, was how the person seemed to be making less noise and taking lighter steps than I would expect from someone entering a house. It was as though they did not want to announce their presence so they walked without actually putting their full weight on the ground. There was someone else in the house with me and they seemed to have made their way into Tamnci's bedroom which was next to where I was. The two rooms were separated by a wall to make two separate bedrooms within the house, but there was no ceiling, someone tall enough from either room could easily climb onto the dressing table or bed of the room they were in and see into the other. This is exactly what Kayise, did, he looked over the wall peeped his head through and saw me. He then went over the wall separating the two rooms and slid into the room in which I was in, landing on the bed.

“I was fixing the door in the other room” he started explaining his presence in the house in which I had previously thought I was by myself. Kayise lived in one of our extended family homesteads, so he was family. Makhulu had been complaining about the broken door handle in the next room for a while and wanted it repaired in preparation for her children's homecoming for the holidays.

“Did you manage to fix it?” I managed, composing myself and suddenly realising I might have been busted bending myself this way and that in front of the mirror. I was now already seeking a way out of the room as I had looked at myself in the mirror long enough and had also decided that those children at school had a point. I was thin with barely any meat on my body.

“Where are you going, don't go?” Why he did not want me to leave was beyond me, my play mates were probably waiting for me or they were probably just carrying on without me as I pestered them all the time. We only ever played games of cards with uKayise where he always cheated and therefore always won and uMakhulu would be there playing with us as well so I did not understand why he did not want me to leave when it was just the two of us. He was also meant to leave as he had finished fixing the door handle.

“What did I say to you about boys?” Makhulu blurted out, disturbing my thoughts. But I still did not know to whom she was referring. It could have been Sane, our extended family cousin who lived with us and mainly helped with the chores. She was always being shouted at for being with one boy or another. But Sane was across the room on her own bed and she didn’t answer when uMakhulu asked. Besides, she claimed all the boys were her friends but uMakhulu was not having any of it, I also knew that they were not all her friends because she kissed some of them. Once when we had gone to fetch water at the river late at night uMakhulu had shouted at her saying she only wanted to fetch the water in the night so that she could get together with a boy. Of course, uMzala had told on her because uMzala told Makhulu everything.

Makhulu was mad at me because I had been caught spending some time with Kayise earlier that day. When Sane walked into Dabsi’s bedroom earlier that day I was laying on Kayise and counting to twenty as he had instructed. He had said that I was to lie on him, do up and down movements on top of him while counting to twenty and he would do the same on me. It was a game, we took turns. He played, I played. He played. I played. We both had turns on top of each other. It was fair, or he had me believe. And then it would go on and on, until I do not know when, as the instructions did not go that far. When Sane walked in, she took me away from the bed where I had been with Kayise and walked with me to the rondavel. On the way she condemned me for doing “these things” now. What did she mean? What exactly did I do that Kayise did not? Or was Kayise supposed to play such a game with someone else and not me? He was left alone and allowed to go home and I was cornered by myself. Was he not condemned for his behaviour because he could fix broken door handles and I could not?

I assumed Sane went to Makhulu and told her all that happened, who then reprimanded me about it later. She may have talked to Kayise about the events of the day but she never told me that she did, or that I had nothing to worry about as he would not bother me anymore, something I probably needed to hear from my grandmother as a little girl who had unsuspectingly played counting games with an elder male cousin she had trusted.

Sane confused me, I had only done with Kayise what she had made me do with her in uMakhulu’s absence. uMakhulu went away to church conferences a lot, because she was an unwavering member of the church and everyone there valued her presence and contribution as she was one of the elderly members of the congregation who were present when the church was first opened all those years back. During these trips, Sane, Mzala and I would sleep in the smaller flat in our homestead. It was the oldest house in the homestead and I guess everyone trusted that we would be most protected by the ancestors when we were in it than any other house because it was the house that was introduced to them when our grandparents first built their home. It’s just like children, children who are introduced to their ancestors at birth are thought to be protected by them.

When we slept in the flat we shared a bed. On these nights, Sane would wake me in the middle of the night and start touching me. She would keep touching my waist and my chest until I woke up. She would sit me in a position that made it accessible for her to touch my

vagina to hers and then grind on me. During these moments I remember just wanting to go back to sleep. I remember being aware of uMzala sleeping next to us and not wanting to wake her up because she (unlike me) would undoubtedly tell uMakhulu. I did not want her to tell uMakhulu because Sane had already made sure I understood that uMakhulu would not be happy with my behaviour. My behaviour even though she was the one waking me up in the middle of the night. Unlike before where clothes were always kept on, when Sane told me to take off my pants and let her get on top of me such that our vaginas were touching, I knew what was happening. Our grade R teacher had succinctly told us not to engage in any activities involving taking off our clothes or we would contract AIDS and then die. As much as the scenario I found myself in was not fully covered by the information from my teacher I said “Mam said we should not do such or we will be infected with AIDS.” I did not want Sane touching me, I just wanted to sleep.

“She was lying to you, our other cousins and I do this all the time and we never got infected with AIDS” she said. Who she meant by our other cousins was probably one or all of the boys she spent all that time with. It was well then. She could continue taking off her clothes with them as it seemed to be a norm for them. They were the same age group and they all agreed to it while I was only a child of five years in grade one.

Besides confusing me, Sane also planted ideas into my head. Now that I look back at it, it was probably to take my mind off the sexual abuse she committed when Makhulu wasn't home. This way I wouldn't tell on her if I thought there were bigger things at hand. She told me uMakhulu loved uMzala more than she loved me. I thought that was absurd because as much as uMzala and I were the same age, she was just too much of a dependent child and needed more of Makhulu's attention. If anything, she inconvenienced uMakhulu from getting around as she was always on her tail. I had known uMakhulu to always treat us the same both in our presence and absence. I was more of the one who always had my own thing going, good or bad, and didn't need much supervision to get around so Makhulu mostly let me be.

From that moment Sane painted uMakhulu to me as this woman who would only look out for her one granddaughter, who was not me. How could I then reach out to her when she gave all her attention to Mzala? My attention then turned to treading carefully and making sure I got what belonged to me, whatever that was, and that I wasn't mistreated – as advised by the person who molested me as a child. Having seen Makhulu's reaction about Kayise, I knew she saw me at fault somehow and that just made things harder. I did not know if she would blame me again. Where I was previously always ready to help around with the chores, I started complaining if I felt I was being sent to do too much of the work. I wanted to make sure everyone was being given the same amount of work to do and actually performed those tasks themselves. I became someone who was so careful that they were actually being treated like everyone else in fear of being treated unfairly. That became a coping mechanism.

While bathing me uMakhulu would tell me that I looked lighter in complexion because I was bathing more.

uMakhulu used to work as a helper at the village supermarket back when the missionaries owned it. She continued to work there until after they had sold the shop to a local family. When we couldn't find things at the nearest spaza shop we used to go there and look at the dusty old-fashioned dresses that they displayed and nobody bought. The owners died and they closed shop. The nearest spaza shop never had stock. And then a Pakistani man arrived in the village and opened a shop that had everything. Another foreign light-brown skinned man arrived and opened another shop, married a local woman who wore a niqab, shouted at customers from behind the counter and had daughters who wore niqabs.

uMakhulu had a money cloth knot that she kept under her mattress or in the pocket of her petticoat depending on when last she had used it. uMzala and I knew where she kept it but she insisted we did not tell anyone – as though anyone didn't know where old ladies kept their money. When she threw her body onto the bed complaining of having been on her feet the whole day, the whole day could be anything from an hour to eight, I often wondered how the money knot under the mattress was doing. Were the notes inside it compromised? Did they bend and fold due to the weight on top of the bed ?

“Lele, go and buy some milk, *mzukulwana*,” uMakhulu said handing me a R10 note. “Auntie Nangi is coming today,” of course why else would we need milk with our tea. The money knot had made its way from under the mattress and was in front of uMakhulu on the table next to which she was standing. She was starting to fold the knot again but not before I noticed the coins and notes inside. The notes were folded on top of each other multiple times. The coins were scattered such that when uMakhulu retied the knot they came together and made the clinking noise that they would continue making in her petticoat pocket until she put it back under the mattress.

I made my way to the spaza shop that never had any stock. For all uMakhulu knew I could have passed the time somewhere else and returned without the milk and it would have made no difference.

“Can I have some milk, please,” I said handing the crushed, folded note to the storekeeper who examined it this way and that before looking at me this way and that. The note seemed to have been affected after all.

There were instances where Mzala, our cousins from the homestead next door and myself would visit our uncle, Wara, in his home where he then lived by himself, he had been an only child and his parents had died. He had for a long time lived outside the village and in the city for work purposes and had not come back home for a while. The youth liked to get close to him, to be associated with the glam that had retouched the village. He did not have a car, or have a beautiful wife or girlfriend, just him having made it home after so long was enough for the village residents. People would refer to his home for directions, “Just go past Wara’s house and a few houses down on your left is the river from which you will go up into the next part of the village, you do know Wara is back right?” The other would reply, “I heard he was back. He had been gone for a long time.” There, the traveller would not only have their directions but they would also have information on the return of a man they had known about growing up but had not seen or heard about for a decade.

Behind Wara’s home there was a very tall, big tree with massive branches which we had climbed and played around in as children. We had even attached a swing on it using an old car tyre as the seat and strong rope as the handle which we connected to the tree’s high trunks and we would take turns on the swing while playing games on the ground. We played ball and skipped rope. It was all fun and games at the area above Wara’s home where our tree was. We would play for hours a day every day until Wara came home once and he offered for us to play in his yard. This was an exciting offer for us because his yard was to say the least, satisfactory.

In the yard there was a garden with trees bearing peaches, plums and all sorts of fruit. We had stolen the fruit for so many fruit bearing seasons and to our defence no one had lived on the homestead from whom we could ask permission before settling onto the garden and having wild days eating fruit. Being invited into the homestead was an advantage to us because we could have the fruit without feeling like we were too big as thieves anymore: we had been invited into the yard even if not necessarily into the garden to help ourselves to the fruit. Every homestead in the village had a garden, a big garden where they planted vegetables. There would be ploughing and irrigation and when harvest season came, there would be all sorts of foods to store for weeks, months and some lasted until the next planting season. Some homesteads had fruit trees, and there were not many of those so as children we paid close attention to the homes that did so that when the time came, we would ask for some of the fruits; steal the fruits when the homeowners were out; and in cases such as Wara’s where there lived no one at some point, we would harvest the fruits ourselves. We’d have so much fruit that we would get full. We were already missing our mealtimes at home because we were at play, but now we were missing our mealtimes because we were at play and we were eating while playing.

After Wara invited us into his yard, we would all play around the yard until we felt it was time to go home. We reported our arrival each day by our small voices shouting across the yard, chasing each other, playing hide and seek and shouting each other’s names. We did this for so long that he invited us into the house where he had all sorts of sweets for us. We got so used to this, not only were we having fruits of our choice from the garden but we were also being treated to sweets inside the house. Once, Wara did not have sweets and biscuits to treat us to so he suggested we go get them from the spaza shop about eight minutes from his home so we all got up getting ready to walk to the shop but he then suggested that we not all go because then we would take longer to come back. I thought that a great idea because we really

took our time anywhere and everywhere with the games we played to and from the destination. For the elders who had sent us, the best games to play when we were sent anywhere were the running games because at least then we would get there and back in no time. For the elders who had sent us, the worst games to play were hide and seek, we would leave the homestead going in the direction of the specific destination – only we would hide on the ground below the garden of the nearest homestead and never actually make it to the shop. In Wara’s case of sending only so many of us to the shop, there was no such thing as us needing to get back home sooner because the sweets we went to get were ours to have, so for all we knew we could have gotten them and continued our play somewhere else and come back to his the following day for our day’s play.

Mzala and I were the only girls in our play group so our cousins went to the shops while we remained with Wara in one the houses on his homestead. As soon as they were gone, Wara asks Mzala to make juice for all of us so that when the boys came back we would all have something to down the biscuits with. The drinking material was in the other house on the homestead. I did not get up to help her because Mzala had been asked to come up with something to drink so I was not liable to help her in any way. As soon as she was gone, Wara, who had been sitting across from me, got up and sat next to me. I looked outside the door after Mzala and his words were “Don’t worry about her, she’s okay.” I was not worried about Mzala, she knew how to put juice together. I turned to look at Wara and he grabbed me by the waist with both his hands on the sides of me and put me on his lap. Straight ahead of me was a cabinet of glasses and side plates which made me realize immediately that Mzala did not have to go all the way to the other house for the same materials but then again they may have been reserved for guests. Guests never ate from the same plates we did. My mind went to my thin sunny tights which I was wearing. They were new, Mama had bought them for me as part of my Christmas summer clothes the previous December. They were pink which was the go-to colour for clothing for girl children. I think Mama’s imagination did not have to run very far when she did my shopping – whatever she thought was girly I would wear. They went just past my knees. They were mine.

The next encounter I had with the man was years later at a family traditional ceremony. Wara was at home, and he was family, so he attended. He had shouted from the kraal where the rest of the men were drinking and eating meat to ask Mzala to bring him a jar of water. At such gatherings, it was easy to lose count of who had sent you to do what because this was when the elders sat and the children ran every errand. It was likely that on your way to run one errand, you’d be asked to run another and you’d forget the first one and then the elders would have to send another child to follow up or do the errand themselves.

When Wara found that Mzala was taking too long with the errand, he came and looked for her in the rondavel where the women were. He found that she was still busy with some other task she had been sent to do by someone else at the ceremony.

When Wara entered the house, I was closer to the container with water than Mzala was so Makhulu suggested that he ask me instead to get the jar of water for him. He looked at me when he replied “No Ma, I’d rather do it myself than send a child who does not listen to the instructions of adults.”



When uTamkhulu died he had started another family with another wife and two children in another village. uMakhulu speaks of him as though he was the greatest man in the world.

When I was in grade R we lived with Makhulu's sister's son who let me carry a s'khafina full of reusable sausage oil to school instead of my *s'khafina* of *amagwinya* that uMakhulu had prepared for me which looked the same.

At church, to make space for all the adults on the chairs, us children would sit on the base of the pulpit area just below the pastor and facing the whole congregation. There was no greater moment to remember to cross our legs like girls than this one because the whole church was watching. We were meant to follow the service as much as possible, standing up, singing and sitting down with the whole congregation. One of our cousins, uNhinhi from our next-door neighbour homestead, liked to sleep during this time so we had to make sure to catch his big snoring head before it hit whoever was sitting next to him. During these times Nhinhi's grandmother entered the church a while after everyone else and left shortly before everyone else. She sat at the back by herself in her black mourning clothes because her husband had recently passed away. If only she could come sit with us and catch her grandson as he fell asleep.

Nozizwe works in Gauteng and has brought home five children who she drops off with her elderly mother before going back to work. Her two sons have one father. Her daughter has her own. Her other son is fathered by a man whom the elders say is related to Nozizwe's family. Her youngest son is by a man she met in Gauteng who passed on his curly hair to their baby.

Nozizwe and her sister always fell pregnant at the same time. When they were on their third pregnancies they both gave birth to daughters after having had sons. When I came back to the village and asked about the girls uMzala informed me that Nozizwe's daughter had lived and her sister's hadn't.

Zizipho left the village to join her father in Pretoria where she would also be going to school. She came home with a new-born baby with light skin and dark curly hair that the elders say she got by a Pakistani man who owns a shop near her father's house in Pretoria. Her mother sent her back to complete her studies and then afterwards she came home with a baby she had by another foreign national with dark skin. When she came back home the third time with no degree her mother said she now knew she wanted the village people to talk about all her children's fathers who were nationals of all these countries where none of them would ever travel.

When Chumani's father died we heard about it in the middle of the night. Relatives came from his side of the village to ours to announce to uMakhulu what had happened. uMakhulu could not stop saying that it was a great thing she had gone to sleep with her clothes on because it would take too long to get dressed again. They all left and we did not see uMakhulu for days. Then they announced his death on the radio *kwimiphanga* and we all shouted from the top of our lungs as though we were hearing it for the first time. On the day of his funeral his church clothes were held up on a hanger in the air all the way to the cemetery for his *uxhonyobhatyi* as done for all members of the church when they die.

When Chumani's father died his grandmother went to fetch him from his mother's so he could live with her. Soon after she found out that Chumani peed in his sleep so much that the mattress would be so wet the next morning they would have to position it against the wall outside and dry it. And then the same thing would happen the next day and soon the whole house was smelling of pee. Chumani's grandmother decided they needed to speak to the ancestors about him. They slaughtered a goat, invited half of the village to come join in the asking of the ancestors for the child to no longer pee in his bed. A week later, Chumani's grandmother announced to uMakhulu that there was no longer a mattress being dried outside every morning.

uMakhulu told us not to look into the mirror in the dark or we would see ghosts.

One night uDabsi came running into the house out of breath insisting a ghost in gumboots and an oversize coat was after her the whole way home. uMakhulu said that was Mr. Nada's ghost, he had been brutally murdered and his spirit was still looming in the area uDabsi had been walking every night.

While uMakhulu was at a weekend church function our older cousins stayed home to look after us and while we were outside a group of four steadily marching men in white who seemed almost attached to the hips passed behind our homestead and we all immediately ran into the house leaving the fire we had been enjoying outside agreeing that we had seen ghosts.

When Sisi came to stay with us so she could attend school in our village, she told us of stories where a woman in her village woke up from the dead and cleaned her homestead in the night such that every time her grandchildren went to sleep without cleaning they'd wake up and the dishes were washed and the yard swept.

When we were children there was an infamous rapist who raped women in one village and then disappeared only to resurface in another village to rape women there. We went to *intlombe yamagqirha* in our village one time and one of them there was said to be the infamous rapist's grandmother whom he had raped until she ended up in a wheelchair.

uDabsi hired one of her older friends to do laundry for us every weekend. One weekend she couldn't come so she sent her niece to do the job. The young lady reminded us to bring all the laundry we needed to be washed at once because she didn't want to leave ours too late and the infamous rapist catching up to her as she crossed the river on her way home on the other side of the village.

When Dabsi's older friend couldn't do her job anymore uMakhulu recommended hiring uMaNyathi who would do the laundry and the general upkeep of the homestead. We could see her walking slowly from her home every morning as though she didn't have a clock in time. She would get home and lie down before she started working because she was tired from her walk. She drank her Coca with sugar because she said it got rid of the acid which she said wasn't good for her. uMakhulu joked that uMaNyathi must have thought she was at her grandmother's house the whole time she was working for uDabsi.

When the local spaza shop owner found out that uMaNyathi earned more than their cashier who didn't get a chance to lie down at work they upped her wage to match MaNyathi's.

There was a group of cousins we went to school with in the village whose mothers were sisters. They were all girls and two of them were in my class and they were always fighting: over friends, over books, and they even went as far as saying mean things about each other's physical features. This wasn't unusual as child play except the one seemed to love the fights and the other was always avoiding them. Soon I found myself in the midst of these fights as I befriended the one and had the other one convincing me that I was better off as friends with her so I should unfriend her cousin.

In those days to become someone's friend you had to join pinkie fingers to indicate the beginning of your friendship. To end the friendship both parties had to push their thumbs against each other. My new friend convinced me to leave her cousin as a friend but her cousin was not having it and would not avail her thumb to end our friendship. Once while sitting on the floor in our grade 2 class on a sunny morning, copying a class exercise from the chalk board with my new friend next to me and my soon-to-be former friend sitting in front of me, I, as per the instructions of my new friend, pushed my thumb against the old friend's back and called the friendship to an end.

As our whole class later found out, the cousins – with my former friend's three sisters – and my new friend's two sisters, all lived on the same homestead but were treated so differently that they did not even carry the same lunch to school. My newly found friend's lunch together with her sisters' was more appealing because their mother bought the groceries while the others' lunch was made up of whatever they could find in the house as their mother could not contribute to groceries.

For my birthday uMama gave uMangci money to get me a cake because she was going to town already. As she drove out we were on the stoep watching her car and on her way back we were in the same position.

When uOvayo was a baby I was holding him to my chest and baby talking him outside by the stoep when Makhulu's sister's son came up to us and said "You really love him *nhe?*", as though I wasn't supposed to.

When Ovayo was a baby he crawled in his nappy from Makhulu's rondavel to the house reserved for guests on the homestead, onto the red polished stoep past the lounging area, the bedrooms and kitchen and all the way into the pantry where he somehow managed with his baby arms to pick up a filthy bottle of paraffin and drank from it. By the time uMakhulu found him, having made her way past two houses through the yard on her old lady legs, the baby was still drinking. She screamed for Ovayo to put the bottle down before snatching it away from him and giving him a hiding on his thighs. She always pinched us on the insides of our thighs when we had been naughty. It would sting for a while after, she said it was so we would remember not to be that naughty again. And then she reached for a carton of milk from the tray of cartons of milk behind her which we also kept in the pantry. She opened Ovayo's mouth for him to drink. After the screaming from across the yard uMzala and I were already at attention when uMakhulu instructed us to run down the street to ask that she and Ovayo be driven to the hospital in town as the community clinic was closed. uMzala and I had to sleep at a neighbour's that night where we joined the many children on the floor. The sleep felt short because I spent a lot of the night scratching myself like I did when I slept in a foreign environment as a child. It's as though my body knew I was somewhere else. uMakhulu came back the next morning holding the baby in his blanket as though guarding him from springing away and inviting more harm to himself. At the age of 12 he climbed a moving truck from the back and when it suddenly turned it flung him across the road. He broke both his front teeth in half. He is only 16 today.

When uMama noTata bought uBhuti a Samsung E250 and he travelled to the village with it I enjoyed him recording our young voices on it and letting us listen back to it. We were so fascinated by making all the noise possible so it could be captured by the phone and then being dead silent so we could listen to the playback, I could not help thinking I wanted my own Samsung E250 from uMama noTata.

Ovayo loved feeding the chickens their mealies and one day he decided to feed himself a corn of the mealies and that ended up going up his nose. uMakhulu hit his back to help him blow it out and he went back to feeding the chickens.

Whenever uMama had to leave without Ovayo she'd ask us to go with him to another house in the yard and then come back with him when she had left already. One day as Mama was preparing to leave Ovayo said we should take him to the other house because Mama was about to go somewhere.

When Ovayo was four I asked him where he had put my lip gloss because I needed to use it and he told me with his very glossy mouth that I was making his life difficult asking him so many questions.

When I was in grade three I was seated in Makhulu's rondavel with a pencil in hand doing my homework when Ovayo suddenly asked "Whose chappies is this?" with a mouth full of my eraser.

One of our cousins from the homestead next-door exclaimed "Ovayo! I thought you said you were an only child but here's your sister!", when he suddenly learned we were not all just cousins but some of us were siblings. Ovayo may have learnt that then too.

Ovayo still dips his bread in his tea before chewing at breakfast just like uMakhulu did when we were growing up.

When we were children uMakhulu would get served tea and she would call for us to come and drink from her saucer with her. Now I have two cups of tea every day.

When uMakhulu prayed she would pray for all her children mentioning them name by name, all her grandchildren and then she'd pray for strangers in hospitals asking that they regain their health and go back to their families. uMzala grew up to be religiously and spiritually inclined.

When Sane walked around at home in her shorts that showed her legs all the way up to her thighs, there were dimple spots on both her hips which I didn't find when I looked at mine. I wanted to grow up and have dimples on my hips too.

As children we would somehow know which homes had *amagqirha* and we would go there to watch them all night. Maybe it was due to the buzz in the village whenever they were coming. Our parents did not let us leave home at night for a lot of things but they did for this.

uBhuti walked in while I was bent with my back towards the door looking for clothes in the wardrobe when he ran towards the wardrobe which was making its way to fall on me with all its contents.

Next to the wardrobe, uMakhulu had a wooden trunk in which she stored her special occasion clothes as well as some needles and threads. To get to the trunk we'd have to remove the other clothing container that she had on top of it and by the time we opened the trunk the lid would be rushing to close again such that our fingers sometimes got closed on if we did not move them fast enough.

When one of Makhulu's nephews was born, he was left-handed. His father believed that meant bad luck therefore he tied his left hand to his back every day so he was forced to use his right hand for everything. When he finally untied him his body had forgotten he wasn't born right-handed and he was using his right hand for everything.

uMakhulu comes back from her stokvel meeting laughing because they had to remove one of the women from being in charge of the books as she did not know how to write out amounts. She goes on to say she doesn't know why they thought she would know because she did not go up to standard six in school like uMakhulu and some of the women had.

uDabsi brings bags and bags of Christmas, winter and everyday clothes for us from eRhawutini. All my clothes and shoes match Mzala's. We differentiate them by size because I am taller so my clothes and shoes are bigger. Everywhere we go people still ask us if we're twins.

Mzala's friend from school comes over and after a game of cards and gossip she asks us if we want to know about the day she was raped. We keep quiet and she carries on that the rapist, who is my school friend's brother, motioned for her to come over to him in the dark while he was over at her house and everyone else was drinking in the lounge. She laughs before she finishes the story and we both just sit there staring at her.

The residents of the homestead above ours hadn't come home for years on end so an extended family member took charge of the home and rented it out to students who came to our village for high school because their villages did not have a high school. One night these students' rooms got broken into and one of them was raped. She ended up in a relationship with the rapist and would be seen walking with him in public and she brought him back to where she stayed.

While making dessert for our Christmas lunch, uDabsi looks at me and asks if my mom could make the same dessert. With a smirk on her face that says she knows she can't.

The elders call a daughter whose marriage has failed *umabuy'kwendeni*. It is used so carelessly and so often that no one even thinks twice about saying it. uMakhulu always jokes that a lot of my paternal aunts within our extended family have had failed marriages. Out of the many of them, only two have been married and have stayed married, the rest for some reason or another make their way back home with their children. The reasons include anything from the husband seeing other women; husband bringing infections and viruses home from seeing other women; and on one rare occasion that surprised even the elders: husband wanting a second wife. When a woman comes home from a failed marriage the elders always want to make sure that she did not do anything to make the husband act the way he did. They want to know what did the women do to put everything together and correct the 'mistakes' of their husbands.

Noma's mother left her marital home and went back to her maiden home because she had been reporting her husband's cheating to his family and hadn't received much help. She was gone for three years during which time the houses on her homestead started to collapse and her five sons could not keep them standing. During the time she was away there was word that she had gone mentally insane from the shock of how her husband continued to mistreat her. When she came back women from the village went to check on her at intervals and when uMama took me to see her all she could talk about was how she was glad she hadn't married a man who already had children. No matter what her husband put her through she couldn't imagine going through it with other women who were also mothers to his children. Being a mother to his children made her feel she was something to him that no one else was.

A woman who was already a mother got married in our village and moved in with her husband in his one room flat bringing her daughter with her. They had a child together and it was then that the rumours surfaced that he was cheating on her with a woman he met at the school governing body meetings where he was a member. She packed her bag, carried her baby on her back and held her daughter's hand and went back to her maiden home. The village women said she should have stayed because he had accepted her with her daughter.

Half of the village was woken up by a scream for help from a woman who had been beaten up by her brother's wife with a wooden spoon. The wife said her husband's sisters had been on her case ever since their brother had married her and she was done with it. The husband wasn't home when this happened because he worked eKapa and she felt that was part of the reason they took advantage of her. She left her two sons in their father's home and years later word came to the village that she had married into another family and had two more children.

Zingisa got married and had four children. She came back to her maiden home because her husband was building a marital home not far from hers for a woman who he would be taking as his second wife. She stayed home for years when her grown children decided they wanted their mother back with their father. By this time Lhilhi was taking care of her late sister's two young sons so when she left she took them with her.

When Zingisa's sister came back home she couldn't walk by herself from the house to the outside toilet on the homestead because the wind would blow her over. Her under eyes were black and her mouth white and cracked. She was thin and breathed heavily all the time as though she was tired from lying in bed as well as being helped up and being sat outside so she could catch the sun while everyone else passed and wondered about her. Her husband had been unfaithful and she had the virus that the elders did not want to talk about.

uTamnci had a lot of children, some we met, some we only heard of. Others we would meet in passing at random places such as town and the passing introduction would be “Ooh there’s your uncle’s daughter that you’ve never met”, and we’d continue with our shopping right after. The man’s children seemed to be everywhere such that when I was in grade three I had befriended a girl who later turned out to be one of Tamnci’s daughters and therefore my cousin.

Some visited us at the homestead and one such cousin of ours was uZola. He lived in our village but just a little further up on the hill and he would come down to our homestead and have a meal with us, he never announced his comings or goings so just as we were glad to have him he would be gone. Once he came for a talk of the village annual New Year’s Eve party where people of all ages attended, from grandparents all the way down to grandchildren. All alcohol, food and music was provided so people came as they were. uZola was getting ready to go to this party and uMzala wanted to go with but as per Tamnci’s instructions we were not allowed to go. I had not even known there would be a party anywhere until earlier that day so I was not interested in going. When uMzala took a bath in the evening and wore her going out clothes underneath her night-gown, I had an idea what her plan was, and I was honestly not opposed to it. I thought that if she wanted to go to the party she should be allowed to go.

We were both sitting on a bunk stool having supper, her hoping to slip out and go to the party afterwards. uTamnci was sitting across from us on Makhulu’s bed, watching us. He knew something was going on but we would not say. Right at that moment, uZola came in and at Tamnci’s questions suggested the problem must be that uMzala and I wanted to go to the party. Earlier that evening uDabsi had left pots on the stove and instructed us to continue with the cooking, which was the actual cooking because she had merely put pots on the stove. She told us that upon being done with the cooking we could also come down to the party as our agemates would be there. She told us we would come back together. uMzala and I had been raised together so closely that I felt our elders somehow forgot that we were not the same person. Despite all information provided, Tamnci’s argument remained that if I could stay home so could uMzala.

uDabsi listens to *umaskandi* on loudspeakers so we listen to *umaskandi* on loudspeakers and the neighbours listen to *umaskandi* on loudspeakers because uDabsi is home from eRhawutini where I assume everyone listens to *umaskandi*.

Seated on the bed facing the television but further facing the window, Sisi, Mzala and I all get up at the same time and exclaim “There’s Sisi!” “There’s mom!” “There’s Dabsi!” when we see uDabsi pass by the window to fetch us from Tamnci’s.

A woman from church comes over and brings some frozen yogurt for uMzala and I. We sit outside and eat while she goes inside and speaks to uDabsi. We're fascinated by the ice because back at the village we don't have a fridge. The woman tells uDabsi how beautiful uMzala and I look in our matching clothes to which uDabsi replies while pointing at me "I bought them for them, I buy them both the same clothes but this one's mother only buys for her and not my daughter."

One evening uDabsi came home from her usual visiting of old friends around the village and complained that I had not brought in the clothes from the washing line outside like she had asked me to do. I did not remember her giving me that task. She had hung her clothes on the washing line at the back of the houses on the homestead so they were not easy to spot while getting through our daily routine. Had I spotted them it would have been the sensible thing to take them down despite her not having asked me to do so. This was to avoid people passing by on their way and stealing them. That evening I had already settled into our rondavel with uMakhulu and my cousins, when uDabsi came inside and asked if I had fetched the clothes she had asked me to fetch from the washing line outside. Upon her coming into the homestead she had passed the washing line but she had not taken the clothes down herself.

When uMama came to the village she would sleep in her flat and I would continue sleeping in Makhulu's rondavel. When she invited me to sleep with her I thought how strange she was that I wasn't used to her. I was always waiting for something to pop up and prove this strangeness I felt but she was just my mother.

I asked uMama if we could go to church. She wasn't sure because she was very tired from working at her fruit and veg stand from Monday till Saturday. It was school holidays so I was always there with her and I wasn't tired. She finally agreed and we walked the uphill distance passing all those shacks made with shiny sharp on the eye zinc under the sun. The church was on a hill away from the shacks and it was my first time at that church because I didn't stay with Mama and she didn't always go to that church so she didn't know anyone. I wore my new wavy material two-piece skirt and top that showed my arms that she had bought for me for church. When we got there, there were twin girls who were wearing matching pink dresses that covered their shoulders and halfway up their arms and had their own small Bibles. It seemed like they were also enjoying new clothes, but I didn't talk to them.

While seated next to uMama on her vegetable stand on the busy road in Engcobo town, a young *makoti* stands next to us and picks up her ringing cell phone. She informs the person on the other side of the line that she cannot believe she was tasked to buy R2000 worth of groceries for an *umgidi* when that's the amount she spends on monthly groceries at her house.

There was an ancestral ceremony at our homestead and a lot of people were in attendance when a man came to the gate with a backpack. He greeted a lot of the adults who seemed to know him but were surprised to see him before coming to us children and telling us that we were still in diapers when he left. This man was Bhanti and he was Tata's first cousin from one of our other family homesteads. He had just been released from prison in Mthatha. He was on his way home and was of course going to pass by our homestead to announce his return home to uMakhulu when he saw a yard full of people.

Immediately after Bhanti went to prison uMama took Bhanti's son, Bayanda, to come stay with us. Then one of Bhanti's sisters took him and another one took him until he was sent back to the village around the same time I had started living with uMakhulu. During this time he would visit our homestead and uMakhulu would never let him play with us where she couldn't see him because she said he would rape us. She said he had learnt all of that from the different houses he had lived in as a child.

It wasn't long after Bhanti's return that he brought home a wife twenty years younger than him. He bought her a gold ring that soon turned bronze after she had washed a little too many dishes at all the family ancestral ceremonies she attended as a *makoti*. She had a scar on the side of her nose that went all the way down to her upper lip that she had earned in a knife fight. So when we heard that she had gone back to her maiden home in the middle of the night after beating Bhanti black and blue after he had tried to beat her black and blue over a misunderstanding, we were not surprised.

uMakhulu went up to standard six in school and there are a lot of people younger and older than her who never set foot in school. uMaMkhwemnte was one of these women in our village. She was so illiterate that when her late husband's monies came from where he worked as a miner, she had Bhanti in charge of all the paperwork because he had shown interest in her while drinking *umqombothi* at a village gathering. He kept her bank cards and one time he travelled to eBhayi where he was said to be walking around with a backpack full of cash looking to buy a bakkie which was soon written off because he couldn't drive. MaMkhwente's daughters didn't finish school and got married while her son remained with her waiting to see his father's money.

Grownups told me I would not amount to anything in life, they told me I would barely make it through school. They said all of these things because I misbehaved a lot and when being beaten I would never cry. Children who do not cry under such circumstances as beatings, have the hardest time in school and therefore have hard lives. I don't know how this conclusion was reached. I had no problems with my spelling, reading or maths as a child. I also didn't care about the beatings uMakhulu and uMangci gave, which were the worst hidings during the years I lived with them as a child. I didn't cry from the hidings though, I felt the hidings were just procedure to reprimand naughty children and I knew I was a naughty child. And then I didn't cry because I was convinced they wanted to see me cry.

I remember when uTamnci brought uMangci home for the first time, she was still his fiancée at the time. uMakhulu showed her around our yard, there was not much to see except our four houses on the homestead which consisted of two rondavels, a flat as well as a bigger six room house. There was also the kraal but we did not own any livestock at the time so there was nothing to show there. The woman had a car and it was parked there on the ground of our homestead the whole time for the whole village to see. The only time there were cars on the homestead was when everyone was home for the December holidays but Mangci would be moving in with us on a full time basis so her car would be there everyday. She seemed stylish, she had a car, she smelled nice – I knew the latter because I made it a point to pass by her so that she could see me. I liked being seen, I always wanted to be present. More than anything else, she was a schoolteacher and my teachers liked me so she had to like me.

uTamnci worked for the SANDF and lived in Pretoria so he and uMangci would only see each other during school holidays when she was off from work or during December holidays when he was also off from work. She was to take care of uMakhulu who was old, no one said this but she was to take care of us children as well. Muffled conversations amongst elders had it that she was infertile, so her duties therefore did not include having her own children as would otherwise be expected. She did not do any laundry with her bare hands because she had bone problems nor did she carry any water on her head from the community tap as was expected of other newlywed women due to further health issues.

uMangci and I got along well most days. Initially she worked in another village before she transferred to work in our village to teach at Cwecweni Senior Secondary School. Because the first job was closer to town she would sometimes make a stop in town where she got nice things for my cousins and I. With her around there was always nice food. She seemed to us a heavy shopper and when she brought groceries home there was a collection of all sorts of vegetables, meats and flavourings we were not used to having in our food. We were flattered to be her family and she ours, we were just children she found living with an old woman who happened to be a mother to her husband and she cooked for us and that made us family.

Our village of Cwecweni in eNgcobo was one of the few villages with a high school so students came from other villages to study at our school. This meant our village had a lot of students who lived amongst us but were not originally from the village and one of these students was Sisi, who was Makhulu's niece. She was, just like uMakhulu, originally from the village of

eXonya and they did not have a high school and so just like her brother and sister before her, their aunt's marital home in the village with the high school was their go-to place for a couple of years when the time came. uSisi was the third of seven children and after being done with school, her elder siblings had decided to find jobs in town where their father had also worked all those years back. uSisi's elder brother had left school to go find a job eKapa and her sister had left school after falling pregnant with her daughter who was the same age as uSisi's youngest sister. We were poor, but uMakhulu would always make reference to her brother's children's lives to tell us to be grateful for the little we had.

When Sisi came to live with us, she took care of a large part of the chores on the homestead. Sane, our cousin who lived with us before had already left by this time, she went to live with her mother where she would also be attending school. When Sisi came to live with us Mangci had already been living with us. uSisi arrived for the purposes of attending school but was expected to undertake some chores alongside uMangci. The dynamics started changing on the homestead with her arrival. For example uSisi would cook, and uMangci would not like her cooking. She would complain that Sisi poured too many spices and not enough salt in her dishes; that she scrubbed only the surface when cleaning Makhulu's rondavel forgetting about the hidden parts under the bed, table and furniture; that her pap was not soft enough; she needed to not hurry her pot of beef because it was better tender and whatever other detail the rest of us did not care enough to notice. For the most part, uMangci was convinced that uSisi was out to waste the groceries that she worked so hard to buy. This was news to us, we always knew her to be someone who enjoyed us eating the food she prepared and she had never gave us any reason to believe that she was wasting food on us. Maybe she said this because she couldn't eat Sisi's food due to her complaints about it and therefore her portion went to waste as she couldn't have it.

Once, uSisi cooked dinner and dished up for everyone to eat. Mangci had been out for a teachers' workshop and by the time she came back in the evening, uMzala and I were already doing homework under the paraffin lamp which seemed to release more smoke than light. She came into our rondavel and upon receiving her food asked why the food was so dry. The food had no gravy so it had no flavour. Sisi told her we cooked food uMakhulu bought and not the food she bought so that is why the food did not have any gravy.

"What does that mean?," uMangci asked with a very curious look on her face. She was taken aback and it showed, her eyebrows were raised and she leaned in with one ear in Sisi's direction really wanting to listen to why the food had no gravy. It was as though she could not guess what the reason behind what Sisi said could be but was willing to hear whatever could be said on the matter.

"It means we're avoiding waste," uSisi said in the lowest but assertive voice possible. She could not shout to save her life and this is something uMakhulu loved about her, always making sure that she knew she was the better live in niece to her noisy sister who lived with uMakhulu before her. uMakhulu had not gotten along much with the sister because she wanted to be the only loud woman in her home.

uMangci walked out to the house that she shared with uTamnci whenever he was home. We knew she would get there and call him and inform him of how his mother and his siblings' children were mistreating her. As soon as she walked out Makhulu said "Yes, it's a good thing that you told her off." Strange, because we all thought she was asleep just a moment before. It was a great thing she had not heard anything as we did not want Mangci to feel that we were ganging up on her. It was also good because before that point we had not known that Sis was capable of standing up to anyone, let alone Mangci who was not only her superior at home but also her new teacher at school.

One time we drove to Pretoria to be with Tamnci for the school holidays and Mangci got mad about one thing or another and unlike when she had gotten mad at the village when uMakhulu was around, she now beat us up. She summoned me to one of the many furniture-less rooms in the ridiculously big house which uTamnci was provided by his job. I had never seen anything like it, there were so many rooms that were just there and not being used. I had thought the house in uMancgci's maiden home was big, but it seemed uMangci and uTamnci kept exceeding some standard with their houses. She told me to look the other way so that she could kick my bottom and I did. She was shouting, she was mad. She did the same to uMzala and to her sister's son whom together with his sister had taken the trip with us.

The nephew, Mzala and I were all born in the same year and in some ways I was the ring leader because I was actually older than the two by a few months. The nephew was also the leader in the sense that he knew all the naughty things to do and actually had fun doing them. He once kicked an apple all the way across our yard and into our neighbour's yard because it was red and he did not like red apples. He was from the city and children from the city were more unruly than us was what uMakhulu told us. Instead of turning down the offer of a red apple and having it be given to someone else who actually wanted it, he kicked it into someone else's yard, and it was fortunate that at the time nobody lived in the homestead next door or uMakhulu would have had to answer why her daughter in law's nephew was throwing unwanted food onto other people's yards. This was just one of the many little and not so little things he got up to which we therefore got dragged into in the name of fun.

Between the mischief the three of us got up to, uMzala was always a follower of our wrongdoings and instructions of what was required of her. Due to this relationship between the three of us, whatever business we got up to uMangci assumed we did together. We could have been beaten up because we had got out of the house when we had been told not to, or had attempted to leave the yard, when it was so dangerous outside with all those moving vehicles, especially for village bound clueless creatures like uMzala and I. At least the nephew grew up in the city and knew his way around suburban areas by then. We were beat up for a lot of petty things which involved us not being in the house when we had been given strict instructions to not leave.

One time uMangci was crying as she was beating us, asking why she had to deal with all of this from us children. "What kind of children are you?" she chanted, and we knew she meant

whose kids were we such that she had to deal with so much from us. She had not birthed us, why were we such a responsibility of hers. Why could we not just behave?

As soon as uTamnci came home the last time uMangci beat us, she welcomed him into the house immediately telling him of our behaviour that he felt he needed to talk to us about it. I remember him talking to us but particularly looking at me, I was the tallest of the bunch I may have also been the one responsible for some of misconduct but if anything, the nephew was the worst child even I had come across and uTamnci knew this. This meant that he asked questions of the three of us but expected the answers to come from the nephew and I as he knew uMzala could not come up with these things on her own. Looking back I realise uTamnci did not interrogate us because he believed we had not done anything out of the ordinary for children, but he wanted to stand by his wife.

That day he quickly dismissed us and we knew the next adventure that we had set for ourselves daily, we would go take a bath. We had always been warned against the act of bathing together at the same time because we simply did not have to but Mzala and I felt that the bathtub was big enough to fit three people so we bathed together. The nephew had seen bigger bathrooms and probably had his own bathroom. We on the other hand did not even know of a bathroom until Pretoria, at home we washed in whatever room had privacy.

When uMangci started working at Cwecweni Senior Secondary School it was around the time that she had corporally punished a student so badly that he had to go to the hospital to have his hand examined, treated and bandaged. The benefits of her then living and working in the same place were that she was never running late for work and she could drive uSisi to school as they were both at the same school. The response from the boy's parents was that uMangci had to take care of him until his wound was healed so he had to stay with her which meant he had to stay with us. That's when she brought him home with her. Despite how he got to be a part of our household for that period, Asiphe was a lot of help at home. He helped in the garden when we were planting and ploughing. His hand needed attention but he still got some things done. If anything, we knew we'd miss his help when he left. One of the first trips we took with him was to uMangci's maiden home where only their domestic help, uMamVulane, lived. uMaMvulane was a short woman of average build who was always laughing and running up and down the homestead getting things done and making sure we were taken care of and catered to. She had been with uMangci's family from before uMangci's mother had died, and she took care of the home when uMangci was with us and her sister led her life with her children in East London. Mangci's mother had been a police officer and there were pictures of her all over the house but there was one which was taken while she was on the phone. Rather, it was taken while she was pretending to be on the phone posing for the picture. She was seated on her work desk with files upon files in front of her, she had on massive spectacles, the kind cool kids today wear for the khaltsa. She died quite 'fresh' as uMakhulu would say, suggesting that the event of someone's death is more bearable when the person had lived longer. That picture with the huge spectacles was visible from the moment you entered the house, and it always felt like she was watching over everyone who entered her house.

Mangci's home was massive, there were four separate houses on the homestead which included the house we were all welcomed into whenever we visited, which had a kitchen with proper kitchen appliances such as a microwave, a stove with an oven, a fridge, a dining table and even a sink. There was a dining area just outside of the kitchen with a table and chairs. There was then a sitting room with sofas and a TV as well as a coffee table. Down the hallway, there were bedrooms and bathrooms. One bedroom belonged to the late owner of the house; one to Mangci; another to Mangci's sister – who were the only children of the deceased; one belonging to MaMvulane; a bedroom that Mangci's niece and nephew used for the duration of our visit and then a bedroom shared by Mzala and I. Some of the other houses in the yard included a flat with mostly no longer working appliances, a fancy rondavel with a veranda made from bricks – with fancy furniture such as couches and a television set as well as a bed. Rondavels always had beds because they were basically one room spaces where people could live their whole lives – sleep, bath, dine all in one setting. The last house was a smaller rondavel which was not as fancy and had just enough space which we used to hang out during the day when we did not want to be in the way of adults.

uMaMvulane loved having us around. She would be going up and down, in and out all over the yard putting together meals for us and cleaning. We didn't know when she did the cleaning because we would get up and the house would be clean, we'd step out to the other house to take our messy baths and we'd come back to clean rooms knowing she did it without even asking if we needed her to. She seemed to love having people around as she mostly lived alone. Once, uMaMvulane needed to go home to take care of a family matter and it was just us children and uMangci in the home. In her absence, Asiphe helped prepare breakfast while Mangci prepared other meals. Mangci would give us strict instructions of what foods to prepare and all three of us would be standing at attention but she would be looking at Asiphe because she trusted him to do the right thing. Not only was he a little older than us, but he was also more responsible.

I knew Asiphe loved to be associated with his teacher. He loved to be able to say that he knew how his teacher lived; that he had met her family and visited her homes. It was sad that it took suffering in his very teacher's hands to experience something outside of his own village home. I knew this myself, that I took my sweet time being flattered at people mistaking me for Mangci's daughter before correcting them and stating that she was in fact my aunt by marriage. I wasn't obsessed over it as I knew I had my beloved Mama but I still loved the association.

When I first asked uMama about her family she had recently arrived at the homestead from Port Elizabeth and was by the stove stirring an almost ready pot so she could dish for everyone. With her back turned to me who was sitting on Makhulu's bed, she was still wearing her denim skirt and leather jacket she had arrived in and not her *umolokazana* attire to respect the elders of the home like she always had to: she told me she was one of six siblings, her mother had died in 1997 and her father way before then.

Mama comes from a family of eight: six siblings and two parents. She is the fifth of the six siblings and is the third of four daughters. When she was born her father exclaimed, "More, more and more girls!" so she was nicknamed "Momomo." I thought uTatomkhulu was complaining of not having more sons but he said he was happy with all these daughters that would later marry and bring more cows to the family.

My maternal grandfather was walking to a village traditional ceremony when he was spotted by a group of boys who knew him and brought him back home. He had suddenly gone blind on the way.

When uTatomkhulu went blind uMama was his guide everywhere. They spent so much time together everyone wanted to know if she was his only child or his youngest child. She was neither. She was the child who was his guide everywhere.

Mama's oldest sibling was uMalume Jikijane who came home from town on pay days with only mayonnaise and Aromat after drinking all their parents' pension money. He bought both because he could not stand his food that he had not bought without either one. uMalume remained at his parents' home when every one of his siblings had moved out of home to start their own lives elsewhere. He had no wife, had no children. When we visited him there were just tins of guava in his cupboards. They were what was left from the groceries that his sisters contributed for him monthly. When he died a lot of Mama's family attended.

Mama's eldest sister was a victim of the Xhosa tradition of *ukuthwala* and she was married off to a chief. For years she wasn't allowed a social life so she escaped one night taking her daughter with. She had three children, two of them sons who have taken over their father in the chieftaincy; as well as her daughter who disregards her royal duties and refuses to see any of her royal family.

Mama's only surviving brother, uMalume Manku, lived in Joe Slovo too with his eldest son. His daughter lived with her mother and the youngest son lived with his mother. When we visited with Mama, his son would be so hospitable while Malume stared into thin space the whole time barely saying a word. He was a praying man so he referenced everything in the Bible, his house was decorated with quotes from the Bible one of which was about the woman who had looked back and turned into a block of salt. His house was always warm and humid. He later moved back home and remarried.

uMakazi Luber is older than Mama by a few years and she likes to ask people who looks older between her and Mama. She and Mama worked as street vendors selling fruit Engcobo while living in a squatter camp where once a man came from his shack crying and demanding to see the woman whose shack he was hounding because she had allegedly cheated on him. The shacks looked the same so it'd take him some time.

One of Mama's sisters was the family loud drunkard. She visited us unannounced and would buy alcohol on credit that Tata would later have to pay for because he was a regular and she wasn't. Mama told her to leave because all she did was drink, shout, argue with me because we shared a bed and I wanted to read and study while she wanted to be drunk.

When one of Mama's sisters contracted TB uMama had to travel to eKapa to go take care of her. When she brought her back with her I was to share a bed with her and every time she coughed I worried I would also get sick. When I told uMama this she told me that wasn't my room, it was for guests and uMakazi was a guest so I wasn't to complain about anything or I would sleep on the floor in the living room.

This is where the second half of the street has their get togethers. It's that house where everyone meets to discuss everyone else's business. For example I once heard all the mothers of the second half of the street talking about how the mother from number 22 is a witch. 22 being on the other half of the street meant she wasn't at the get together. This was right after she started extending her house and it looked so much bigger than all the houses on the street.

In number 64 lived an old woman who was once famous for drinking so much *imbamba* with her friends that all the old men she drank with would shame her for it. There was a certain amount of alcohol she was allowed to drink as a woman in the presence of men and she surpassed it so the old men called her out for it. They did not like that she was having more fun than them. She was always so drunk that she sent her grandsons to school without having washed their uniform. They were old enough to do their own laundry but she did it for them for so long that they never learnt. The old women's children who the grandchildren belonged to were away for work and when they came back it would be a drinking competition while the daughter prided herself in drinking something sweeter and therefore more sophisticated than *imbamba* and the son drank beer. Either way everyone got drunk and the grandchildren suffered.

At number 62 the dynamics were so strange for people who lived on Sipheka Street. Those people were never outside except to go to school and work and come back. They built a wall around their house which kept the rest of the street out so the mother from 62 was only seen during the times that she joined the gatherings at 64 which wasn't very often. When she wasn't there the rest of the women talked about how mother 64's husband was raping their daughters. He also kept them in the house because he didn't want the people to see. Mother 64 could not do anything about it because she hadn't been allowed to go and see her ailing father on his deathbed by her husband so none of her family wanted anything to do with her. The rumour got so bad that husband 62 attended one of the gatherings at number 64 and demanded that all those women say all the things they were saying about his family to his face and no one could say anything. All the women became mute in the presence of a man.

At number 60 lived a lot of different families over time because the house was being rented out. At some point in the shack lived a family and I was friends with the eldest daughter. She was so much older than me but we were in school together. She was one of those who school was so difficult for but she stuck it out. After some time they moved away because the mother had her Road Accident Fund pay-outs come after losing her arm in a car accident. So they left the shack which smelled damp from the rain days after it'd rained and bought a house in a more sophisticated township. Sometimes I missed their bloody chicken which they prepared every Sunday morning for Sunday lunch. It was bloody because they didn't cook it long enough.

After they left the landlord moved out of the main house, did away with the shack and had tenants in the main house. As it stands, the tenants are foreign nationals, a woman who works at a salon just outside 64 and a man who must have some sort of 9 to 5 because he drives out each morning around 8 and back every evening by 6 o'clock. With the extension of our small township came us seeing people of different descent around us. Tata once had a small ceremony for the ancestors and Mama had made umqombothi which brought friends of Tata's we had never seen before. Some of these friends were some coloured women he drank beer with. We were surprised to see coloured people in Joe Slovo township and it turned out they lived in the new part of the township where it was still shacks. This meant that their children went to Joe Slovo Primary School where they had no choice but to take isiXhosa Home Language because there were no schools teaching Afrikaans nearby.

A woman moved in with her two children whom she drove to school every morning. They didn't have school transport like other children who attended school together because no one else attended their multiracial school in our area. Her daughter was the same age as me so we played together. She had a boyfriend from school and she told us that her mom had said it was fine as long as they were not having sex. We were surprised that she could talk to her mother about boys. The only boy talk I had with uMama was to stay away from boys because they were liars and it ended there. I never sought to find out for myself.

Back when I was in primary school there was a girl in high school who used to visit our neighbour's son a lot. The son was no longer in school. They spent their afternoons together while she was still in her school uniform. Then she was pregnant, still in her school uniform. They had a son. She finished school and was no longer wearing her school uniform. Their son grew up to play with Ovayo a lot. One time their son slipped and fell in a broken sewage drain in our yard and scraped his ankle. He cried so loudly and, in a minute, both his parents came out from their house next door to his aid. I tried to explain what must have happened and they picked up their baby and left without seeking further explanation. The mother would later bring her son to visit his father for a weekend, a week, the school holidays. He still played with Ovayo a lot.

It was common for husbands to leave their wives at home to go drink alcohol in taverns but at this house lived a couple that got drunk together. Every Friday, Saturday and Sunday there were cuss words flying across their house and the rest of the street could hear. We knew that the man shouldn't have married her because she wasn't much of a wife anyway; we knew that the husband wasn't anything without her and that he owed her money. During the week it would all die down until loud music started playing on a Friday and we prepared ourselves to hear who had been the worst spouse that week. Their youngest son was the same age as Ovayo and he would come to our house and refuse to go home until it was time for us to go to sleep.

The walls at number 50 were gated. We never visited the children there but if it was absolutely necessary that we did we would have to call their names at the gate and they would open for us. The same with our parents who visited the parents there. When the eldest daughter at number 50 fell pregnant the whole street was in shock. Wasn't the purpose of the gated yard that she wouldn't have the slightest chance to see boys? She only went to school and came back, how could this have happened? Their second daughter didn't come home for weeks at a time when she slept at a boyfriend's. When she started this, her mother held her hand out to the community clinic and got her on contraceptives. She wasn't about to become a grandmother for the second time at age 40.

When number 52 was playing loud music, number 48 was playing the loudest music and the two houses were right next to each other. Number 48 had a yard made of bricks as though to keep the music at number 52 out and theirs in but we heard it just the same. The man at 48 would braai some meat, drink some beer and sit on a camp chair outside in shorts enjoying the music. Mama joked that their small child could not sleep unless the music was playing at its maximum. On Sundays the jazz music from 48 would be playing while on the other side of the street the church was at its loudest with the piano playing, the mic screeching with the loud preaching which I could only imagine brought sweat to the preacher and wet armpits to everyone else.

Here lived a woman with her daughter. She saw me one time on my way to school and she informed me she had attended the same high school. She told me it was a good school and asked me about some of the teachers who had also taught her. I asked her if she had intentions of sending her daughter to the same school when the time came, she said no. She couldn't afford it like her parents did for her. So much had changed between then and now.

I went to primary school with Thembi's brother while Thembi was already in high school. When Thembi quit school to sell *umqolo* that she fried while the customers waited in her stall by the car wash where the boys who no longer went to school chilled all day, her brother quit school to be *ukondi* for the taxi drivers who were Thembi's customers. He would shout for people to catch a ride in the taxi even when people were in their nightgowns in their yards not going anywhere.

The first time I saw a couple kissing in real time was when my primary school friends and I walked one of our friends to her house in the evening after an afternoon of play. Just before we got there we saw a group of guys leaning against one of the houses and one of them was turning his head this way and that kissing a girl who kept stopping and looking around. She either did not want to get caught or she was meant to have been home already. Surrounded by so many guys, she would barely talk herself out of it once she was caught.

Once, before Mama left for a funeral in her family in the village she sent me to go stay at a neighbour's. When she came back Tata asked her why she hadn't left me with him, did she think he would rape me?

Before I got my room at home it was Bhuti's before he moved to the shack outside. I would sleep on a sponge on the floor in my parent's bedroom and every night before bed uOvayo would roll from the bed onto the sponge and land on his back and then shout he was uTata, uMama, uBhuti or Lelethu and then he would go to sleep.

When uTata would get paid uMama would dress us up for shopping and then uTata would step out for a beer saying he'd return when we were done so we could leave. When he didn't return uMama would have to go look for him in taverns while uBhuti went to look for him in other taverns and uOvayo and I would be sitting there in our shopping clothes waiting for everyone to return. Sometimes they found him and we were able to go shopping as promised. Sometimes they found him and he had lost his bank card and sometimes he had spent a lot of the money. It was no longer worth going to town for shopping anymore.

A new pastor came to church. He told us about the Lord being a jealous man. He sits in heaven and is jealous over us because he wants all the love for himself. So when things are wrong in your life it is because you don't love the Lord enough. The pastor made an example that a small child is normally jealous of her mother such that she calls her my mom instead of mom. She wants all that attention to herself just like the Lord. He then shouted at us while he was sweating and wiping the sweat away that we must accept the Lord today so that we can give him all our love so he isn't jealous. I asked Mama if the new pastor was okay. She said he was fine the spirit had just possessed him. He looked like a girl from school named Zodwa who was so fat and fainted and vibrated on the ground every time it was hot. Some said she fainted because she was fat, others said she vibrated on the ground and had foam coming out of her mouth because she had seizures. To me the pastor looked like he was sweating and having seizures while standing up.

During the first year I lived with my parents after four years of being apart I made some new friends at school who came over at my house once and Mama was there. The following Monday at school they told me they had witnessed me being rude to Mama and that I should remember my place as a child in the company of adults.

I had a friend in primary school whose house I would go to every day after school for play. We were in the same class and we walked home together frequently. One day as we were about to leave each other to go our different directions home she told me not to come to her house that day.

When I was in grade seven uTata went to fetch my report card from school and the teacher told him she was happy to see him because she rarely saw fathers be involved in their children's school affairs.

When Mama was a seamstress we had a sign at our gate which declared that she was available for sewing clothes. January was the time when uniforms were needed and students sent for their uniforms that had to be taken care of from the previous year or new ones which were two sizes too big. They would come back two terms later to have them loosened up a bit while wearing the same uniform for years until it was too small to fit.

The only time uMama hit me was when she was in her bedroom having a bath and I was in the living room watching TV and she asked me to go out and listen to what the ward councillor's office people were announcing on their *umboko* that they carried all around Joe Slovo so that all the residents would know when to meet and about what. I went out of the house a minute too late and they had already moved to the other side of the township and I couldn't hear them anymore. When I went to report this to uMama she picked up her shoe and threw it at me while exclaiming, "You took your time that's why *umboko* left you!"

When I started my period uMama did not have money for sanitary pads so I used a cloth. It felt like my insides were being pulled apart and the blood was there as proof. The following month I waited for my period but it didn't come, nor did it come the second month thereafter. On the third month I was ready with my sanitary pads uMama had finally managed to buy. On the third month I was thinking maybe it was a false alarm. We had played rough with my friends so maybe someone had hit me at the meeting of my legs and the blood had poured out. Maybe I wasn't old enough yet, but on the third month at age 11 it turned out I was.

For a long time I couldn't eat while traveling because my stomach would be upset and I hated the smell of every food. Later in my life I travelled to the village by myself the first time and a lady whose hair was dyed blonde in the taxi told me to not eat all that uMama had packed for me because I had to have *umphako* for when I got home.

When I was in primary school and uBhuti in high school I thought he and I deserved the same amount of money to carry to school everyday even though he walked an hour to school and another hour back and I carried lunch.

Picking on Him

I passionately accused uBhuti of stealing my charger because our phones had the same charger. I could not even look at him when I told him I had found mine under my many luggage bags in my room.

I asked Tata to take pictures of me because Mama had bought me a new dress and they turned out so beautifully I jokingly asked him where he had learnt to take pictures. He told me he was once a photographer in Mthatha. I'd known him to have only been a security guard in his life. He never took pictures of me again.

I lost my matric certificate when the university wanted it and uMama took me to *umthandazeli* for cleansing because she thought the devil was after me and did not want me to finish my degree. When we got there she met uMamTshawe from her church who was with her daughter and they spent the whole time while we were waiting to be called talking about everything else other than them being at *umthandazeli* when the church preached against it. Inside there were several bathtubs made from zinc surrounded by candles and soaps. When you went to consult and *umthandazeli* suggested a bath was what you needed you were to bring your own soap and candles but they would always use leftover soap and candles and you were not allowed to take yours home. With us they did not think the problem needed a bath so Mama told them some information about me and they said I needed to go home and look for my certificate again. When we got home Mama told me uMamTshawe was always talking about her not practicing the very thing she had come to do that day. We found my matric certificate on top of my wardrobe with my other documents.

Tata organised a protest at work to seek better pay. Their employers called the police to shoot them down and stop the protest. One of Tata's colleagues whom he spoke about often was shot and killed. Because Tata was already 60 and they didn't need his labour anymore, they sent him home without his provident fund. After his beer he would cry himself to sleep about it. Mama was confused at what seemed a sudden interest in politics while I was glad to see him so passionate about something.

"Who are you buying for?" the lady asked from beyond the counter.

"Jwarha, he is my dad," I said, taking the two cold 1 litre *Black Label* beers from her hands.

"Ohh, Jwarha has a daughter this big?", the lady asked startled while sorting out my change.

"Yes." I said wondering if they knew anything about each other since Tata had started drinking at hers.

“Why did uDabsi say she loves you?”

“I don’t know, Mama. Maybe that’s the sort of thing you say to your brother’s children.”

Mama looked at me and she looked aside, as though to recollect if she had ever said that to her brother’s children, or even to me her only daughter. A frown stayed on her face as though not recollecting any memory.

Mama tells us of a car accident where the car rolled over three times while she was inside. She was left with an almost invisible scar on her chin.

Growing up uTata spoke of my sister as Nwabisa named after him, Monwabisi. This is the name he had given her before she was born but wasn't there to give it to her when she was born. When we met her we learnt her name was Linda but we still referred to her as Nwabisa among each other such that when her real name came up we were confused for a moment.

When Linda arrived home for the second time Tata was drunk. The first time she had arrived as a student at Cwecweni Senior Secondary School down the road from our homestead and uMakhulu had told her Tata didn't send her any money monthly so she couldn't afford to take care of another one of his children and that she had to go. Tata spent a few years after that hysterically crying about this when he was drunk until Mama started the search for my sister and found her mother's cell phone number. She gave us Linda's cell phone number and we could talk to her. When she arrived for the second time it was around Christmas and Tata knew she was coming but had left that morning as someone who was quickly coming back but didn't return for hours. He returned smelling of a shebeen and he couldn't move his hands from covering his face from crying as though he was the one whose father never raised him.

When Linda came home she brought her eleven year old son with her. I was fourteen and had a nephew three years younger than me. Ovayo was nine and had a nephew two years older than him.

When Linda visited us for the third time we were back in Joe Slovo. It was in the evening and she had caught the bus from eKapa to us and uBhuti had to fetch her from the bus stop. Mama served us rice, chicken and potatoes that night and we all knew the chicken was because my sister was home. She and I shared my bed like we did for the rest of the time she was around. Once Ovayo came from playing with friends on the streets crying and our sister rushed outside to see what the matter was. She was ready to reprimand one of the friends when it came out that Ovayo had fallen on the ground during play and that's why he was crying.

I saw my sister again years later when I was visiting her in her home in Khayelitsha where she housed her two younger siblings, her sons and her nephew. It was a three-bedroom two-bathroom house that she had worked for. Through her with all that she had been through, I saw all the more that I could achieve with all that I had been blessed with.

My youngest nephew screeched and scratched with his toy cars in the corridors until I woke up, closed my door or asked him to play outside. Then there would be all his toys to pick up, step on and kick aside while wallowing in the pain of having stepped on them without looking. Then he would come elated from play and reach for hugs and kisses or he would come crying and reach for hugs and kisses. Either way I'd be happy with such an affectionate child.

I go next door to pick up the clothes that fell into their yard from the laundry I did earlier. The gate looks locked so I yell "Molweeeeni" and a short woman about thirty years old comes out and escorts me to her backyard where I pick up the clothes. When I leave no one is in the living room so I don't have the opportunity to say thank you.

When I was in grade seven I joined an afterschool arts programme which met at my school. When one of my friends introduced me to the white American man who ran the programme he said “She can come, we don’t have enough girls here anyway.” All I kept thinking about was all the English I’d have to speak.

In the arts programme I joined a reading group where an American man named Charlie read *James and the Giant Peach* with us. I still have a copy of the book on top of my wardrobe at home.

In the arts programme we also had a girls’ group where a woman named Martha taught us to not treat the word vagina as something to be talked about in private because it was a regular body organ.

When Martha left we were left with uZuki who took over the girls’ group and cultivated a sisterhood out of each age group of girls in the programme.

In one of the parents’ meetings at the arts programme, parents were being encouraged to let us have more time at home to attend to our schoolwork. Lulu’s mother got up and said her two daughters had to learn housework so they could take care of their husbands one day. She asked what good was an educated woman if she couldn’t keep a warm home.

Nomfundo’s grandmother promised her a Blackberry touch screen if she agreed to marry the man from church who said she had been revealed to be his wife in a dream even though she was 13 and he three times her age. Nomfundo’s grandmother said marrying him would guarantee her safety from all the diseases she would get if she slept with boys her age who would never even marry her.

Sibu’s mother insisted that she come to class with her three younger siblings if she couldn’t stay home and take care of them while she and her father had to work.

Nondwe’s mother knows one of the teachers is taking sexual advantage of her. She sometimes comes to school to see the teacher and some students say it’s to see if she can’t do what her daughter does for him better.

Azile contracted HIV from her mother during birth and her mother died soon after. She lives with her aunt who looks so much like her we always thought she was her mother because she calls her Mama. Aya tells us of the boys she sleeps with without disclosing to them her HIV status and says it's because they insist on sleeping with her without a condom. One day she tells us that she is angry that it is her responsibility to make sure she doesn't spread it.

Kamva's parents had her when they were very old so if she doesn't tell you, you would think they were her grandparents. She likes to tell us her sister who is 25 years older than her is her mother and that her niece who's three grades above us is her sister.

When we go to Sihle's house, her mother doesn't let us in unless we're wearing skirts. As soon as we sit down she brings the Bible and tells us that wearing men's clothing and tight clothing will make us burn in hell. Her daughters wear ankle long skirts and headwraps everywhere they go. We would like to ask Sihle to come to our houses instead but her mother brings us scones and juice as she speaks so we don't complain.

Kathy came and taught us maths. She couldn't believe the amount of work she had to do before we could meet her where we were supposed to be as per our respective grades. I'd never seen that many maths problems before.

In early grade eight, seven months after I started attending the arts programme the man who ran the programme told me and one other girl that they had found a school for us where a lot of our potential as students would be realised. They chose us two because we had worked so hard to cultivate our reading, writing and maths skills and they thought we were ready for something beyond what we were offered at the school we were in. When we both made the top three students in our grade the school was able to send more students in the following years.

Kathy took the girls and I to her house where we would spend Saturday mornings at races on the beach because she was a runner. I'd spread out a towel, listen to the waves and read because I didn't like running much. We'd swim which was mostly us just getting in the water only knee deep.

Kathy's children came to visit and they were not half as serious as their mother as they didn't seem to care about maths as they were both musicians.

Kathy then found a house with a pool and we were always swimming in it because it was contained water, safer than the ocean.

One time she fetched us from school and we went for dinner in our uniforms and a man came up to our table to let us know that he had contributed towards the founding of our school. When Kathy left for good she left us books we had read and hadn't read from her library.

At the last place Kathy lived at we had a braai outside where we met all her friends she had made during her time in the country. One was a woman named Celeste who was a pharmacist and worked as a pharmacy lecturer at NMU. She spoke to us about how she was praying to God to send her a husband so when we heard she had left her job to get married to a man who lived in Durban we were not surprised.

In grade eight I cut my hair. At school the next day my friend told me I should have warned her so she could prepare her fight for all the people who'd have something to say about it.

In high school I knew I was the friend who was least desired by boys. It didn't bother me because I didn't have hopes of it changing. Sometimes I think if I had had the high school run of notorious boys, I wouldn't have dived headfirst the first time I was interested in someone who was interested in me.

One of the elders in our extended family was working as a miner in Welkom and living in a hostel when his heavily pregnant wife decided to pay him a visit. He asked a woman who sold food to the men in the hostel to accommodate her as she couldn't stay in the hostel with him. With her host's help she gave birth to their son and it was just before she was set to leave and go back home that she found out that the woman in whose house she stayed was involved with her husband. He had been hoping that they would get along enough for her to not be too bothered when he finally told her that he wanted to be with her too. She travelled back home and fetched her daughter whom she had left with her husband's mother and took both her children with her to her maiden home reporting her husband's infidelity as her reason to come back. When our elder finally got some time off work he travelled home to find his wife gone and then travelled to her village where her family put him in a rondavel all by himself without so much as a glass of water to quench his thirst after his journey. This was not the way families treated their son-in-law. After what felt like hours as the sun was beginning to set, a number of women entered the rondavel he was in and sat directly opposite him and asked him why he had come to see them. He said he was looking to take his wife and children back home and the women said he was welcome to come and see the children whenever he wanted but no one would be going back with him. His wife did not want to see him. They told him he was welcome to sleep in the rondavel but he would have to leave in the morning. His children grew up and started visiting him. He never remarried nor did he have more children.

Makhulu's ring finger – and the ring fingers of a lot of women from her generation – was amputated at the joint when she was a baby. She says it was to prevent her growing up and wetting her bed as an adult or having psychological problems. When we asked her why, she says it was also so she wouldn't question everything like us the generation who never had it performed on us.

When we have an ancestral ceremony people from different villages come and drink *umqombothi* as well as eat meat with us. Some of these people are from villages which kept their traditional Xhosa attire as their everyday clothing while we only wear it on Heritage Day. They smoke their tobacco from their pipes and they spit on the ground in the house because their floors are made of mud and the spit dries faster than it would on a carpet. They put *imbola* on their skin everyday to protect them from the sun and their feet are so hard from walking without shoes all day. People from our side of the village call these people *amaqaba* because while we moved with the times they remained where we once all were.

When I was seven and uOvayo two, uTata slaughtered a goat for each of us to introduce us to our ancestors. If the goats did not wail while being struck with *umkhonto* there would be suspicions that uMama had lied about our paternity and had had our *imbeleko* with the wrong family.

Every family in the village has *intlabi* and that is the man who slaughters the animals at every family ceremony where an animal needs to be slaughtered. In our family it was uTamkhulu's older brother who would naturally hand the responsibility over to one of his sons but his one son had died, two of his sons had been imprisoned and the other two hadn't been home in decades. The responsibility was given to uTata who is Tamkhulu's eldest son and the most viable choice in those circumstances.

When I first started university and it was the holidays and uTata was working night shifts uMama would invite me to sleep in her bed with her. In the morning she would complain of what a bad sleeper I was until she told me we'd do all our catching up during the day so I could go back to my own bed. She refuses to share a bed with me until today.

When I moved in here I met the man from next door who has a missing tooth or a black tooth in front I have never looked long enough to know. He boils the same pot of a plant that I assume he drinks or washes with or uses to cleanse his house multiple times a week. It smells terribly close to those indigenous medicines uTata picks by the river in the forest even though I only smell it when I pass by his open door or window – but stronger.

His girlfriend comes over and they scream at each other in a language I don't understand. In the middle of the night I wake up to her screaming in bed.

His brothers come over and I notice one speaks little English. He just stares in my face smiling and says “Hooookay” while not moving to call his brother as I have asked.

When I moved in here the house was empty of people but full of belongings that had been dropped off with the intention of the owners moving in later. The house was filthy even though the landlady claimed a cleaning lady had cleaned just after last year's tenants had moved out. She finally agreed to have someone clean the fridge which had a carton of spoilt milk, a tin of expired mayonnaise and worms all over its insides.

When the first girl moved in she brought friends over and they played music through the night, left the toilet unflushed and went to sleep with meat in the oven so we were woken up by neighbours telling us our house was on fire. She worked as a waitress in one of the restaurants in town and she never showered before work. She worked night shifts and came back in the early hours of the morning drunk every day. We asked her about school and she said she was doing well but she had to move out before midyear because her parents had caught on that she had never registered for the year.

When the second girl moved in she drank so much expensive wine that she could never let herself in her room after a night out. She would pass out in the living area or knock on one of our doors so we could open her room for her. One time I did not open my door to her knocking and I found her passed out by my door when I woke up the following morning. She left during the year to go stay with a boyfriend she had known for a month and said they'd help each other study.

When I moved in here one of my housemates told me she was sorry for wearing shorts, she didn't know I'd be bringing a guy over. I looked at her blankly for a moment before I realised what she meant and had to reassure her that it was her house she could wear whatever she wanted.

I met this guy once, we had been communicating via social media since a few days before. He had seemed decent enough, chatting to me and asking which side of campus I stayed. For some time I was convinced he would ask me out, it was the only logical thing to do at that point because we spent so much time talking. One evening, he texted me to ask that I meet him by the arch which serves as one of the entrances into the campus, which was a few minutes away from my residence so I told him I would meet him if he met me halfway to there. Upon meeting, we walked for a few minutes outside of the campus before he asked that we turn into the road leading up the other side of campus. I wondered where everything was leading, I had met this guy for the first time and I had been walking with him on campus ground that I was familiar with but would not necessarily explore at night.

Once in grade eight, I had a friend who had a boyfriend and every time he tried touching her breasts while they were kissing, she would tell him no because her mother had told her she would know when her breasts were being touched. Apparently, firm little girl breasts started to sag when the girl was being touched by a boy. uMama had told me that she was glad my breasts were firm because as soon as she got hers they started to sag. She did not tell me but I knew she meant she was glad my breasts were firm as a little girl because she did not wish me to endure the skin-cutting comments women had to say about other women with sagging breasts. Before I knew it, we were standing on some Makhanda road and he had managed to get behind me when we were previously walking side by side. From behind me, he grabbed my whole body, his hands were on my breasts, squeezing while he pressed himself to me. We were standing in the middle of nowhere so it was just him and me. I tried to say something and before I could, he firmed his grip on my breasts, had his arms and hands cupping my breasts. He started breathing heavily, inhaling for so long as though he could smell something he liked and heavily desired.

Years after finding out theories regarding women's breasts I could not help wondering if Mama would be able to tell that my breasts had been handled between the last time she saw me and the time she saw me next, even though I knew better. This experience made me numb, I knew I was supposed to feel something with him so closely pressed to me so closely but I just felt numb. When I sat with my feelings later, I realised that I was angry that I had been in the situation, that I had walked to meet the situation. Upon what I assume to be him having realised no reaction from me, he turned me to face him and took my arms to his shoulder as though to hug him, he held on to me still. I slipped away from him and started walking the way we had come just a few minutes before, he came onto me and pressed himself onto me again, and assuming my wriggling myself off him and walking away had not been loud enough for him, I told him "I said just a chat." We had discussed the events of this evening and had decided on a conversation being the suitable venture. He tells me "I am chatting" with his whole being grabbing me from behind and then letting me go and grabbing my butt. He gets my face so level with his that I know he expects our lips to meet, but I will not allow this. He has taken enough from me this evening already. So I freeze. I don't turn my head for him, I don't lift it up for him. I then tell him I think we should go as he had said this session would be short, "short" he says as though not believing that I believed that. He suggests we go a different way than we had come so that we can see more of campus, I tell him we are going the way we came. I am making demands now. We start walking back.

As we walk back, he starts talking about the campus being the safest place he has ever been. I ask him what he means, he tells me safety for him means not being subjected to robbery. He then recovers as though realising he has left out a line regarded important in his speech, and says safety also means not getting raped, one is safe as long as they are not subjected to robbery or rape. He looked like he might not have even understood why the second part was the right thing to say but he had heard it being said by those advocating against sexual assault on campus that he thought to say it too. He then proceeds to say that all sexual acts should be consented otherwise they contain elements of rape, I tell him that is rich, what I do not say is “coming from you”. He tells me people always know when they are doing wrong but choose to do it anyway.

We got back to where we had started and we sat down. We started speaking about anything and everything. I was suddenly interested in what the breast-grabbing fellow had to say, I realise it was anger and vulnerability I was feeling that made me so ready to take him down and take back whatever power I had had and he had taken away from me when he did with my body what he pleased without speaking to me about it.

We spoke about his family and we spoke about mine, he told me they were all boys at home, I told him I was the girl in between boys. During this talk of parents specifically I could not help thinking that no parent would guess their child to be sexually inappropriate with others, no parent would guess their child who had made it into university after generations of their people deprived of education was sexually assaulting others. He told me he wished to be a father in the next five years, I told him I would not be having children in my twenties. He told me he liked children and that he was taking care of his brother’s child as his own because his brother was much more of a lost soul than he was. I should have realised he was a lost soul. I look at my phone and suggest it is time to leave. I did this in case he got mad at me for thinking he meant it when he texted “A chat would be amazing” after I had said I could only offer him a conversation when he asked to meet. I just nodded to acknowledge I had noted his invitation even though I knew there and then I would never see the guy willingly again.

I immediately turned to walk back to my residence, he did not offer to walk me and I was glad. I climbed the stairs until the last floor and I could not help but notice that that night the res was particularly loud, it seemed people were awake. I mean, it was well known that students don’t sleep, there is always someone awake at every point in the night but this particular night it felt as though there were a lot more people awake. Maybe I was just afraid of being watched, I noticed more people being awake on this night because of what I had gone through that night with a strange man. I climbed the stairs and I got to my room. I looked at myself in the mirror and I knew that I would not say anything about that night to anyone, I could have passed by the house warden and reported to her my feelings, I did not even have to say the name of the boy, I knew that. I could just speak to her about it, just to get it out, but what was I to get out? How would I explain to her what I was doing with a boy in the middle of the night, surely I met him willingly, and knowing what could take happen. The odds were against me, I knew, and I knew that I would keep quiet and just be.

Before meeting me that day he had supposedly come across a lot of women and it was when he saw me that he decided he 'liked what he saw' and I was supposed to pretend to be flattered by that. Women sometimes say there is something about a man who speaks his mind but I was mostly struck by his declaration of having liked what he saw at that very moment which meant he did not wait for a second encounter to see if he still liked what he saw, before he could declare that he liked what he saw. I was on my way from a physical performance tutorial at the Drama Department on campus and was walking back to my dining hall for supper. I had picked up Drama in my second year of study at Rhodes. I had always liked watching the performing arts but I was in a phase where I thought to explore the performing arts as a performer and that did not go very well.

"I couldn't continue walking when I saw you coming, any sensible man would stand and watch" he began. Quite the straight shooter. What he meant was any sensible man would stare, because he was staring and he clearly deemed himself sensible. From his very first words I knew he was not here to make pretend, since he was already insisting on his manhood I realised for him part of being a man meant getting straight to the point.

"Is it?" I said, somehow already annoyed, how did I even manage to do that, I could have a sudden change of mood without even knowing why myself. I was jolly just moments before, I had finished yet another week of physical performance and it felt like a weight off my shoulders because that was one less thing to do on my to do list that week. It was as though I could just decide I was irritated on the spot and my mood would change. I was tired, I had had a long day. It was heading to 6 o'clock already and I just wanted food and my bed.

"Let's go, you're also heading this way" he said as I reached him and attempted to pass him. He saw I was passing him so he said something as a way to stop me and catch up to me as he saw we were headed the same way. Seeing that I was still not responding to any of his advances, he continued, "What's your name may I ask?"

"Lelethu" I said.

"Where are you from Lelethu?" I realised all his talk was in isiZulu, Zulu people always assumed everyone spoke their language. For all the guy knew, I might not have been responding to his talk because I could not understand what he was saying. There was no way he could have known what language I spoke from just looking at me.

"I am from Port Elizabeth, but my parents are from the Transkei" I said in isiXhosa, looking at him to see if he would respond to the tribe and therefore language difference. I do not know why I told him where my parents were from, I was probably looking for something longer to say so it did not sound like he was always speaking because it seemed he had a lot to say. Also, he just seemed the type that would ask if my family were originally from Port Elizabeth so I told him before he even asked.

Now I knew the next appropriate thing to do would be to ask him where he was from but I had a feeling he would tell me before I even asked, and he did. After we had passed the mini-bridge which led us to the path where I would head to my dining hall we stood a while, and this was only because he was still speaking. I was not trying to be rude and have him call after

me as I walked away had I walked away so I waited for him to stop speaking so I would tell him I was leaving.

“To not waste your time” he begins, and I could not help but be grateful that he understood the urgency of the matter and that he once again got to the point, he continued “Where I come from we are taught that a man must get to the point as soon as reasonably possible when speaking to a lady so that they speak sense and she knows why he is after her.” So he was after me.

“I like the teaching from back at home, continue I’m listening” I said, now really needing him to finish speaking, also realising that he is a man of many words. My mind is everywhere but in the moment. I see a girl from my first year Politics tutorial, Mbali, she waves to say hi, she has always been nice to me so I wave hi back and ask how she is doing. After this exchange of the other’s state of well-being, she walks away. I can’t help thinking she told me she was a Law major and was probably making her way from the Law Library. I remind myself of a boy I used to like in high school, we would be walking together on the school campus on prefect duty and he would greet everyone he saw, he even remembered all their names. He would pay me no mind and I would just be walking beside him doing whatever job we were assigned for that duration, and I remember how I yearned for him to see me. Maybe the guy standing next to me in that moment felt like I did back then.

“Say what you need to say and be quick, I need to go now” I say, suddenly irritated again, even the weather was starting to get cold. It was autumn, but I could feel the cold creeping in with the setting sun.

“Okay” he says, now laughing, I see I caught him off guard “Seeing that you are in a hurry, I would like to then have your cell phone number and then we’ll speak when I call you” he concludes his train of thought.

Now I am mad, he made me stand there, just so he could ask for my number, why did he not do that sooner? “So what you have been meaning to do this whole time is ask for my number?” I ask, my face now softer, even I could feel it. “You should have just said” I say, and I look at him and see that even he is confused now at my sudden niceness. “My phone or yours?” I ask. As soon as I walk away he yells after me that he will call me.

Once, two girls from my residence and I were walking from class, this was weeks after I had rejected the guy and told him a story about not being ready to be in a relationship. I knew from the first time I met him that nothing would come of it but I was not about to let him know that so I let him think he had a chance, cruel, yes, but it was easier for me to just block him after he texted me. One of the girls from my res said something about the passing guy being the guy she had been telling her other friend about. I look up to see the guy they are talking about coming out of one of the computer labs and heading off campus. I ask her what is up, they try to brush it off saying he did not matter but I say “I am asking because I have a story about the very same guy so I would like to know if my intuition was true about him”, they look at each other and they laugh. They then gasp in shock, then clap their hands in disbelief, saying I must

just tell the story at once because that there is one hell of a man, one who does not like the word no coming from women. They talk of his severe suffocating nature.

The one girl was walking from res to class when this guy clearly bumped into her. He did not apologise for it because he later said he wanted to get the girl's attention. He was letting her know that he saw her. He bumped into her and just passed her leaving her struck at this man's audacity when they had never even met. According to her, she stopped for a moment and watched him walk away from her in the opposite direction off campus. He then turned and winked at her, just as she was turning away from him. For him, he had done his bit and won the girl's attention. She thought this encounter strange and told her one close friend about it – with whom we were walking from class at that moment. When she saw him that day when I was there she was clearly upset and told her friend that he was the guy she had been speaking about and I also happened to recognise him.

Later in the year, we saw the guy again and that is when I heard that one of the girls in our res has a similar story with the same guy. Our housemate had been walking from class when the guy walked so closely behind her that she felt him breathe on her neck. She felt him come close enough that his body was touching her back, when she turned to see what was happening. This is when the guy walked from behind her to beside her and then started closing her off from the road onto the end of the pavement where there was no longer road for her to walk on. The guy did not say anything to her, he did not chase her down or scare her off but he invaded her personal space in public. He did not speak, he just acted in a manner that suffocated her as a pedestrian. Other people would step on you in public and excuse themselves but this one never spoke and continued as though he had not been a creep just moments before.

I travelled to the village for Tamnci's funeral. I arrived in the evening and found out uMama had been kicked out of our homestead because there was a huge family fight. I spent the night and woke up the next morning and helped with some chores while uOvayo transported my luggage to where uMama was and I then proceeded to meet her. It was an uphill road and she was in one of the last homesteads in the village before the big gate that opens up to another village. The owner of the home was an extended family member and she worked as a nurse in the hospital in town and only came back when she could which wasn't often so uMama had the homestead to herself.

I slept in the bed across from hers in the big rondavel that housed two double beds, a wardrobe and a table on which sat a stove. Mama and I spoke to each other across the room into the night until she fell asleep and I'd also go to sleep. Some nights I would watch TV in the two-room flat on the homestead and would only come back into the rondavel when the winter sun had already set and it was so dark outside I couldn't see my own hands. I would find uMama already half asleep and she would ask me if I did not fear the dark, walking up and down the yard when I knew we were in such a secluded area of the village.

During the day we would prepare lunch and cook supper, sometimes cooking it outside. We also braaied corn from the garden outside while sitting and catching some cold winter sun. On the morning I left, uMama carried my biggest luggage bag on her head as we walked all the way down the village to catch a taxi to town where I would catch a taxi to school in Makhanda.

“All of you stand against the wall and wait until we come back for you!”

“Pregnant women and women with small babies this side! Family planning that side! Everyone else together there! I will not be repeating myself!”, came the voice from the big bellied, squeaky voiced man who was covered in PPE from head to toe while he was pointing this way, that way and over there.

Leaned against the wall we were all trying to get away from the rain but the building still wasn't open to us.

“Are you on the injection?”

“Yes, I don't trust the other stuff.”

“Apparently they make you fat”, said a woman whose hands were in her track top pockets all the way to the top of her belly because she was fat.

“And dizzy all the time. All those headaches!”

“As long as I will not have more children I am fine. My children's father also doesn't want more.”

“The father of my child doesn't want me to be on contraceptives. He wants us to try for more children when the one we have is still small small.”

“My sista, you can't listen to men! One moment he will want another child and the next he will leave you pregnant and go for fresher bums.”

“It's good to have children but not too many, do you know how hard it is in the labour ward?”

“Yho! You mustn't go there if your family never performed a ritual to strengthen you because that thing needs strength.”

“Do you have children?”

“No.”

“What are you waiting for?”

“I don't want any.”

“Mxm, you say that now.”

“She is really just talking. You must have children otherwise whose children will you send to the shops?”

When we were children we heard our mothers say women were not meant to be wearing pants while they were pregnant so we spoke to each other about women not wearing pants when they're pregnant. We would put pants on and remind each other that we wouldn't be able to wear pants once we were pregnant. We had until we were pregnant to wear our pants and maybe they wouldn't even fit us after.

I've never seen uMama, uMakhulu or any other of the married women in the village wearing pants. uMama isn't allowed to wear them at her in-laws because it is disrespectful to the elders alive and dead for a daughter-in-law to wear pants. She also has to wear a doek and have a scarf around her waist over her dress all the time in the village but she never adhered to these rules in Joe Slovo. But she still didn't wear pants in Joe Slovo even though I think uTata wouldn't have minded.

uMama tells me I need to finish school and get a job so I can send some money and help them finish building our homestead. She tells me I must never buy a car before I buy a house because I will always need a place to stay even if I catch a taxi everywhere. She tells me I must never be like Zama who works as a police officer and has a husband who works as a police officer and comes home in her car to park it in front of her father's unpainted house that she never helped to build bringing with her groceries that will only last up until she leaves and never sends any money home. Her sister who works as a security guard is better than her because she at least bought a rain water tank so their father never has to collect water from the community tap.

When I was twenty I told uMama I'd like to have a child when I'm 30. She told me I'd have to get married before then and that 30 was too old. I told her I'd be having a child at 30 even if I did not have a husband. She then turned to uBhuti who was twenty-seven and asked him when he'd be having his first child and he said as soon as he had a house of his own. Now that I'm nearing twenty-two I don't know how she'll react to me not wanting any children at all.

While going through a terrible breakup where I barely left my bed uTata came into my room and asked me if I was pregnant. He told me we did not have a house full of people so an extra person wouldn't hurt and I wasn't to be ashamed. After all I had gone to school, got my matric and my two degrees which was more than he could say for a lot of girls my age. I think he was a little relieved when I told him I was not the child he had to worry about bringing him grandchildren.

uMama heard from one woman that uBhuti had a son but it turned out to be his girlfriend's son who we also played with and fed and were sad when he and the baby's mother broke up because we did not get to see the baby anymore.

The second day we met we talked until midnight and he gave me his shirt because it was cold. I kept it for months, wore it when I missed him which was frequent. I burnt it with the matching socks he had bought us when he told me statutory rape wasn't strong enough a crime.

I would sometimes look away while we were together and he'd ask what I was thinking about. At first I thought he wanted to know what I was thinking about then I realised he just wanted to know if I was realising what a loser he was.

When we were together we spent so much time apart that when we got to see each other we started from the beginning with the introductions.

When I told a guy who told me he only wanted to have sex that I did not plan on having children he told me we'd have to discuss that.

I met a guy in a club and he told me he liked the fact that I did not feel the pressure to drink while my friend was getting me a drink. He was a traveller living in his grandmother's house and he was in town until the following Tuesday. My friend saw him at a different club the following Friday where he asked her for a cigarette.

My friend tells me I was ready to leave the club with a guy until I threw up and he wasn't interested anymore. Two weeks later I found him leaving my housemate's room and I was so grateful for that throw up.

There is a tenderness to the way your long, veiny hands look as you caress the sides of my thighs, travelling on top of them to the insides and soon enough your perfect hands are under my bum pulling me down such that I land on my back, my head bouncing on hard wood. There is a darkness surrounding us. The roof is so far up I know it's there but I can't see it.

There are poles and hoops and nets and dusty benches. My hands are on your knees and I'm faced away from you, heaving up and down on you in between my legs. It's always a challenge for me to be in charge. You enjoy my taking the reins for a moment but you notice the intensity is lower on my side so you take over again. Before long I'm looking at the roof again but this time I see an opening through the roof and I'm wailing for the small light that has crept through and the wind to fetch me.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Part B: Portfolio

### Contents

Introduction.....	101
Part 1: Coursework Reflective Journals.....	102
Part 2: Thesis Reflective Journals.....	120
Findings on the Draft Thesis Report.....	130
Part 3: Poetics of the Wor(l)ds We Live Essay.....	132
Book Review 1 Muriel at Metropolitan by Miriam Tlali .....	138
Book Review 2 Tjieng Tjang Tjerries & Other Stories by Jolyn Phillips .....	140
Book Review 3 The House of Hunger by Dambudzo Marechera .....	142
Book Review 4 The Collected Stories of Lydia Davis by Lydia Davis .....	144
Writing in Community Report.....	147

## **Introduction**

I was born in Gqeberha but my parents have since moved back home to Engcobo. I arrived at Rhodes in 2018 as a first-year student. Even then I knew that I'd be majoring in English because I wanted to be a writer. My impression was that I'd be doing my Master's in the English department but the teaching staff advised me to apply to the School of Languages for a Master's in Creative Writing. I was excited about the course from the get-go because I'd finally get to be creative with my writing and not be confined by the academic writing expectations of the institution that I'd faced before. I expected to be reading other students' work and seeing different styles of writing. The orientation week set the tone of what we would see for the year, we had students and teachers read our work and give us feedback on it.

## Part 1: Coursework Reflective Journals

6<sup>th</sup> February

The first week of classes was facilitated by Henali Kuit who is currently teaching abroad, so our meeting had to be on Zoom. Her seminar was titled Writing Simply which focused on the use of the literary device of motif as a means of keeping work simple and tight.

Our course is a year long and it is divided into two semesters where we do coursework in the first semester and then thesis work in the second semester. As part of the coursework in the first semester we had weekly reading sessions on Tuesdays where we got to bring work to read to our classmates and discuss it. During this week's reading session I read the short story "Girl" by Jamaica Kincaid. I found it interesting hearing that while I was not very impressed with the mother's condescending ways towards her daughter, my classmates thought the mother could be noted for her protective stance towards her daughter's growth as a woman.

Each week a new teacher comes to take us for a seminar and we submit weekly assignments based on the weekly seminars we have. The experience with this week's assignment of writing on a piece that uses motif was a tricky one at first as I did not know what type of text to use but I ended up using a song.

A). In Mali Music's *Contradiction* ft. Jhene Aiko, the chorus appears three times. It goes:

"If you say that it's over, I won't die x2

I'll just come back for more

We'll meet again for sure

If you say that it's over, I won't die"

With the line "If you say that it's over I won't die", there is a backing vocal of "No, no", as if to, with words, prevent both the break up and the possible death caused by it. The chorus as a motif in this song forms just like a motif does – a pattern. It's the lyrics that the song keeps going back to as though to remind the listener what the song is about – that being the contradiction of wanting to come back to an ex-lover but also realising there being life after the breakup. The chorus acts as a connection between the other parts of the song because it occurs after the first verse and then after the second verse. It is in synch with these verses because the message is the same. After that there is what is called the bridge of the song. Naturally the bridge of a song may provide some contradiction to the rest of the song's message and in *Contradiction* this is the part of the song where one lover asks the other to not end their relationship hence:

"You don't have to say it's over

You don't have to say it's through

You don't have to say it's time

Just goes back to you, yeah, just goes back to you.”

The second part of the assignment was producing our own work which includes some elements of motif. I wasn't thinking for long before I decided what to write about. Like all my other stories that I have written, this story stemmed from my own life including characters that, much like the concept of motif itself, are recurring. I always write about my grandmother (uMakhulu) because I spent so much time with her growing up as well as my cousin who features as uMzala in my stories. My chosen element of motif is my grandmother's cloth knot in which she kept her money and in the story the young narrator's mind constantly wanders back to the money knot. It goes as far as personifying the notes and coins by wondering about their feelings as they are enclosed in the money knot.

13<sup>th</sup> February

The week started off with a seminar by one of our teachers and poet Mxolisi Nyezwa. The seminar was titled Meeting Poetry and it was to focus on arranging our writing poetically and I was immediately nervous because I have never written poetry. I was challenged out of my prose writing bubble in order to meet the week's assignment.

During the Tuesday reading session we read with Paul Wessels and Manga Buzani from the two readers we had received during orientation week and some of the titles that stood out for me include Maaza Mengiste's "Invisible Map", which I had chosen to read. I recognised Mengiste from a section of our honours course last year where we had the choice of reading a book by her titled *The Shadow King*. I didn't read the book because I found it difficult to read so when I saw her story I was keen to try something else by her. There was a significant focus on places throughout the story such that it travelled with the reader across different landscapes for the pursuit of the main character's immigration journey.

We are also expected to be reading books that interest us outside of class and this is what we call the reading research. For my reading research I got to read *One Hundred Days of Rain* by Carellin Brooks as well as Sindiswa Busuku-Mathese's *Loud and Yellow Laughter*. These were both significantly easy books to get through in terms of the language used but I am worried that I may be missing a bigger picture of what the books are about. *One Hundred Days of Rain* gets through ninety-nine chapters with an unnamed narrator and the subject seems to be the same: rain. This is following the narrator's break up with her romantic partner. She wakes up every day to notice the multifaceted recurring rain so she tries to find the different purposes that rain serves and how different rain is across the different days.

On the other hand, *Loud and Yellow Laughter* is an encounter of a family's history – a character named The Mother is a black woman who was married previously and The Father is an older white man who not only isn't in contact with his biological child but does not mention her at all to his adopted child that he shares with The Mother. In both books, characters are named after alphabets such as S to refer to The Father's first child in *Loud and Yellow Laughter* and to refer to the narrator's ex-lover in *One Hundred Days of Rain*. I feel that in both books practise minimalism in the plot. The chapters and scenes are short which makes the books palatable.

We had our first poetry reading evening on Thursday with Manga and it just made me nervous about the week's assignment which is also poetry. According to the feedback I keep receiving from my classmates I think they do get the essence of what my work is about and they enjoy it, which I didn't expect for the poetry assignment. Editing my piece I am hoping to reduce the words I use to get my point across – I used very few words in my original piece but I guess I can go fewer and simpler.

20<sup>th</sup> February

In Kerry Hammerton's seminar on Fierce Writing I found the reading material a bit heavy for me and I was grateful that it was over Zoom where I could mute myself and not turn on my camera. For example I found myself quite emotional at vangile gantsho's untitled poem from her book of poems "Red Cotton." It vividly spoke about sexual harassment of a woman by several men. Some of the most clearly written lines from the piece include "the man on my wrist shoves his tongue down my throat" which is written in the present tense giving the effect of it happening as the reader is receiving the text.

In our Tuesday reading group Veronique brought a poem titled "Throw Yourself like a Seed" by Miguel de Unamuno – a poem which challenges the reader to get over the bad things about life and focus on the positive aspects. Initially I interpreted this poem as we work until we die and then I heard that it is commonly interpreted as that one's life work doesn't have to be burdensome.

Going into this week's assignment I was worried about not having enough things to write about. But then we were given prompts which made it easier. I really enjoyed the writing prompts that asked us to reflect on family life because writing about my family is a huge part of my writing.

I love that the poetry reading sessions are good for discovering new South African poets.

For my reading research I'm currently reading Es'kia Mphahlele's collection of short stories titled *In Corner B* which I'm enjoying because much of the work I have written has been in the short story form and has been autobiographical much like Mphahlele's book.

The feedback session suggested that I put in more intensity into my work and that I be as specific as possible but without repeating myself. Going into the editing of my pieces I applied the feedback received from Kerry to keep the suspense going.

27<sup>th</sup> February

Stacy Hardy's Epistolary seminar introduced us to writing in the form of letters. It made me think of two books namely Julia Alvarez's *Return to Sender* as well as Mariama Ba titled *So Long a Letter*. I had read both books without necessarily thinking of why the structure was chosen and I was glad to see an excerpt from the latter included for the seminar.

I was most excited by the pieces which explored family life and the letters written to or about family members whether alive or dead. One such piece was by Victoria Chang from her book of letters titled *Dear Memory: Letters, Silence and Grief* where she questions her mother of her origins – she wants to know where she was born and what her American birthday is. This piece sparked me some interest because I also have some women in my life I would like to know more about.

For the week's assignment I wrote one such piece for my late maternal grandmother who I never got to meet as she died four years before I was born. Until this seminar I had never wondered why my mother never talks about her. She always speaks about her father who was deceased before her mother but has little to nothing to say about her mother. So when I wrote the letter to uMamCwerha, my grandmother's clan name, I wrote her to ask why I know nothing about her.

During the feedback session on Friday it was said that the letter to uMamCwerhaFirst was in the moment and had coherently detailed my feelings towards my grandmother. It was also said that I should find more reasons as to why no one talks about her which I did not know how to take because that was the purpose of the letter to speak to her about the silence around her name in our homes as her grandchildren.

On Tuesday for our reading group I enjoyed a piece titled "Albino Orma" by Silvina Ocapo for its innocence and non-focus on child sexual trauma. Reading the piece you almost expect a child to be molested and sexualised by an older person but it doesn't happen. The experimentation of children on their sexuality is what the piece is about, which does not have to be harmful to the children.

I read *Tjieng Tjang Tjerries and Other Stories* by Jolyn Phillips this week and I really enjoyed the stories. They had a rich feel of the context in which they're written. There are two stories that appear consecutively in the collection whose connection felt stronger than any other and they're titled "The Pair of Glasses" and "The Funeral Singer" respectively and there is an overlap of characters such as Ouma, Oupa and Auntie Martha. They felt like one story divided into two and this made me think about my work where I also use the same characters in different pieces.

6<sup>th</sup> March

In Jo-Ann Bekker's seminar titled Writing Obliquely we learnt about writing about emotional situations in a way that looks like the piece is focusing on something else completely. We got to read some short pieces by Lydia Davis titled "The Sock" and "The Outing" respectively. "The Sock" explored the narrator's emotions of loss through the interrogation of her ex-husband's socks and feet and time they spent together. From the beginning of the story we can tell that the narrator is having a difficult time letting go of the life she had with her ex-husband. "The Outing" is an exploring of the outside such as the "road, path, woods, bridge, bushes" – it feels like a built up to something, to the adventures of the wilderness and this is all done in one sentence.

In the reading group on Tuesday I found a piece titled "A Smell of Wood and of Silence" by Piano Barros interesting. The first time I read it things felt a little blurry but then I realised that was the purpose because no matter how many times I read it there was that sense of not being sure if things were taking place or if it was all in the narrator's mind. The narrator was always sleeping which makes the line between the events happening in real time and those happening in her sleep quite blurry for the reader and I enjoyed this piece because it left me thinking if it is important to know of the difference.

I wrote a piece that I wasn't very sure would fit this week's assignment. It was at the feedback session where I found out that the problem wasn't that it didn't fit in and that it was just repetitive. So repetitive that I was tired reading it out loud to the rest of the class. I have no problem making my pieces tighter, as I received feedback suggesting that I should, but I think I did get carried away when the instructions said we must try to push ourselves for 2000 words if we're writing prose.

This week I started reading *Women as Lovers* by Austrian writer Elfriede Jelinek which I find an easy enough read but not striking enough to the extent that I can't put it down.

13<sup>th</sup> March

I did not know Paul Mason's Narrative Convention seminar could be taught because it is the common way of storytelling and is what we're challenged to move away from in a way.

The reading group featured some folklore such as "Talk" by Ghanaian author Ashanti. This took me back to the stories my grandmother told us growing up which featured singing and talking animals. Repetition was used to get points across because the stories were reserved for children and that is how children learn.

The poetry session on Thursday was based on the poems we'll be focusing on next week in Marike Beyers' seminar. I read "The Elephant" by Carlos Drummond de Andrade out loud to the group which I thought was intriguing because the speaker builds something from their "scant resources", sends it out to be received by the world and then has to rebuild it the next day. This spoke to me as a creative writing student who hopes to work as a writer that the world will receive our elephants in whatever way it does but that doesn't mean one needs to stop writing, building and recreating.

For this week's assignment we wrote story outlines and then exchanged them during the seminar. From there we went home and wrote conventional stories based on words someone else had put together. There were two parts to the assignment and the feedback I received from the first part was that I need to get to the inciting incident in less time. Going into the second part of the assignment which was to write a not so conventional version of the story focusing on the consciousness of a different character from the first part of the assignment I was challenged to write from the point of view of a wild animal. Exciting.

20<sup>th</sup> March

The brief for this week's assignment was brief because we had already read the poems in the Thursday poetry session so we knew the poems that resonated with us the most and were able to share them during the session. I really liked "My Death" by Robert Berold because of its sound: it had a repetition of similes as well as some vivid images. One simile goes, "I want to die in bed or sitting on a chair / like an old car", and a second one is, "Stop eating altogether like my dog Max", which describes the specifics of the way the speaker imagines their death.

Working on this week's assignment my focus has been my relationship with my father as a young girl. One piece is about how he always told me I'm asleep unless I've made my bed each morning as I was getting ready and running late for school. He would say this as he made my bed for me because no matter how early I got up I never seemed to have time to make my bed.

I am currently enjoying reading *Muriel at Metropolitan* by Miriam Tlali. It's exciting in the sense that it gives a different side of apartheid living conditions for black people which is outside of the child headed black home while the mother is a domestic worker who can only come home once a month for a weekend. It shows a more 'sophisticated' working environment for women even though the working conditions are still unbearable.

The poetry session on Thursday ran for two hours 7 but it was worthwhile. The very evident theme across the poems was survival and war in Europe and the poems that stood out for me include "The Burning of the Books" by German writer Bertolt Brecht which from the title speaks about the act of banning of books which are considered not in line with the ideals of a war or regime.

The feedback session on Friday was gentle but direct. Going out of there I knew exactly what I could change about my work for the edited version. There was a suggestion to change the title for my first piece and I've admitted before that I never know what to name my pieces – I will have everything written out but still not have a title.

27<sup>th</sup> March

We did not like being on campus on a public holiday – Human Rights Day at that. Masande Ntshanga took us for a seminar titled Voice which was meant to help us establish our voices as writers. He couldn't be with us in person nor could he make it to Zoom so he sent us some material to read from. I found the readings repetitive, the interview between his writer idol Vivtor Lavelle and Amy Minton doubled as a working definition for voice in the On Voice: An Experimental Seminar reading which turned everything into a drag to read. It felt like Paul W was doing his work for him. Sending us things to read and not interacting with us at all just feels quite lazy to me. Everyone has their own teaching methods but to what extend can we call this teaching? I understand the inspiration of finding one's voice through another already establish author's but the whole thing felt like Masande was telling us all about his admiration for Lavelle but not so much about himself. It felt like we had come to a seminar to learn about Lavelle and nothing about Ntshanga.

In the reading group this week I found Juliet Escario's "Dust Particles" astonishing. Just like a piece we read in one of the reading groups, it spoke to sexual acts in relation to children. Unlike the other piece which showcased the exploring of sexuality by children, this one had the influence of an adult and therefore was overbearing. I appreciated how Escario leaves room for the reader to figure it out. We're not told that the father sexually abuses his daughter but we sense it in the way his presence impacts her and therefore the way she acts around him.

My book review writing process has began with deciding on which books I will be reviewing and my decision is *Tjieng Tjang Tjerries and Other Stories* by Jolyn Phillips as well as *Muriel at Metropolitan* by Miriam Tlali. I've decided on these books because one is a collection of short stories and one is a novel so I get to explore prose as a prose writer. I think this is a good balance between my interests. Both books are by South African women of colour whose writing careers have primed at different times in South African history.

Giving feedback to my classmates virtually on Friday felt different because they were not there to read their own work so if I read past words a little too fast or was too slow at fast paced parts they were not there to correct me. The feedback that I received was that my piece was economic and the revision I made from the original piece to the revised piece was evident.

3<sup>rd</sup> April

This week we did all our work from home. I had the time of my life during the last two years where we did our studies from home due to the pandemic and this reminded me of that.

I had time to read *A Walk in the Night* by human rights activist and apartheid struggle hero Alex La Guma. *A Walk in the Night* at some point covers the defying of the Racial Registration Act in an instance where a white man lives in an area designated for coloured people. When he dies in the hands of a coloured man he was drinking cheap wine with, the constable who is called in cannot help but note the dead man's whiteness among the pool of coloured faces who have reported him dead and who are present when the police assess the scene of the crime.

The poetry reading session on Thursday went well. We finished off the work by the 20<sup>th</sup> century Spanish poets under which we covered "Cold in Hand Blues" which takes the form of question and answer from one line to the next. For example the first line goes, "and what is it you're going to say" and the second line goes, "i'm just going to say something", and my favourite is, "and what's this you're going to do", and the answer in the fourth line goes, "I'm going to hide behind language."

My book reviewing process has consisted of me reading more book reviews and hopefully finding my own stance from there.

I loved being home for a week.

10<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> April

The poetics week introduced me to a lot of readings I found interesting. Amina Cain's "Slowness" discussed slow writing and how far that can be pushed in writing in a way that the reader still manages to stay with the writer.

Thinking about writing the essay and writing the essay were two different experiences. I think I took a long time thinking about how difficult it would be to write something I felt I didn't know all the instructions to. Once I started writing it I just kept going weaving my thoughts and impressions in the different readings that stood out for me during the poetics week. As I was transitioning across the paragraphs and speaking of the different readings my mind kept going back to the one instruction I remembered that there needs to be a connection between one paragraph to the next which means I need to organise my thoughts. Non-academic writing does not mean sloppy writing but then again the focus shouldn't be so much that this is not academic writing.

Going into the feedback session for the essay I feel that some feedback from whoever will be assessing the essays will be that it was too academic. Whatever that means. That having been the only way I have known how to write essays. That having been the very way I had to push out of my mind in order to get the week's task done. I don't do well with instructions because they obviously limit me. I do worse with instructions that are said to not be instructions so whatever feedback I receive I assume will be based on that.

24<sup>th</sup> April

For the second part of the first semester after coming back from spending some time at home we were separated into prose and poetry. We met Henali for our first seminar as separated entities for a seminar on Overwriting which challenged us to write without explaining ourselves. We read “Insomnia” by K-Ming Chang which I enjoyed because I believe it spoke to part of the week’s assignment which says we should write about a cultural practice or a family ritual but without explaining it to the reader. “Insomnia” covers a practise called acupuncture which is performed to cure insomnia and the story goes on about the narrator’s visit to an Ouyang Ayi to seek this curing.

I have drafts for both my book reviews. I am ready to start drafting a book review overview.

For the first part of this week’s assignment I went back to a piece I wrote for one of the assignments in the course and it is titled “A Jar of Water”, from Jo-Ann’s Writing Obliquely assignment. The instruction was to choose a piece and cut it down by 50%, whatever that means for you as a writer. I took that as cutting down on the word count so of my 1500-word original piece that I submitted for Jo, I cut it down to 750 words. With the words that I have left I am trying to make sense out of it.

Writing the second part of the assignment I as usual went back to my childhood and looked back to the times where traditional healers would visit a certain home in our village where a member of that household was being transitioned into becoming a traditional healer. They would spend days familiarising the initiate’s family into the kind of life their kin would now be living as well as giving the initiate their first experiences into their new role in the presence of family. Every villager would attend and that is where we would experience music, dancing and the playing of the drum for so long during the day and into the night. That is what I wrote the second piece of my assignment on and I eventually titled it “Walking to the Light.”

I started reading *The Collected Stories of Lydia Davis* which I am excited about. I picked up two titles within the collection titled “Agreements” and “Disagreements” respectively. “Agreements” was so much longer than the “Disagreements” piece which I would at face value have taken to mean that there are more things to agree on than disagree on. But “Agreements” is longer explaining the things the subjects should be agreeing on but aren’t.

The feedback that I received regarding my week’s assignment was that my work was too descriptive and it read as though it was meant to be longer which meant it didn’t do well as a standalone short piece. Going into the editing for Sunday’s submission of the assignment I shortened the work further.

1<sup>st</sup> May

The week started off with Carol Leff's seminar titled Place which I really enjoyed because it reminded me of a paper that we did in my honours year in the English Department which was named Imaginings of Place in South African Literature. I really enjoyed the paper because it was taught well and looking at this week's work there was a common text between last year's paper and this week's assigned readings. This was K Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* which is set in the Cape and follows the life of a twelve/thirteen-year-old who lives on the streets in the post-apartheid South Africa context. The novel as a whole being set under bridges, in shacks, on the sea and the mountains has a very strong sense of place so when an extract from it turned up again this year under a similar theme we're studying it felt natural.

The reading group went well as we were joined by Manga. It felt very laid back and creative. Yenzo brought a long piece that took a whole hour to finish reading out loud. It's titled "In Retrospect, The Days Were Fresh and Easy" by Jereme Dean. It was entertaining to listen to even though it went on and on and something we agreed on when discussing it was that it was a great piece to have someone else read and the rest of us listening to because when reading it by ourselves in preparation for the session it was hard to finish in one sitting.

The feedback session on Friday was on Zoom and we discussed both mine and Savani's work. Carol seemed to be very excited to be reading and giving feedback on our work. The session went really well and there wasn't much editing to be done because the feedback was mostly positive.

8<sup>th</sup> May

Going into the Effective Dialogue with Chwayita Ngamlana seminar I was very sick. My whole body could barely carry me through anything such that even walking to the venue was a drag. We had the seminar outside the Drama Department because our building was closed and we couldn't access it with our student cards.

I was intrigued by a piece by Charlotte Perkins Gilman where dialogue wasn't necessarily spelt out for the reader in the form of the presence of quotation marks so while reading the piece we had to follow enough to find out which parts were speech and which were narration. This is something we talked about that dialogue isn't always a moment.

During the reading group on Tuesday I read from the *South African Post-Apartheid Stories* collection and the story was titled "You are The Daughter" by Rayda Jacobs. This story was not what I expected in the sense that even though the title of the collection explicitly said all the stories were all South African, I did not read the story as local. It was so foreign to me in terms of its cultural practices that I placed it anywhere else in the world but here and it wasn't until I read it for the second time and picked up that it mentioned a suburb in the Western Cape called Rondebosch that I knew it was South African. These foreign practices included the washing of a mother's corpse and its private parts by the daughter hence the title.

I also finally went to the San where they gave me all sorts of medication and also tested me for covid19.

I managed to finish the short pieces in *The Collected Stories of Lydia Davis*. I think I may have gone into it overhyped from the excellent pieces by Lydia Davis that we read in the reading sessions because the ones in her book I'm not so sure about.

For this week's assignment we were meant to write two pieces: one which only uses dialogue and another that uses the style of writing we would use for all our other pieces. This was so we could see how effectively we could use dialogue in writing by reading the piece with the dialogue first and then having our classmates guess what we wanted to say before revealing the other piece which would explain things better. We submitted this week's assignment a little differently from the other weeks' assignments in the sense that we did not submit on Thursday night for our classmates to go through before the Friday feedback. This means the first time everyone saw each other's work was on Friday during the feedback session. The feedback that I got for my assignment was that it worked. Chwayita said she could not fault it. Mbe and Savani agreed so I just submitted it as it was on Sunday evening.

15<sup>th</sup> May

The week started off with Paul M's seminar on Soliloquys, Monologues and Prose where we were meant to address an institution or a practice by writing a rant. The session itself wasn't anything I was excited about.

The reading group on Tuesday was just us girls as Manga didn't join us and Mbe wasn't there. I really enjoyed sharing "Shhhh" by NoViolet Bulawayo from her novel *We Need New Names* with the class. Just like the title says the story really speaks to the names the children, one of whom is the narrator, Darling, are given such as Stina, Bastard and Godknows which are names that are striking to me. And the name of the place where the story is set is Paradise but its conditions of poverty are the opposite of the idea of paradise.

The feedback session on Friday was terrible. Paul M thought there were so many ways I could improve my piece starting from him not getting who the rant was addressing. That is only something a white man would say because my piece was about black people being excluded and when included being made uncomfortable in spaces reserved for white people specifically the academic spaces such as universities. Being someone who was always allowed to exist anywhere I guess the response I got from Paul M shouldn't have come as a surprise. He literally tore my piece apart and I was expected to just be there and listen to him because he's the teacher and he knows what rants should sound like and how "clear" they should be. I don't think my piece was perfect but there was so much credit it deserved that Paul took away from it. My classmates had to explain to him what they thought my piece was about to which he admitted to have completely missed it.

29<sup>th</sup> May

Stacy's seminar on Punctuation took place on Monday over Zoom.

The piece that I chose to rework as part of this week's assignment is one that I have written in the past (as per the instructions) and I structured it in accordance to the week's instructions. This is a piece I had written as part of a bigger piece, a short story. I eventually titled the piece "The Man and his Children."

The revised piece with the punctuation changed the meaning of the piece in the sense that the sentences are shorter which means there is more opportunity to take in the scenario as it happens instead of longer sentences where it's harder to pick things up. Also, the revised piece with the punctuation changed the meaning by introducing the concept of leaving sooner to the reader. I think with the longer piece the events were just stated in a matter-of-fact tone whereas with this revised one there is a recurring theme of leaving and loss. Leaving from when my uncle left his children to be taken care of by their respective maternal families as well as the sense of one of my uncle's children coming to our homestead to visit us and then leaving without telling us he was leaving. He kept doing that such that we did not even ask him about it anymore in the same way no one was making my uncle take responsibility for his children.

The second piece I wrote was about growing up in the village with my grandmother. So this one is based on the reality that my grandma sent me to school at age four because she thought I was a lot of work to handle at home for the whole day. She needed me to spend some time away from her so she would not be running after me the whole time. As the story turns out it is one of my older cousins who had to run after me each morning in order to get me to school because I simply did not want to go. So the story unfolds as the repetitive events of waking up, being ran after to go to school and the piece is so descriptive in the way my cousin runs after me around the yard but can never reach me until the time I actually need to be at school.

5<sup>th</sup> June

This week started with Chwayita's seminar on Sex and my initial impressions were that she's the best person to teach this seminar because of the contents of her book *If I Stay Right Here* which covers the topic on a broader spectrum. Going into the assignment the brief was to write a sex scene but with a purpose.

The reading group covered a Ghanaian story titled "Ekow" by writer Ayesha Harruna Attah, a piece about coming home after being abroad for years and trying to find one's own place again amongst the rest of the family who stayed. The narrator comes face to face with the gate at her home several times but she doesn't enter and she insists on driving to as many places as possible before deciding to go inside the homestead. One of the places she visits is her sister's house where her sister lives with her children. The husband seems to be neither here nor there but they discuss him as someone coming over/back to help with the children while looking at pictures of him.

The lives of the sisters can be looked at side by side, the narrator being the sister who went away and feels she has nothing to show for it. The sister being the one who remained and built a family but is having marital problems and her children barely get to see their father. This story is about transnationalism and the expectations to have created an exquisite life abroad by one's proud family. It's also about the one who left coming home to realise how much everyone else's lives have changed during the time they were gone.

Writing about sex felt weird for me because I have never done it. The feedback that I received regarding my piece was that it needed to be more descriptive on some parts. I needed to be very specific on the acts that were taking place and make it known outside of the Sex seminar that I was writing about sex.

This week was successful for me because I enjoyed the readers in the reading group and I also found editing the work for Sunday evening incorporating the feedback received worthwhile and helpful to improve my piece.

12<sup>th</sup> June

This week started with Jo-Ann's seminar on (Re)Writing Children which was delightful. I got to write two pieces and I went into the week's assignment with the idea of church in my mind with both pieces cantering how children see church and carry themselves around the church environment.

I always feel like I didn't write the work when people comment on it because it's interesting to listen to the things other people pick up that I achieved with the work without even realising that this is what I was doing. I believe it may have to do with the belief that the work speaks for itself outside of you as the writer.

We were also required to reflect on the editing process while writing the work. I prefer silence when I write. Growing up I would write in the night or early in the morning when everyone was asleep. In the editing process I get the chance to speak myself through the work in the sense that I listen to it and hear if it makes sense. That's the time where I allow some noise into my creative process. The mumbling to myself and speaking to myself as I edit allows for me to catch the parts of it that aren't as strong and I can strengthen them.

The overall feedback was that both pieces worked successfully for the week's assignment. Both pieces could use a little tweaking on one or two sentences each to add more description. Since writing on children who are beings with all this time in the world to notice things and pick things up, the assumption is that they will be as descriptive as possible in their writing so I had to put more descriptions into the work going forward with my edited version.

The reading group covered a piece by South African poet Mxolisi Dolla Sapeta titled "Violent Seed" which looked at the township life from a sympathetic point of view, sympathetic of the circumstances as well as the means people make to get through those circumstances. The image about the beach in the piece reminded me of a poem by another South African poet Koleka Putuma who writes about black people from townships around the country visiting the beach during the December/January holidays and making a sea of black bodies while at it. To the white people, this is the time to hold their purses close and be tolerant of so many black people existing at once in a space they have to themselves for the rest of the year. I find that I enjoy the words of poets when they deliver them in a manner I can grasp, I get bored of reading poetry when it's too poetic and needs too much background research.

## Part 2: Thesis Reflective Journals

10<sup>th</sup> July

It was great to have our part time classmates with us as well as the rest of the teachers. The feedback sessions had a bit more variety because different people were able to comment on one's work during the different sessions we had across the days. It did also make me feel a bit anxious finding out what people thought about my work, whether I was or wasn't confident about it.

We were asked to divide some of the work we has written into three parts: the work we were confident about, the work we were still working on, as well as the pieces we were not confident about. It was great to hear that the teachers wanted me to explore more poetry when I read some of my poems which fell under the category of work I was confident about. They particularly enjoyed that they could still recognise me in the work even though I had attempted a different genre from my usual prose.

The feedback on the book reviews being that they needed to feel more personal wasn't anything that took me by surprise because I wasn't confident about them while writing them. Despite this there was a comment from one of the teachers about the review I wrote for *The Collected Stories of Lydia Davis* that I had created a space for myself to write the review as openly as possible, which showed my stance in the themes of the book.

It was interesting to see the different responses for work from teachers I had written the work for as opposed to those who were reading it for the first time. Where the latter needed some explanations for some things before making their own immediate assumptions, the former spoke up and said "I think she meant to do this"/ "I remember this piece and we decided this meant that", which was funny and relieving at the same time.

It was great to see some of the work our part time classmates had managed to do up to that point. We remembered that they were experiencing some of the earlier difficulties we had had with the course ourselves and were still finding their feet and their tone in their writing.

Overall, the contact week went well and it was so refreshing seeing people we'd last seen in January and hearing what they thought about our progress as writers thus far.

17<sup>th</sup> July

I spent much of this week regrouping after the previous week of being on campus every day. As much as it was great seeing everyone now it was time to think about all the feedback and think about the best ways to incorporate it into my writing going forward. So I started by editing my pieces which I had read for feedback during the week.

The poems which I had read and were the audience's favourites were easier to edit because they were short. As much as I knew they couldn't form part of my thesis because that is prose only, it was good knowing that were there and I could go back to them whenever I needed to – if I need to.

I moved on to the short prose pieces. Editing them brought me to life much like the time I felt when I originally wrote them. It felt like with each edit, they were coming to be what I had envisioned for them all that while back.

Contrary to what I thought when starting this course, I realised a lot of the thesis would be formed by shorter prose pieces as opposed to longer short stories. I wondered how it would look like incorporating a few of the short stories instead of making it all short prose or as I had thought previously, all short stories. This is for variety because a lot of the pieces I have submitted for the weekly assignments have been getting shorter each week and I realise I have some that were longer pieces. I'm looking to start working on placing together my work for my thesis. I know that's probably the last thing we will be thinking about but I want to see how the final version will look when they are placed next to each other; which piece will come first and which will follow and why.

24<sup>th</sup> July

I tried to get in touch with my supervisor this week to ask that we have a plan as to how I'd get the work to her and how frequently we'd meet for feedback and before sending more work. I just wanted to devise a working plan for the draft thesis.

When I emailed her I was met with an automated message stating that she was out of office and wouldn't be back until sometime in August. This got me panicking because I was ready to get the ball rolling with her and what took me aback even more is that no one told me she wouldn't be available for some time. I felt a little bit out of the loop but I realised I just needed to keep writing and she would attend to everything when she could.

The task that I challenged myself to continue with was producing the latest version of the thesis abstract. The first draft went sideways very quickly so from that feedback session I knew I would have to keep revising it until it met the expected standard. I had sent one more version after the first one and there were a lot of edits on things I needed to expand on or be succinct about so I used this week to work on the third draft which I am hoping is closer and closer to the version being sought.

Carol, my supervisor, got back to me and explained that she was away for health treatment that is why she wasn't available. She also said she was now available so we could meet via Zoom and discuss a way forward. This came as a relief so I continued putting together work that I would send to her for feedback.

I find the process of sharing new work exciting because I don't know what my supervisor or the examiners will think of it. Yes, not knowing makes me excited sometimes. I'm also thrilled that the work is reaching more viewers, no matter what the reaction becomes from these new readers.

I'm happy to share work that I have written during the year and thought I wasn't comfortable enough to share. There has happened inside me some form of letting go, which existed before because my work has been said to possess some depth, but I believe this exists at a more carefree level now with this new collection of work I am sending for review. I'm looking forward to more of this with the continuation of the thesis.

31<sup>st</sup> July

This week I met with Carol and we decided that I should send a bulk of work to her each week. The meeting was on a Monday so we decided Mondays are the days I send her work and then later during the week on maybe a Thursday we meet to discuss feedback for the work sent on a Monday. However, she couldn't meet me on the Thursday to discuss feedback for the 17 pages of work I had sent because she was travelling to Gauteng for a family emergency. We decided we'd use the following Tuesday to do the feedback session which is when she would be back from her travelling.

I used the week to focus on writing more and meeting the following Monday's deadline when I would have to send more work. My focus in my writing has been to write work that speaks to the work I've already written, the work I know will be in the thesis. This is so it exists as a collection of work. I read on the student handbook that one's thesis does not have to be a body of work necessarily ready to be published or form a book by the end but for some reason it's important to me that it speak to each other. Maybe this is from having repeatedly mentioned in the different drafts of the thesis abstract that the work is a collection.

So I have been writing more of what I call my Makhulu stories, uMakhulu being the character who keeps appearing in the earlier stories taking place in the village. So nothing has changed with regards to that. There are more characters because the time I spent at Makhulu's house was spent in the presence of a lot of extended family who will also be making an appearance which will reveal their contribution to matters as they are today.

Revisiting these moments and being able to write about them has done a lot to me, it has made me realise that there are so many things I have overlooked in my life. There are so many things I have tolerated because I thought that's just the way things were. Writing about them makes me feel that I am doing something about them, even if I couldn't do so then. This is some of what writing has been able to do for me and it is so liberating being able to do this in a course than encourages just this.

7<sup>th</sup> August

This week started off with me sending another 14 pages to my supervisor to look at. On the Tuesday we had the meeting which was quite brief where she informed me that she was still reading the work so she didn't have enough to say about it yet. From what she had picked up so far she was able to comment on the style and tone of the writing – that it was mostly consistent in its colloquial and conversational sense.

She also commended me on discussing some rather controversial matters which is something I said I would want to hear her say again after she'd read the whole thing because I wasn't sure about it. She found the work honest and mature with the former being something that I aimed for because I want the reader to accept the work even if they don't relate to it. I want the reader to believe the work even if they don't know what in the world I'm taking about.

With the work I am to send to my supervisor next I have found it leaning more towards my earliest childhood memories and this was before I moved to Makhulu's, before I came back to the Joe Slovo Township which has been described multiple times in the pieces I've written about. These new pieces describe a Joe Slovo in the shacks before the RDP houses and I was even surprised myself that I could fish in my memory of an event from that long ago. In a different piece I also write about Mama's side of the family, with uDabsi, uMakhulu, uMzala and everyone having been Tata's side of the family. The reader gets to meet Aunt Lucia who is Mama's youngest sister. I'm excited to hear what my supervisor will think about her because not only is she a strong character on paper, she is also a very strong character in real life.

14<sup>th</sup> August

I started this week by going through some feedback I had been sent by my supervisor on work I had sent to her. It was three 8-page short stories that I had wanted her to look at because I was concerned if the genre was working as best as it could for me at this point in my writing. I decided to not send a lot of the same genre at once in case the feedback became repetitive as it sometimes did granted because I have my same style of writing.

The general feedback was that I needed to cut the stories down by half which I understood and accepted. I noticed that with my short stories I do the thing of closing off the story with a concluding paragraph which may even leave the reader with a message, a “life lesson” which my supervisor advised me wasn’t necessary. As I read it back to myself I also realised it was as though I was trying to explain myself or I didn’t trust my reader to make their own judgement of the situation.

Moving forward and seeing my work being cut down made me realise that I needed to produce at a faster pace than I was sending work for feedback if I was to meet the word count in time. During this time I found inspiration in my surroundings and took notes about things I’d write about later which was something I hadn’t necessarily done before.

I loved revisiting a short story I had printed for the reading group earlier this year but never got to read to the class and discuss it with them. It’s titled “Thoughts in a Train” by South African writer Mango Tshabangu and it speaks about a very specific act of catching a train from Soweto to Johannesburg where black workers are packed against each other seated, standing and balancing on each other in the moving train. The journey is said to take forty minutes or forty days which speaks to the irrelevance of time in such unbearable conditions. There is a second train to which someone throws something through its window that are always shut, the train that is mostly empty because it is for the white people. I loved this story because it moved quietly on the page but it was a protest on racial segregation as enforced by apartheid South Africa.

21<sup>st</sup> August

This week both my supervisor and I were feeling a little under the weather, I had caught a flu which had my chest and nose blocked and my head so heavy I couldn't look at a computer screen so I put off sending her more work as well as meeting with her about previous work I had sent her.

I read from *The Granta Book of the African Short Stories* and I thought to start off with an African author whose work I'm familiar with but then I thought where's the fun in that? So I picked up a story titled "Homecoming" by Milly Jafta and I really enjoyed how it doesn't seem to go anywhere because it starts with the narrator getting off a bus and then ends with her and her daughter still walking home, still not arrived. But it does a lot of background information such that we know the narrator left home for forty years, lived in a foreign country where she couldn't open her door to strangers like everyone did at home in the village, wasn't there to see her children grow and is now scared everyone will see her as the failed parent she is.

I loved the symbolism in her daughter asking if she needed her to slow down so she could keep up as they walked. She feels to have not kept up with her life up to that point such that the question feels so considerate of her daughter. By the end her daughter tells her she can walk before her and set the pace in which they would both walk and will in turn to be the one to get home first. It's a small act of consideration that lets her feel as though she is in control of something and if she wanted could be in control of bigger things.

\*\*\*\*\*

28<sup>th</sup> August

This week my supervisor emailed me saying she'd like to postpone our meeting. She also said she thought the previous batch of work I had sent her where I had continued, from the assignments I had written during the first semester, to experimented with shorter prose had worked better than the longer short stories. I took this as an opportunity to write more pieces in this form so that I could send them to her and by the time we could meet there would be a significant amount of work to get through for feedback.

All continued as thought I had been writing in this form for a long time and I really enjoyed reading the work back to myself. It was refreshing and light while tackling heavy subjects so I was confident about sending it for feedback because my supervisor and anyone else who read my work often picks up things that work that I had not realised I was even doing.

4<sup>th</sup> September

I had previously written a piece for a session my supervisor had taught the prose students during the year on Place. She had given positive feedback on it as it paid attention to detail and it had followed the prompts of the assignment so I thought to extend on that piece. I wrote shorter pieces under the main piece. The main piece is titled Sipheka Street and it gives a general account of what the street I grew up on looks like as well as what happens there.

The shorter pieces which I wrote under the piece then dealt with what happens in each house in Sipheka Street so they are titled with the numbers of each house being written about. I think what inspired me to go back to this piece and extend on it is knowing that I hadn't been able to capture everything in the main piece I had originally written.

I sent the above together with my portfolio work which included all four book reviews which I had edited as per the feedback from the contact week.

\*\*\*\*\*

11<sup>th</sup> September

This week started off with feedback from my supervisor for the work I had sent last week which was about the street I grew up on as well as the book reviews. We met and she told me that I had an eye to make things correlate in a way that she had not expected. One of the pieces I had written about was about a school girl who falls pregnant and she has to wear her school uniform with her big belly and she said that highlighted the contrast that should exist between children and pregnancy.

Her feedback on the book reviews was different from the guidelines we had been given as well as the feedback I had received during the contact week. During the contact week I was dared to include more of myself in the review, to actually say how everything felt for me because I had written them as how a standard book review should look which wasn't what the course wanted. When my supervisor saw the book reviews where I had edited them to include the feedback from the contact week as I saw fit she encouraged me to write standard book reviews. I wasn't even confident when I initially wrote the book reviews so when the feedback came contradicting each other I was even more confused.

25<sup>th</sup> September

I spent the week writing and at the last meeting with my supervisor we had agreed that I needed more writing time than I do meeting time. We had done feedback on all the work I had written and I needed more time to produce more work and instead of meeting with her to discuss whatever few pages I had managed to write each week we decided to wait until I felt I had done a bulk of writing which I would send to her and we would discuss at once.

I decided to incorporate something I hadn't thought I'd write about in this thesis: an intimate partner relationship I went through. I didn't think I'd write about this because I couldn't imagine how it'd look on paper and I was just overall scared of touching that part of my life. I was scared because I didn't know if it correlated with anything else I had written prior as everything else had come from this child narrator I had developed. I wasn't sure what the transition would look like going to the narrator as an older sexually active young woman.

I put together 10000 words worth of this experience for my supervisor and hoped for the best.

\*\*\*\*\*

2<sup>nd</sup> October

When my supervisor got back to me there wasn't a lot to change with what I had written because she already thought my strongest point was with writing short prose which is how the 10000-word intimate partner relationship writing was structured.

She advised me to think about formatting, to make sure that all my work was in the same font and size which I realise is something that got lost along the way as I copied and pasted across the different tabs I'd have open in front of me as I typed. We had a lot of the thesis work ready so my supervisor suggested that I print everything out and decide what comes before what. This is because I had been writing pieces that I knew had relation to each other but I had not thought about in what order I wanted them to appear.

I decided on placing the pieces together chronologically starting with my earliest memories in Joe Slovo and the village, building up to my time in primary and high school building up to my time at Rhodes which is where the intimate relationship stories come in. I finished it and sent it to Carol so she could send it to Paul W. Paul W confirmed receiving it and sending it to a reader. It was time to go back to working on the second part of the thesis: the portfolio. Soon I submitted the reading in community assignment.

The intimate partner stories did not work at all. It was a completely different approach to what I had made the rest of the thesis to be. We decided I shouldn't include it in the thesis.

9<sup>th</sup> October

I was ready to start with putting my portfolio together but then I realised we still had not received feedback for our Poetics essays which form part of the portfolio. I emailed Carol asking if she could have a look at it for me because Paul W hadn't and I haven't received feedback from her. I later found out Paul W would be giving feedback on the portfolio at once so I needed to submit all the contents of the portfolio together.

I have been reading *The Heinemann Book of South African Short Stories from 1945 to Present* and it has been a good read because I enjoy reading short stories especially local short stories. One of the stories that I read first was one by a writer whose work I am familiar with because it's been prescribed at university, Ivan Vladislavic, titled "The Brothers." I was surprised to find out it was a type of folklore because I have read his novels which covered a different genre where he was commenting on the political state of things in South Africa after apartheid. This story seemed to be set nowhere in particular and left me with a life lesson like folklore does: that we never know what we have until we lose it or our problems can always get bigger. I really enjoyed it.

\*\*\*\*\*

16<sup>th</sup> October

When writing our journal entries during the year we were encouraged to reach over 1000 words per entry. While editing all these entries which were now supposed to be shorter for the portfolio made me think why. We could have just kept them short to begin with.

I read a story from Clarice Lispector's book of stories titled *The Completed Stories* and the story is titled "Via Crucis" and I feel it gives the Bible story of how the Virgin Mary fell pregnant with Jesus a modern touch. This is because the protagonist calls her husband impotent when she finds out the shocking and confusing news of her pregnancy, which is something that could never have been said about a man in the Bible. After having named her unborn son Jesus, she decides to name him Emanuel instead because she recognises the crucifying of Jesus as an act she accepts as noble but would not like to be repeated on her own son. I liked this story because as much as I know it from the Bible, I didn't know what the writer would incorporate or do away with to lead it to a different path.

## Findings on the Draft Thesis Report

The reader report noted that my writing explores difficult and traumatic experiences. This is what I meant when I wrote in my journal that the thesis has stretched me further than I was when I started the course. I held out on writing about some events because I never wanted to just hit the surface with my work hence I did not write about them until later when I felt I had made space for them. At the same time I did not want the first thing that would be said about my work to be that it is traumatic and difficult. To make sure the reader's heart isn't broken such that they just stop reading altogether I thought it important to put in some light-hearted pieces as well.

My focus has been the content of the thesis and I wasn't thinking of a title. I'm saying this because the reader asks about a title. Other than this, titles are hard for me. I would much rather send it without the title. Having titles also means having to know why the specific title and if anything else wouldn't work better in its place and that's just work that exceeds the creative writing process that I don't think is necessary right now.

I think us being constantly told to remember to put our names on the documents we submitted during the course as well as label the word documents with our names may have led to me taking things a little too far. I ended up putting my name on each and every piece I wrote, right next to the title, which the reader suggested I remove and I agree.

The reader suggested that I divide the thesis into different parts but then went on to speak about something else directly after so she didn't get to tell me why this suggestion was made but I can guess. I think it was made because towards the end I added work that is different to the rest of the thesis but this is work that I together with my supervisor have agreed does not belong in this body of work. With that work removed I don't think there needs to be divisions as the pieces are placed chronologically and I think that is the division that makes sure it flows into each other.

In the thesis abstract I do state that the narrator moves locations between the village, township and an institution of higher education so this means the character will change according to the space she finds herself. uMakhulu will not feature in the stories where the narrator is a university student because she is in the village, this is in response to a comment the reader made that some characters that appear in the beginning seem to disappear towards the end. uMakhulu and Makhulu are the same character. uDabsi and Dabsi are the same character. uMzala and Mzala and the same character. uBhuti and Bhuti are the same character. It's just that for native isiXhosa speakers it sounds unnatural to say one in place of the other so it's a context thing. I could make it easy and name each character without the u, or name them all with the u but when an isiXhosa speaking person picks up the text and reads it, it will not make sense and they will know I had people whose first language is English in mind and that's not what my work is about.

The reader left a comment I did not think was real when I saw it and that was that they thought uDabsi was a man. The reason behind this is because she worked in Johannesburg and it is normally men who leave home and go find work in Johannesburg. It is only later in the

thesis when I refer to her as she that they realise she's a woman. I don't know what to say to that.

A piece on page six of the thesis titled "The Money Knot" refers to the narrator as Lele and later towards the end another piece refers to her as Lelethu. The reader commented that the narrator goes unnamed until she is called Lelethu towards the end and she suggests her name be said sooner. I will be changing the narrator's name on the piece on page six from Lele to Lelethu in case anyone else struggles to make the connection that it's the same person. These are the only two times the narrator is named and that is because I do not think her name matters. The stories around her matter and I think the reader should be able to consume these stories either way.

Prior to the reader's feedback when people have read my work I'd been asked to clarify if I was writing the pieces from the perspective of the young narrator or I was writing them as my older self looking back at the events. The reader's feedback says that there is a spirit of a child's perception and innocence which is captured well with a hint of an adult looking back and I'm glad these two can be noted for existing together.

I will be rearranging the order in which my pieces appear in my thesis because I realise it could be more orderly. I realise some events that I put directly after each other were only occurring around the same time so I could arrange it better by putting events that occur directly after each other and have similar themes together. For example, there are pieces which speak about death in three different ways: in the form of a woman whose husband has died, a son being physically affected by his father's death and the elders interpreting it as custom thing, as well as the belief that there are ghosts in the village. I had previously put other pieces in between these pieces but now I realise they are better occurring right after each other because they speak of different aspects of the same thing and they actually take place around the same time.

### Part 3: Poetics of the Wor(l)ds We Live Essay

I have always found the idea of there being a difference between science and the arts intriguing because it has always come across to me as one being perceived more important than the other. Ann Lauterbach's essay titled "Use This Word in a Sentence: Experimental", classifies the two disciplines as "science undertak[ing] cool experiments and art undertak[ing] hot experiments", therefore looking at art as hot, hip and happening (2). For example, hot (the arts) is associated with discoveries that serve the spirit and I really like this reference because it looks at matters of the body and soul as important too.

A cool experiment with words is how words can be manipulated to serve the purpose of the text. I remember my English teacher in high school calling it poetic licence when poets do it in their work. In "The Beautiful Voyage" by Barbara Guest I found one particular line interesting and it says, "A poem stretches when Pressure on a word causes the poem to stretch... never desert meaning for a word", and the second part is what I specifically underlined because it made me think of the different ways one word can be used in a sentence – text or even as the quote says, in a poem (79). This may also translate to the different ways we then read the word out loud in different parts of the text as it keeps appearing, making some parts shorter and some longer. In poems, the way a word is pronounced may change so as to align it with the rhyme of previous lines causing the reader to stretch on some parts that would normally be flat. This can be as simple as words which look the same, such as nouns and verbs, being used differently or it can go all the way to just as the quote says, dragging a word to create a different feel and meaning to the whole reading out loud experience.

I enjoyed Kate Bernheimer from our reading sessions and when we read "Fairy Tale is Form, Form is Fairy Tale" during our poetics week I remember how much it kept me awake and interested. The content attacked some of the things I have thought and assumed about fairy tales previously. This includes not regarding it as serious writing let alone as form because it's "meant for children" therefore it's playful. Further, to realise that the various forms of writing that writers have adopted stem from the fairy tale form because it has a long existence is to realize that all forms of writing may be fairy tale. This takes me back to Paul M's seminar on narrative convention where we discussed that the traditional way of writing is where the main character wants something and goes on a journey to get it. In the end they achieve that thing or they realise they don't need it which is the way fairy tales are constructed. Cinderella wanted freedom from her stepfamily and attending the party even though she wasn't allowed to was the beginning of her journey to freedom. This same structure goes for text that I have thought and assumed to be "outside" of the fairy tale structure.

With the similarities between the fairy tale form and other forms of writing above, I really enjoyed finding out about the differences between the two as well as the specifics only found in the fairy tale form. In my experience with writing I have always had to account for my characters and for all the words I put on paper otherwise everything feels like it's left hanging and that is an uncomfortable feeling for the reader. In instances where I have tried to experiment with just saying things I have received feedback that I need to go back to them to expand and

this is something that isn't necessary in the fairy tale form. Bernheimer calls characters in fairy tales "silhouettes" and goes on to say they are "mentioned simply because they are there", and although everything may translate as flat, no one questions it as readers would in traditional storytelling (66). I really liked this reading because it just verifies that there isn't always a need to have all the answers in writing and that is seen in fairy tales. In fairy tale if a shoe flies at midnight when the moon is full it flies at midnight when the moon is full and that is all the reader has to work with because that is all the writer has given. In my writing ever since I've started the MACW course I have tried to experiment with different writing techniques and that has mainly been giving the reader the information that I can in my writing and trusting them to figure everything else out and the feedback I have received for it is that it either was enough or it wasn't. So it has worked for me sometimes and sometimes it hasn't and I have never presented my work as fairy tale so I guess that explains the times it hasn't worked. I can't help but think that if I were coming forth and saying I am writing fairy tale the responses would never be that no one knew where I was taking the story because there would be nowhere to take the story other than where the story ends up.

When Craig Santos Perez talks about accessibility in "From Unincorporated Poetic Territories" I think about the stories that have been accessible for me to write about. Those are the stories inspired by my surroundings. So I find my lived experiences accessible and am able to write about them. I don't think my work would be the same had I led a different life. I think my supposed different surroundings would inspire different things in me and influence my writing in completely different ways. For example, I grew up fetching water from the river on days where our local village councillor switched off the water in our community taps after one woman had done all her family's laundry by a community tap for all of us to see. That doesn't even make sense for people who grew up fetching water from the river every day or people who just had taps in their homes. When I see a river, my relationship with it is those intervals where we didn't have water until the water would be back in our taps. That's what my mind has access to when I think about water whereas someone else may think of endless droughts or boats and sailing or fishing.

This piece also talks about stories changing with each telling and I can testify to this with my own writing. I keep referring to the writing we've done in the MACW because that's the most recent writing I've done. During Masande Ntshanga's seminar on finding our voices as writers we had to take from writing we'd written in the past and the piece I chose ended differently from when I had originally written it and when I submitted it for Ntshanga's seminar. Time had passed and I had learnt new ways to write but I was also in a different writing environment. I have done most of my writing at home because there are a lot of things there that just trigger my memory and inspire me to write.

Before I was writing creatively, I was writing with the inspiration of the way I had been told writing works in university and that was during my time in Literary Studies in the English Department. We were taught that essays have an introduction, a body and a conclusion and I found myself using this same method when writing my own creative pieces which were not part of my school assignments which made my writing fall flat. The first two sentences in Dambudzo Marechera's essay titled "Beneath Reality there is Always Fantasy" describe my

very same experience with Literary Studies in university. From before I came to university I knew I was going to take English because I wanted to be a writer and I enjoyed attending the classes but just like Marechera says, “I enjoyed it but detested having to work at it” (11). I enjoyed absorbing information that was readily available but didn’t love having to come up with my own essays as responses to term questions on concepts we had been taught. It was mainly because I felt I wasn’t good at it, at least not as good as I had been told I was in high school by all my English teachers from having been top of the class in both isiXhosa and English. My English lectures and Marechera are of course a little different because I live in the “decolonise the curriculum” era so there were a lot more texts that I enjoyed and could relate to than he possibly did. Even though we both had to read James Joyce (of course). My struggles with constructing essays that were deemed good enough to answer the questions posed at the end of each term lessened with time as I entered the swing of things but it was also determination to see it through because I wanted to be a writer.

When I read “Surfiction: A Postmodern Position” by Raymond Federman I found it to be unlike anything I have ever thought about in writing. This is the idea of moving past the norm in writing – the idea of moving past a hero or a protagonist as we have known it and letting that be “a creation, or better yet a creature that will function outside of any predetermined conditions of society, outside any moments of history” (Federman, 45). I find this fascinating because for as long as we have read books and watched movies we have fought to have a more diverse idea of what it means to be a leading character so instead of always having men we’ve tried to include women in leading roles and instead of always having white people we’ve fought to see people of colour as well. We’ve suggested that other parts of history from other parts of the world are represented and as time has progressed we’ve tried to make shows for everyone despite their sexual orientation and gender. Now this article is saying forget about all of that – what if we don’t have to think about that at all because the surfictional being will not be a man or a woman. Will it be gender nonconforming? No. It will just exist among everything but attached to nothing.

For the most part this is playing with my mind because I am really trying to imagine it but my imagination is based off of what I already know. I know human beings so when they say the new protagonist will neither be a man or a woman I’m thinking a person without genitalia but who said genitalia makes men or women? A human being is what my mind has access to, which is a concept I mentioned earlier. From the readings we did I remember one (it could be the same one) talking about how human beings have imagined aliens and therefore portrayed them on screen and on books. We have imagined them based on the image we have of ourselves (the human) and then the exaggeration of some of our body parts such as the head and facial features. But who said aliens care to look like us? This is the same with the movies we have consumed – we have made them around the same themes such as love because we assumed that’s what everyone wanted to watch so we kept the same structure and made more films. This is the structure that sells films and books and Federman does admit that transforming into something else may not bring in the sales and may just be just that – transforming the literary form.

I think writing about race shouldn't be as difficult as it sometimes is and I do admit there were moments where I wasn't sure how to do it. Not because I was concerned I would offend people in my writing but because it was important for me to get my message across and I was looking for the best way to do that. But just like Bettina Judd says in "Writing About Race", "writing is attached to the body", and what I understand by that is that it is impossible to not write about race because race is political and the political is personal so writing about myself is writing about politics and is writing about race (266). I learnt the political is personal phenomenon as early as Politics 102 in our International Relations side of the course so if before then I had thought me existing in my black body residing in a township in an RDP house in post-apartheid South Africa wasn't politics then I stopped thinking that in that instant. As a black woman my experiences are derived from the fact that I am a woman and that is what I write about. As a young black woman my experiences are derived from the fact that I am a "born free" because I was born post 1994 and 1994 being a significant moment in the country's history coming after a lot of racial segregation that was enforced before and continues to be evident today. I say that even if I do not mean to write about race I do write about race. Judd speaks about growing up reading books about race because her mother was politically minded and I always talk about not having enough books to read in my early childhood and both of these scenarios are political in the sense that one is taught about the politics of race while the other does not even stand a chance to know anything because there are meant to be no books for them to read about themselves and their place in the world.

Anton Shammas's piece "Untitled Address" spoke to me in terms of language to some extent. I write about my mother tongue being different from the language I write in, which is a language I did not always know because I learnt it in school. When I told my mother I wanted to write books she asked me in which language I would write and I told her I would be writing in English and her response was she had recently read a book we had at home. It was written in isiXhosa, which is our home language, and she said it was written terribly such that while reading it she could tell it was written by someone who did not have a strong grasp of the language. She went on to express that it was sad what was going to print these days and being called proper language. In essence she did not want me to disgrace her by writing in isiXhosa if it meant I would write that terribly. Further, she had heard me speak English in and around the house so she was happier with me writing in another language instead, one she thought I could express myself better in.

My mother wants me to write in isiXhosa but she wants me to do so if I will be doing it properly. I don't not write in isiXhosa because I think I do not have a strong grasp of the language, I don't do it because I just never thought to. It never seemed a possibility for me even though there was nothing stopping me from doing it. I started learning English in school, read so many books in the language and just ran with it. It was fascinating for me to be so bilingual and be so well spoken and well written in both languages that I guess I unconsciously chose the language I learnt in school to do scholarly things – such as writing – and kept my home language for home. I don't think my mother is correct in assuming I express myself better in English because no amount of learning can move me away from the language I've been speaking from birth; the language that I learnt at home language level throughout my time in school; the language that I dream in; that I wake up from a nightmare and scream in; the

language to which my mind automatically goes to when I'm expressing fear and excitement in the spur of the moment.

Other than it being immensely funny, the Lesego Rampolokeng and Ike Mboneni Muila's interview conducted by Robert Berold speaks to spirituality in black artists. Some artists in the black community are said to have been gifted their abilities to tell stories through whatever form by their ancestors and they are therefore the vessel through which these messages that they carry are delivered. According to Rampolokeng this has been used as a tactic by the rest of the country to see black people as just body and heart and not so much mind because the assumption is the gift of telling these stories is already within them (4). What about the brilliance and the guidance of it all? Does that not matter or is it easier to perpetuate what has always been said about black people not being smart enough?

I also like the idea of mixing languages to create another one which can either be understood by everyone or by a specific few. It just shows the many ways the human race has adapted across time and spaces in order to communicate and survive. The adaptation of human beings in the most drastic of circumstances whether it be weather, geography, laws has always astonished me. How can we live on when nothing is the same? This makes me think of a poem we covered in grade 11 English by Mzi Mahola and it's titled "Everything has Changed Except Graves." It reflects the poet's thoughts as he sees his place of upbringing and the changes it has experienced and he finds that one of the places that has remained the same is the graveyard because people have continued to die. This just felt spot on as a reference of the human race's ability to just adapt. To adapt to an environment they could barely recognise but remained in because it's all they had.

## Works Cited

Bernheimer, Kate. "Fairy Tale is Form, Form is Fairy Tale". Accessed online:

<http://www.katebernheimer.com/images/Fairy%20Tale%20is%20Form.pdf>

Federman, Raymond. Extract from "Surfiction: A Postmodern Position" in *Critifictions: Postmodern Essays*. State University of New York Press, 1993.

Guest, Barbara. "The Beautiful Voyage" in *Forces of Imagination: Writing on Writing*. Kelsey St. Press, 2015.

Judd, Bettina. "Writing about Race" in *The Racial Imaginary: Writers on Race in the Life of the Mind* Eds. Claudia Rankine, et al. eds. Fence Books, 2015.

Lauterbach, Ann. "Use This Word in a Sentence: 'Experimental'" in Ann Lauterbach, *The Night Sky: Writings on the Poetics of Experience*. Viking, 2005.

Marechera, Dambudzo. "Beneath reality there is always fantasy" in Flora Veit-Wild, and Ernst Schade, eds. *Dambudzo Marechera (1952-1987): Pictures, Poems, Prose, Tributes*. Baobab Books, 1988.

Perez, Craig Santos. "excerpt from 'Unincorporated poetic territories'" in *The Force of What's Possible: Writers on Accessibility & the Avant-Garde*. Lily Hoang and Joshua Marie Wilkinson, eds. Nightboat Books, 2015.

Rampolokeng, Lesego and Ike Muila. "Lesego Rampolokeng and Ike Muila: Interviewed by Robert Berold" in *South African Poets on Poetry: Interviews from New Coin, 1992-2001*. Robert Berold, ed. Gecko Poetry, 2003.

Shammas, Anton. "Untitled" in *Critical Fictions: The Politics of Imaginative Writing*. Philomena Mariani, ed. Bay Press, 1991.

**Book Review 1 Muriel at Metropolitan by Miriam Tlali  
Broadview Press Ltd.**

**2004**

*Muriel at Metropolitan* was written by Miriam Tlali and was originally published in 1979. Miriam Tlali was the first black woman to publish a novel in the English language in South Africa with *Between Two Worlds*. As evident in *Between Two Worlds* and *Muriel at Metropolitan* her work depicts the socio-political imbalances across townships as created by the apartheid government which is mainly seen in the division between suburbs where the township residents work for white people as well as the townships and Bantustans black people lived in.

Growing up South African there has always been an attempt within our schools to teach us about our history, specifically the effects of apartheid on the lives of black people. Whether successful or not, those have always shown black people as the domestic workers and those lessons ended with the human rights we were granted because of the struggle. This is not to say black people should not be painted in this light in literature because black people did look after white children and did their gardens. This is to say that is not all they were. There were black people who lived in the township but worked outside of the domestic sphere of things; there were those who lived on the high end of things as closely to white areas as possible and were just prominent so it does not hurt to hear about their lives. This book does just that.

*Muriel at Metropolitan* introduces us to a middle-aged black woman, Miriam, who works at a furniture and appliances store named Metropolitan hence the title. The book is an encounter of her daily experiences at work where she and her colleagues cater for poor white people as well as black people. Further, this book shows the many ways owners of corporations prey on poor people by offering them equipment they cannot afford which they end up paying for years and long after the said equipment that was bought on credit is no longer even working.

Miriam, as the one who is mostly asked to help the black customers because they speak the 'same' language, is seen as a traitor by her people – as though she is the middle woman through which poor people are stripped of their money by white people. A few times in the book Muriel does reflect on the ways the black customers look at her and sometimes even the things they say about her such that she feels like the white man's kept puppy. Her feeling like the white man's puppy also goes to the fact that she is paid nothing for the work that she does which includes a lot of intellectual tasks outside of her intellectual job description – tasks which none of the white employees can do as well as she does. In her boss's mind the expectation that she will always say yes to everything comes from the fact that she needs the job they've hired her to do so she will not say no to the extra stuff.

South Africa does have a history, I know of this in the black community, where some black people are suspected to have 'sold' everyone out. This is specifically for the black families who are in more stable economic and financial positions. They are said to have benefitted from apartheid because they were spies for the apartheid government and as a result their children

now go to interracial schools where they are offered better education that one wouldn't experience in village and townships. They live in areas that were formerly reserved for white people. In Muriel's case she has suffered all of this spy stigma as proclaimed by fellow black people but without being properly compensated for it. Muriel finds herself as many women do even today – doing work that no one else can do – work that is not regarded as important because it's work done by women so it is not remunerated. Muriel's boss refused to hire more staff that he could afford, which is beside the point, to do the more work that he simply took for granted that Muriel would perform.

## **Book Review 2 Tjieng Tjang Tjerries & Other Stories by Jolyn Phillips Modjaji Books**

**2016**

*Tjieng Tjang Tjerries & Other Stories* is a collection of short stories by Jolyn Phillips. It was inspired by true events from her life growing up in Gansbaai which is where the stories are set. Phillips takes the reader through a series of events in the small fishing town as told by the various narrators who mostly happen to be children.

This book is successful in touching on the different family relations across different family members. As much as most of it focuses on children as main characters, there are grown characters and the problems they face as residents of Gansbaai. For example, one of the stories titled “Fraans” deals with a death in the family which looks like a common occurrence until it is stated that the death was caused by another family member— a twist so needed to make the story come alive.

The narrator in this story is a grown man named Fraans who got drunk and drove over his brother’s two children. After their funeral he feels that his relationship with his brother has suffered as well as the relationship with himself. He cannot forgive himself until he visits his brother, cries for his forgiveness and in response his brother asks him to forgive himself. Forgiveness being a theme here brings that closure of the family unit, even though it is broken in so many ways. This resonates with me because when reading the story my mind was just stuck on the crime being committed that I could not see a way past that so for the story to then turn around and say “Forgive yourself first, Fraans. Forgive yourself” takes me to the realisation that it is true that you cannot ask for that which you have not afforded yourself, no matter how much you think you don’t deserve it from yourself (Phillips 22).

Overall, the presence of alcohol as a destroyer of lives across the stories is one that is true in relation to South Africa’s history. In “Senna’s Cricket Song” an alcoholic uncle regularly rapes his niece until he impregnates her. This makes me think about the legacies of the apartheid system because during the apartheid era to keep men of colour distracted from the real problems killing their families and communities, they were allowed to build shebeens where they would drown their sorrows after long hours at work in the mines and as garden boys. When Phillips puts alcohol as the means through which the workers of a wine company are paid for their labour in “Fraans” is nothing short of portraying a real historical matter.

Speaking of labour by bodies of colour, the story “The Fisherman” speaks to the unending difficulties of providing for one’s family when you’re already poor. As much as Andrea’s father worked to provide for his family, in the end he was left with an ailing body that could no longer carry him to the harbour to fish. He has no pension or benefit payoffs to prove all the years he has worked so Andrea decides to go and ask for her father’s job so she can take over the job of providing for their family. As much as the story isn’t told in a way that demands the reader to feel sorry for the characters the circumstance cuts through my skin and makes me realise all these injustices which seem to lead to ongoing injustice. In this case there is no work hard and

you'll be able to build your family a home, it's work hard and you won't starve to death today. The ailing body in "The Fisherman", the delapidated house in "The Photograph", the minds overcome by alcohol in "Fraans" and "Senna's Cricket Song" all speak to how one's mind and body are affected by their surroundings

### **Book Review 3 The House of Hunger by Dambudzo Marechera Heinemann**

**1978**

*The House of Hunger* is Dambudzo Marechera's first book and it covers a black man's experience in both Britain as a foreign student as well as in Rhodesia during the fight for independence from British colonialism. Marechera's other work have included *Black Sunlight* which also explores a view of Britain, specifically London, from the view of an outsider non-native. The effects of colonialism such as postcolonial violence is one of the themes that Marechera explores in both work.

Coming from post-apartheid South Africa, I can relate to some of the predicaments that face independent Zimbabwe. African countries that have had to fight for their freedom and were "granted" their freedom suffer from the same shortfalls. Those include but are not limited to a freedom which does not include economic freedom for those who were previously oppressed. This usually means that the natives of the previously colonised country are given a limited political freedom where they get to democratically elect their own president while the coloniser is still pulling the strings and running things in the background. That is the extent to which I can relate to the contents of the book as well as the author, being a product of a similar environment as well as living in the legacy of apartheid South Africa.

The book mainly takes place in beer halls and speaks to a predicament the black South African community also faced and continues to face as one of the effects of apartheid. Even when not specifically stated there is always the aura of the presence of more alcohol spots than is really necessary in black disadvantaged areas. This has contributed to people being consumed by this lifestyle wherever they go and therefore moving their focus from bigger issues such as their infringed political, social and economic rights. And in the case that they choose to focus on these bigger issues, they visit the drinking halls to drown their sorrows from seemingly fighting losing battles against the coloniser.

Hand in hand with alcoholism often comes domestic violence. The men spend all their time at the drinking halls and come home to their wives, girlfriends, mothers and children to be violent. This further destroys the black family unit. With men already spending minimal time at home between working long hours for less than minimal wage and then spending all of that money on alcohol leaves the women to take care of their children in all forms.

*The House of Hunger* being published in newly independent Zimbabwe speaks a lot to the circumstances happening at the time which are explored in the book. Violence of a country in transition from colonial power to democratic power causes a lot of rift and uncertainty in the politics and scheme of things because as much as everyone is hoping for their lives to change with the new government, there is the chance that things won't change. There is the vast possibility of a state of neo-colonialism which is evident in *The House of Hunger* and modern-day Zimbabwe. This is a book that was one of the first of its kind to explore an African country's dismal failure at governing itself after it was failed by the coloniser. There are so

many states on the continent whose fate turned out to be the same after gaining their independence. This book brought forward the possibility that maybe an African state was not ready to govern itself. This, of course, was due from no other reason than that it was specifically put in a position by its previous government to not be able to do so. This then means the citizens getting minimal to no service delivery and inherently feeling as though their votes had gone to waste.

What makes the book work long after it was published is that colonialism is a legacy. This means as much as this book was written forty years ago the circumstances under which it was written and the circumstances it so clearly describes are evident today. Zimbabwe has been under the leadership of the same political party since its independence and was governed by the same president for thirty of the forty-two years it has been independent. Having a political party which exceeds other political parties in votes so much consistently for decades leaves little to no room for questions on how the country is run which almost resembles the way things were run under colonialism.

The book also travels between the past and the present, the past featuring some childhood memories where there was so much trauma, which still translates to the presence of so much trauma so many years later. *The House of Hunger* is different from books that came before it and paves way for a new type of African literature because it rejects the idea of nationality. This is opposite to works produced by African giants of the generation before Marechera's such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Chinua Achebe whose sole purpose in their literature seemed to be to respond to the Western world with regards to the damage their colonialism and slavery had caused in Africa. There was some sense of patriotism in this writing because there is a level of pride for one's Africinity for one to say they reject all that the West has wanted them to be. With Marechera's work there is a positioning that rejects one's own native country, on top of rejecting a foreign world class education presented by his coloniser; an all-round rejection of social realism. It is as though Marechera's work is looking to exist outside of the coloniser colonised binaries that precede it.

When the reader meets the narrator of *The House of Hunger*, the reader goes on a journey with the narrator hoping that he finds his identity and this is expected to come from the narrator's family, community and nation but the text goes to reveal that the narrator doesn't feel defined by any of these things. The fact that the narrator is not named speaks to that loss of individuality and therefore represents the narrator as existing outside of anything that would essentially classify them as belonging anywhere.

**Book Review 4 The Collected Stories of Lydia Davis by Lydia Davis  
Penguin Books**

**2009**

Lydia Davis is a short story writer with an undisputed ability to deliver short concrete and succinct pieces. Her work documents the mundane but also documents such extremely vivid occurrences which I find have a relation to each other. This includes similar titles across the pieces as well as similar texture of the themes being explored. *The Collected Stories of Lydia Davis* consists of some of these pieces.

The first piece to be reviewed from this collection is titled “Mothers” and it speaks about the ongoing presence of mothers everywhere. More specifically it speaks about the presence of a mother at the dinner that is taking place as the piece is being written; of a mother of the dinner hostess in Oregon as she speaks to her on the phone as the dinner takes place in New York; as well as a guest of the dinner who would be picking up his mother right after the event. All these mothers occurring in the immediate space and far away and all of them not being necessarily related to the narrator but her being able to recognise their motherliness speaks to the universality of mothers. One can easily recognise a mother in her mannerisms, in the way “she turns her head away”, in the way she eats and in the way you can feel her presence but she may seem absent (Davis 65).

This piece made me think about all the ways I have thought of my own mother and if I have dismissed anything she has done as her being a mother, if I have spotted her in other mothers. I think the fact that this piece’s title is in the plural form is what ignites these thoughts in me because if it was just Mother I wouldn’t go as far as possibly relating my own mother to the scenario, I would read it as a specific mother is being spoken about. The way I read this is the difference between the first piece and the second piece being reviewed being that the first piece is talking about all mothers at least potentially having some similarities while the second piece talks about one mother in specific circumstances and at her specific space with her daughter.

The second piece is titled “The Mother” and it talks about one mother who belittles everything her daughter does by saying it could be so much better if she did it differently. This piece really plays with the idea of a mother and daughter relationship where the mother could be seen as either pushing her daughter to do better because she knows much more will be expected of her in her life or it could be seen as her not granting her the love and comfort of home. This piece brings across the realisation that mothers can only do unto their daughters which sometimes may be to no extent at all. This piece in relation to the third piece as opposed to its relation to the first piece is that the third piece also speaks about a specific group of old women, this being spelt out by the *The* in the title. This means as much as it is Grandmothers which is plural and therefore isn’t specific to one old woman, it is specific to a group and not more than that group.

The Great-Grandmothers explores the position of elderly women in family gatherings and the first sentence of this piece goes, “The great-grandmothers were put out on the sun porch”,

as though to say this was a situation which fell upon them and they couldn't help themselves out of. It goes on to mention that they are left there for so long such that they grow into wood. As much as the piece addresses the treatment of older women, referred to as the great-grandmothers, it also covers how women are treated in general by their families. The idea of "putting" them somewhere and forgetting about them to the extent that, "their gnarled hands had grown into the wood of their cane handles", shows the neglect shown by everyone towards women (Davis 65). Everyone gets by as long as they can without needing women and when they need them for something it is at a point where they haven't taken care of them enough to be granted that help. So they find them adapted into still nature, something they could pass without noticing like furniture, left there for so long they start looking like their surroundings.

More than writing on women in relation to each other, Lydia Davis writes on relations between women and men as well as men themselves. One of these pieces is titled *Visit to Her Husband* and it covers an encounter between a man and a woman who are on the verge of divorce. The piece is about them meeting to discuss the divorce but then the afternoon turns out to be them smoking, alternating using the toilet and being nervous around each other but there isn't much talk about the divorce which is the core of their meeting. The meeting seems to be going well because the important aspect is being ignored, which gives a glimpse of what could have led to their divorce. That along with the man walking out while the woman is telling him a story. The piece ends with a peeled orange in her hand, an orange she didn't remember deciding she wanted to eat and this speaks to her relationship with her husband: she did not know how or why she made the decision to marry him; why she had made the decision to meet with him; or why she had allowed him to take over her story that she was telling him with his that he thought was more important. With all the former and current uncertainties spelled out, one thing was for sure that she was in an unwanted situation that she needed to get herself out of.

"A Man from Her Past" is about the narrator's mother having improper sexual relations with, as the title suggests, a man from her past, and the thing of the biggest concern to the narrator is that her father will return home and not be pleased. After realising her parents are no longer together she makes the excuse that her mother at ninety-four is too old to be having an intimate partner and this feeds to the assumption that women cannot make their own decisions so their decisions are made for them by the men in their lives or are based on what their children think.

These pieces illustrate the agency of women, the state of the agency of women when these pieces were written and how the state of the agency of women is viewed today. In the first piece where the narrator mentions mothers but compares their mannerisms to those of children, "Mothers, when they are guests at dinner, eat well, like children, but seem absent", while also challenging their presence as though their simply being there is not enough to pronounce them as present such that they have to perform their presence or they're regarded as almost absent (Davis 65). In the piece where the daughter is dependent on her mother's approval in everything she does even though the approval never comes such that she digs her own grave and sleeps in it and the response from her mother is that "if only it were forever" (Davis 96). This piece brings to mind the ways women are sometimes side lined in their homes and places of work and how that unfortunately can translate to them being doing so to each other. After the elderly

women who aren't taken care of, Davis also comes in with the relations women have with men where a woman is reminded of the reasons behind her failed marriage when she was almost forgetting it. Through this book Davis manages to bring women as they are viewed in society, write about their vast range of problems as well as contributing factors to these problems which allows the reader into these brilliantly written observations.

## Writing in Community Report

For the reading workshop I wanted to discuss the concept of home as well as the different places we call home and why. I wanted to discuss this because I feel home is simply regarded as where we were born and raised and I wanted to open up the possibility of it being various things which exceed this simple definition.

When I moved to Makhanda to study for my degree I'd meet fellow students who'd want to know where I was from and I always told them I was from Gqeberha. When I was in the dining hall fetching my meals the cooking staff noted the new first year students and would ask us where we were from and I'd answer that I was from Engcobo. I realised my answer changed depending on what age group of people I was speaking to. I was born in Gqeberha, but I knew when talking to older people they'd want to know where my village was, the village being where our extended family was and where our ancestors were buried. Older people understood that we had come to the city to work but we would retire at home and that is what interested them more.

I invited two friends of mine who are also writers to join me for this reading workshop. We read work that I had picked which I found related to the theme of home and we read work they were inspired to write around this theme. I was careful not to give out a specific instruction as to what about home I wanted them to write about neither did I tell them what form to use because I wanted it to be as exciting, diverse and true to their writing as possible.

To start off the session as a way of introducing the theme, I read an excerpt from Zoe Wicomb's novel *October* where she describes how the main character's sister-in-law Sylvie's whole life is her tending to sheep so much that she treats them like children (3). Then Sylvie is said to have her own child who she puts on the "old sofa" in the house where her husband is drunk and she's having an internal conflict about what the husband should have named their child. From the small excerpt there is a lot of information about the characters' lives revolving around livestock, old furniture, alcohol and marital disagreements on how the couple parents their child. I read from this text for the session because the whole book gives a very deep sense of nostalgia for me and that was through the vivid description of what home means for the main character, Mercia. Mercia comes home from Scotland where she works as a university professor and where her life partner has left her for a younger woman and uses her time at home as an opportunity to regroup before going back to her everyday life.

Before we started writing I read a piece I had already written around this theme titled Sipheka Street where I write about the street where I grew up in Gqeberha. I write about what goes on in each household according to what the residents of those houses do as well as according to what the rest of the street says about them. The narrator is seated in a position where she can see all the houses on the street and the piece continues to describe just what the narrator sees and what the narrator knows from having lived on that street. The writers both felt more comfortable with writing one whole piece instead of dividing their work in two or three smaller pieces so I gave them forty five minutes to come up with whole pieces and what they wrote is attached at the end of this report.

The first writer who reads the rough draft of her work in the session is Hlumela Mpiti who is a Drama Master's candidate. She writes and performs plays so it was no surprise that the work she produced was in the form of a play. The setting is the village of uMqanduli in the Eastern Cape which is home for the characters where their days are described as filled with cattle herding, slaughtering animals for food as well as storytelling by the older generation to the children. One of the characters, Amy, is adamant that her home cannot be this bland village life so she attempts to make a home for herself in a student town where she assumes social media popularity. She presents herself as glamorous and rich to the students at university and seeks their validation with that through social media. Her internal conflict when she is rejected by her social media followers and fellow students as well as not wanting to belong in uMqanduli bears the question of can we choose our homes? Can we reject an already established home even though we were born there and raised there?

I stayed in an on-campus student residence for two years in undergrad and I had always referred to my residence room as res like all students do. When I moved off campus in my third year undergrad I could not bring myself to refer to the room I was renting as home. It always sounded so odd when people asked if I was going back home after a class because home for me was Gqeberha and Engcobo. Wherever else I lived in between my being in these two places felt like something that I was doing for the meantime. I think what frightened me more was knowing that I would not rent the same room for my whole time in university so when I found another place to stay in my honours year, did that mean my home changed? How long would it be before I could have a forever home from all these places I stayed at?

Zandiswa Pali-Shumi is doing her Master's in isiXhosa and her take on writing about home included a narrator describing her surroundings as seen through her window. Her work is in the personal and is inspired by her own lived experiences in the sense that her narrator is written in the first person. Her work is in prose. The piece is set in Khayelitsha and from the first paragraph I note what I've noted in some work written in the township setting: the father works long hours, and the children never see him because when they wake up for school he's long gone and when he comes back they're already in bed. This leaves the mother to attend to the housework and the children's needs every day.

The work transitions to the narrator describing the male friends beating her and her female friends in school as just the way things were. Then a comparison comes between the female and male teachers where female teachers yelled at students while the male teachers were known for corporally punishing students as a form of disciplining them. The reflection of men being absent and when they are present being violent and this being a piece written under the broad theme of home enforces the idea of dysfunctional relationships with men in society. When you fear a teacher you have no time to learn from him because something you do could warrant a beating and when you're away from your father a lot that limits the possibility of building a father and child relationship.

I decided to write on home because I feel that is a theme that relates a lot to the work that forms part of my thesis. My pieces are set in three different places overall and two of those places are at home, home as I have explained it above being in Gqeberha where I was born and Engcobo where my ancestors are buried. It was interesting for me to hear what the two writers

who helped me with this assignment thought of home, in ways that related to what I thought of home and in their own ways that I had not thought of. For example, the character Amy in Hlumela's play is ashamed of where she was born and I have never written of my home as somewhere I was ashamed of, I have always written of home in a matter-of-fact approach. I would never write something so it warrants shame if it wasn't a shameful event.

I feel the session went well because I could relate to the rural setting in Hlumela's play as well as the township setting in Zandiswa's piece because I grew up in both. I was able to hold some level of understanding for both pieces.

For the freewriting I approached an NGO from Joe Slovo the township I grew up in in Gqeberha. The NGO is a recycling centre which also holds reading, writing and painting classes for students after school and it is called Trash to Treasure. The owner is Zukiswa Alla who I have known for nine years now as she was a teacher in another NGO that I was a part of growing up so when I approached her with this idea she was more than keen.

I did not want it to be too much of a burden in her schedule with her students so I only took two grade nine students who she assured me were doing okay with their reading and writing. It was important to me that these students were readers because I believe a reader's imagination runs wild when put in a position to think of something in a limited time. I started by explaining to them how freewriting works and then read some of my own freewriting that I had written during freewriting sessions we had in the course during contact week.

I decided on three minutes as the time dedicated to each prompt and as much as we encourage deviating from 'the topic' where necessary I don't need the deviation to be too much. I like to still have a sense of how everything said goes back to the prompt given. During the contact week I believe the time we were given for each prompt was 90 seconds so I decided to double that because there are children and they're non-writers.

I provided five different prompts to both readers and the first one came up with a list of things that reminded her of the prompt. For example one prompt was 'pitch black' and she came up with 'SA hip-hop artist named Pitch Black Afro', 'darkness', as well as the name of a movie a friend had told her about that she was intending to watch.

I think there was a hesitation with the assignment because as much as I gave the instructions the students did not believe that the instructions were real. They still held back from writing things that they felt did not correlate or things that they felt they wouldn't want to be seen by someone else.

I feel the approach of the one student who created a list was limiting in the sense that she did not do it in a way that took up all of the time given as intended, she did it in a way where she paused in between and looked around as though wanting to find the acceptable things the prompts inspired in her. The list method could have worked if she had not lifted her pen from the page and had kept on writing until the time was up. She'd then have a list of things that were inspired by the prompt and a list of things that she thought of as she was thinking of what the prompts inspired in her.

Another prompt I gave was ‘leaves’ and the second student spend the three minutes writing about how the word ‘leave’ sounded the same as the word ‘live’ even though they mean different things. She then made examples that their teacher told them to ‘leave’ her classroom when they were being unruly while all they wanted to do was to ‘live’ their lives. I could not tell this student that these two words actually did not sound the same when pronounced correctly because for a lot on non-native English speakers including myself they are pronounced the same, their pronunciations are used interchangeably a lot of times. I admired the dedication to stick to this argument for three minutes though.

I believe the writing workshop produced what it could for a pair of grade seven students. It took me back to when I was in grade seven ten years ago, I remembered thinking I was smart because I had read my grade five English essays and had laughed at the audacity of the writer I was writing such broken language. I believe these grade sevens believe they know a lot as the seniors in their school and I am grateful to have been someone they showed just how much they know to.

#### **Works Cited**

Mpiti, H. *Now You Know Me, Now You Don't*, 2022.

Pali-Shumi, Z. *Transition*, 2022.

Wicomb, Z. *October*. The New Press: New York, 2014.

**Hlumela Mpiti**

**NOW YOU KNOW ME, NOW YOU DON'T!**

Scene 1

It is a sunny Tuesday afternoon. Amy is fast asleep in her room. Vinyl comes running in shouting out her name. Amy wakes up disgruntled and frowns at Vinyl.

Vinyl: Amy! Amy! Wake up

Amy: Not you again!

*Amy jumps out of bed and opens the door for Vinyl to leave*

Amy, *angrily*: Vinyl, I told you not to come into this room without my permission. You don't listen, you little prick. Now get the fuck out man (picking him up by his collar and pushing him out the door).

Vinyl, *meekly*: But Mkhulu said I must wake you up so you can join us in the kraal – he slaughtered a cow and now we're having meat. Come!

Amy: You woke me up for stinking cow meat and boring old stories? You can't be serious right now.

Vinyl, *excitedly*: No its fun Amy. You've never even heard any of Mkhulu's stories.

Amy, *annoyed*: That's because they're boring you looser!

*Vinyl leaves the room with his head down, Amy decides to go to the bathroom. On her way there, she steps on cow dung.*

Amy: I hate it here! Argh, why did I have to come back here (she takes out her and phone and does a 4 way video call)

Amy: (On the call) Hey guys. You won't believe what just happened, chomis.

Friend 1: Oh my gosh, you look so crusty.

Friend 2: Uphi chomi because ilighting yakho is the pits! [Where are you because your lighting is bad!]

Friend 3: Never mind the lighting, is that a broken window. Is that your home? No ways girl.

Amy: Uh, no. I'm – I can't hear you guys my network is bad. Hello? Hi? Guys? (Amy drops the call)

*Amy runs back to her room furious at her friend's comments. She peeps out the window and sees her family eating meat in the kraal. This infuriates her even more and she just throws herself on the bed and starts sobbing.*

## **Zandiswa Pali-Shumi**

### **TRANSITION**

Outside, the macro, the bigger part was Khayelitsha. These are; school, church, neighbours and friends. Since Primary School, each morning I woke up to find my father already gone to work. My mother helped me prepare for school. I made friends of both sexes. However, my best of friends were the girls. We got along well. The boys could be friendly in most times; sometimes they would hit you for no reason. It was okay, after all they were boys and that is what boys do. It did not matter how much the teachers had punished them they still remained 'strong'. In many cases, there was no use reporting them. They would beat you anyway.

Throughout my school life I had both male and female teachers. Male teachers were known for being strong and female teachers were lenient. For many female teachers being strong was about shouting and yelling and this was no threat to us learners, we had gotten used to it, we always giggled at them. Male teachers beat you up and that we did not find funny at all. We feared them. They were male after all; the same as our dads stronger than our mothers, the male teachers were stronger than our female teachers. I also reminisce of how Life Orientation teachers brought books that enforced gender equality and how they themselves understood gender as just whether one is male or female.

At church, our pastor was male. The pastor influenced our behaviour, even when we were at home. Our parents tried by all means to live by his sermons. Even though my father was strong at home, he listened and showed obedience towards the pastor. In the streets, my friends and I were at the sight of our neighbours. I was a girl. My friends and I were girls. We played 'poppiehuis' and nurtured dolls. On the other corners of the streets, the boys played soccer. I remember how we sometimes played hide and seek together with boys in the late afternoon. Old people in the neighbourhood would reprimand us girls for playing with boys as boys are 'violent'. They told the boys 'ningazumi amantombi'(not to rape the girls). I also remember in my childhood how we would hear screams of a mother coming from their particular house. The older people would go "shame, I wonder what she could have done to defy her husband. Look now he is teaching her a lesson, these women never learn.