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Title: A Skin That Took Them Through

This document consists of two (2) parts:

Part A: Thesis (Creative Work)

Part B: Portfolio

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by

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To my mother, Prudence Kgame, for being a brilliant storyteller, for raising us in stories- with stories. I write this thesis imagining how she would have written it if given the same opportunity as I have.

And

To all my childhood friends who would have loved to fight but being born armless limited them to partake in the fight for life.

And

To Nokuthula Daweti & Sanele Ntshingana, for walking with me in the journey of producing this work.

Abstract

This project comprises of interlinked fictional short stories capturing experiences of the “invisibilised” young people- the street kids, drug addicts, cashiers, childminders, the sick, first graduates etc. These stories are a way to interrogate the fallacy of a “free and fair” South Africa by noting events taking place within homes, communities and countrywide. Told in a playful, innocent, curious, childlike voice and reasoning, my work draws inspiration from Werewere Likings ‘The Amputated Memory,’ for its ability to narrate the current without divorcing the past. I draw inspiration from Liking’s way of writing family connectivity and employing an emerging voice of the narrator starting from being a child scribbling to later becoming an elder. Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah’s ‘Black Friday’ for scanning into young black people’s experiences in a society where their bodies move as misfits. My work also draws from Lesley Nneka Arimah’s ‘What It Means When a Man Falls from the Sky’ for the interlinked stories. Lastly the stories in this project take from Sindiwe Magona’s Mother to Mother for humanising bodies that have been reduced to frames.

She Gave Her Dog My Name

Outside the hut, were eight of us sitting on a rocky bunk stool. We all sat, waiting to go inside. A loud sound of a broken zinc door was heard. My phone beeped - a trigger for my heart to jump. I was hoping for a message that would send me back home. A message that would make being at that place illogical.

I checked, it was one of those- written in bold blue: new job alert. After a brief check, I sighed and cleared the notifications on the screen. The thought of unsubscribing to these alerts crossed my mind.

Instead, I took a visit in my sent mails counting over 100 emails with the subject line “application for job position...”

These job applications were sent to places I dreamt of working at and places I had never imagined myself at. It was a try of luck - aiming very high and very low- hoping for anything/anyone to save me.

The other day, I tried informing Mama of a sad fact that this country is going through a major lack of job crisis - that stats show over 50% of youth are unemployed. That’s how we found ourselves at Baba Ntuli’s house, in Mama’s books, I carried a dark cloud only bab’Ntuli could help remove.

This dark cloud has remained stagnant, darkening every part of me, it was stubborn not even our every evening prayer had come to remove it. No matter how loud we begged, God didn’t hear.

It had been 6 months since the proudest moment my family and I had ever experienced - walking across the university auditorium stage and collecting my degree as a symbol of freedom - an act of a saviour. Six months since the flood of ‘congratulations’ on Facebook, people said they were proud of me. Some of them I had never met in my life.

A search in my family line shows me as the first to get a university degree. Before my graduation, the first to ever walk on university ground.

Bab’Ntuli, a fat, heavy beaded man walked in the yard- beads on his ankles, his wrist, his neck, and waist- themed in black, white and red. He paused. His eyes slowly

moving on each one of us sitting on the stool. We stared back. A few minutes later he said, “sanibonani.”

The lady seated next to me whispered to herself, “he has finally arrived; we have been waiting.”

He walked in the hut, when we could not trace his mighty body through the door, a deep voice followed “Ngenani.”

Mama and I stood up as were the first to arrive. At a door, a sign written ‘khipa izicathulo’ and another one welcoming us to the space ‘namukelekile kwa-ntola mpilo’ written on cardboard with charcoal.

We took off our shoes and went inside the shrine.

His great body sat on the icansi mat with a calabash, a basket made of wheat and two unlit standing candles.

The room was dark. All around it, shelves with bottles, sculptures of humans and animals, and cloths with different colour patterns, animal skin, and different herbs. All these items forcing sparks of green, red, clear white, purple and green in the room.

“Mama ingane yakho le?” he asked while moving the match stick on the box to spark fire.

Mama nodded.

He looked at me with intimidating big eyes and lashed out a chuckle while the stick landed on the strokes of the impepho. He chuckled again and went on to blow the impepho. The blow gave the fire power, the impepho thoroughly caught on the fire and the smoke moving slowly to the roof of the hut in waves.

He put the steel bowl with impepho on icansi and said, “why are you burning schools?”

I did not answer.

Mama directed her eyes at me.

“Where will you learn after you have achieved your agenda of free education?”

Bab’Ntuli said, have you ever ran for your life because a dog wanted to bite the flesh and chew your bones just because of your blackness. Or beaten up because you are found at a place while people like you are supposed to be long gone. Have you ever longed to breathe different air and be denied, get choked by the smell of teargas and wake up at the side of the road with your school jersey with holes and you think to yourself “maybe I was trying to jump the fence when it caught me.”

“With all the privileges, with all the opportunities we have at your disposal young people are not grateful. Do you know how we suffered, I was almost burned to death by the apartheid police, with all the peace in this country young people want to start a war huh?”

He pulled up the red and white cloth wrapped around his waist and showed me an untender stitched scar on his leg.

“1976,” he said with his big eyes pointing at me.

I was scared; he sounded very angry with me.

Bab’Ntuli had a gift to see beyond the present, he could replay the past and foresee the future. I was also scared his gift might even show him things I was not ready for Mama to know about me.

Things only God knew about, oh maybe my friend, Lala. About my habit of smoking the herb. On her knees, every day she prays, Mama prays I never get my hands on it. There’s a lover too, the lover she is not supposed to know about - especially the fact that I have been naked and done all sorts of things with him.

Mama and I never spoke about sex, the last conversation I had with Mama related to sex was when I got my first period at thirteen. She warned me to never let a boy poke anything in my vagina, pinch or even touch it. She taught me to avoid the calling of men- especially the old men who hangout at the street corner day and night waving at every skirt and dress passing by.

Here’s a thing we are taught to protect ourselves from rape. To run when we see it come our way. Because of these teachings that come before our breasts sag, when we have been touched willingly and felt pleasure from it we are scared we failed what

we were taught, failed to run when it came our ways. We are scared to have been conjurors of disgrace.

“Uthukile sisi,” said bab’Ntuli.

His question activated the fast beat of my heart. I thought “if he knew about my unsettlement he probably knows about things I do not wish Mama to find out about me.”

He turned to Mama and said, “Mama these kids are lazy, they do not want to do anything, if they are not in the streets smoking drugs, they are burning schools.”

Mama nodded.

At that point the imphepho had covered the entire room, we could barely see each other’s faces - especially bab’Ntuli’s face because the bowl of the impepho was right between his legs.

We are sitting across him; his left foot is next to my right knee. Apart from knowing about bab’Ntuli’s capabilities, his toenails gave me more discomfort. They looked like only a grinder can achieve cutting them off.

They were just there, staring at me. I felt like they were warning me to cooperate otherwise I would leave bab’Ntuli no choice but to spill the beans.

“Why are you people not in classes, what was your business at Union building huh?”

At that point, I was no longer sure if this was still a rhetorical question or I needed to step in and speak on behalf of all the students whose wellbeing had been strangled and caged by the university education. The education they felt no identification which cost lump sums of money - fees they barely afford even before the increment.

I wanted to speak about how hard it was for me to even understand what was being taught in class in the first few weeks because of a limited understanding of the language of Instruction-English.

As I attempted to say something, my voice choked by the roaming smoke of the impepho in the room. Inside I wanted to lay out how I wished that my lecturers did not pitch in class for weeks and be told that they are attending a workshop or there was

no paper - just like in township school. The schools I schooled all my life. I wanted to tell bab’Ntuli how relieved I was when I graduated. That I no longer had to stand in long queues every year to submit all forms of documents at the financial aid office - including an affidavit with the sobbing story of how my father disappeared just so I could prove that I was deserving to study and to be there.

Boiling on the inside, I decided to be quiet because bab’Ntuli might have gotten upset by my responses and coloured the clouds that are following me even darker. I chose to be safe than sorry.

He carried his body up and kneeled on icansi. He wore his red and white cloth on his shoulders, took a spare and repeatedly poked it on the floor. He looked at both Mama and I with his eyeballs on the roof of his eyelids and started calling on names in a strange voice- sounding like a person who is being strangled while attempting to speak. I look at Mama with confusion written on my face but I saw her face dressed in calmness.

Bab’Ntuli took a small bag made of animal skin where his collection of calabashes resided. He brought it closer to me and asked me to I blow hard inside it. I did. He shook the bag and prayed a very brief prayer in his strange voice. He brought the bag Mama and she also blew inside - another shake and a brief prayer followed.

Bab’Ntuli threw the bones and they scattered on the icansi and started pointing on each without saying a word. I looked at Mama’s face again and it still looked calm.

Bab’Ntuli started mumbling something but I could not understand what was saying.

The mumbling started sounding like a sound, a humming sound.

The humming was followed by these words: “Your child is in trouble mama.”

Mama was not moved. Her face told the tale of old news that have circulated in a village for a very long time, when heard about, they no longer cause any shock.

“Where is the father, I can see he is in a dark hole, has he passed on,” said bab’Ntuli.

“I don’t know,” Mama replied.

Bab’Ntuli said there were rituals my father had to do for me in line with my name - his surname. The rituals were important to clear and remove the dark cloud.

“This child feels stuck and lost because she was never introduced to her ancestors properly.”

Bab’Ntuli told Mama she needed to find the eldest member of my father’s family to help her with performing the necessary rituals for me.

“In the meantime... for her to get a job,” he said. “The bones are showing me that you have been knocking on doors and none of them are opening for you, vumani bo?”

“Siyavuma” Mama responded and gave me a commanding look.

“Si...si...siyavuma,” I said with an unsure voice.

Packets of herbs were given to us.

“You will bath with his one, steam with this - when you steam do not forget to talk to God and your ancestors, ask them to protect you and give you a job,” he instructed.

Mama took out a folded orange-yellowish banknote with a leopard from her pocket and pressed it on the floor to make it straight. With a movement of her hand accompanied by hesitation, she placed it on the icansi and looked bab’Ntuli’s with eyes begging for pity.

His facial expression told the brutal truth that there was no change coming. Mama had to come up with alternative ways of how we were to conclude matters of the stomach that evening.

Mama and I walked out of bab’Ntuli’s compound. I walked out not sure what had happened. I was puzzled and all the pieces came from different puzzle images. They did not fit. A replay of the event were the sharp nails that pointed my way commanding my cooperation. The choking of my voice in an attempt to speak. His daunting laugh would not have allowed me. My clothes and every hair on my body moving with the strong scent of impepho.

Still no comforting emails in my inbox. We were awakened by a call of my name from outside. The name was being instructed and scolded. It was our neighbour, she named her dog with my name.

That woman never liked our family, never liked Mama. She accused Mama of all sorts of things all the time - sweeping rubbish to her yard, hitting the wall that divides our house and hers. She also had accused Mama of witchcraft.

Township dog names are usually bobby, sporty, tiger and the bourgie one snoopy, did she really have to give the dog a human name - Dipuo.

Mama was furious. It hurt more for her than it did to me. She felt the woman was indirectly speaking to my inability to get a job. With my university education, my intelligence - my three years of studying I was nothing but a dog.

A township dog you tie with crooked wires. A dog eating anything and everything. The baby dump from bins- even tin fish. A dog you only feed when there are leftovers in your plate. Sometimes a house is built for it, at times it finds refuge in any place to hide around the yard when the rain comes. A dog you kick, a dog you hit when it shits around the yard. A dog you beat up when it creates holes in your most valuable items.

Mama sent me to the steaming station she had set up for me to begin with my treatment.

“Remember to call their names.”

“Remember to ask for luck.”

“Remember to ask for protection- pray hard for that job Deeps,” she said.

Sitting on a low chair with a blazing one plate stove between my legs and a pot of steaming herbs, my body was covered with two blankets. A minute in, my body was already dripping water in every part - every pore of my skin. The smell of boiling herbs reminded me of the gravel grounds after drizzles of rain.

The smell took me to my childhood, after a light rain, the ground smelling of something we wanted to chew on or swallow. The wet soil had a distinct smell that got us craving for soil mixed with water. When taking it in with our breaths was not enough, we kissed and licked the ground. The nearest taste to the wet soil was chocolate. That brought joy in our hearts, but shitting would be hard afterwards. I remember Mama finding out that I ate soil and gave me lashes on the bum. The bum I gave a hard time performing its duty. I continued though. Whenever I got constipated, I did not voice it out because I knew I had brought it on myself.

Maybe like the unemployment, maybe I had brought it on myself by not begging my classmate to talk to her father about hiring me too. She had announced in class that her father was looking for 10 graduates to grant internships to, most of my black classmate had a place in that white company. I should have sent my CV too.

“I don’t hear you praying, do you really enjoy sitting at home- doing nothing with that education,” said Mama dragging me out of my inner thoughts.

I was not sure whether I know how to pray or not. I had never been asked to talk to my ancestors. I only knew how to talk to God and his son, Jesus. At church they taught us never to forget calling on the father, the son and the holy spirit. I mean, if I were my ancestors, I would not appreciate anyone coming to me on some, ‘hey please help me get a job’ when they have never said a word to be before. I didn’t even remember being introduced to them.

I had seen Mama do it so I copied how she normally communicated with them. I started by introducing myself and told them where I had been (just a brief like story) and got straight to business.

When done with the steaming, I used the same water I used for steaming to take a bath as instructed bab’Ntuli

A week had gone by and I was getting used to the treatment, I had created a language which came with special ways and expressions to communicate with my ancestors, the more I spoke to them and asked from them, the more I believed I knew them better

and that they were listening on the other side. I believed they could hear me and they were cooking up something for me.

A month had gone by and I had lost all faith in them - in the possibilities of getting a job. It was not coming, the herbs, the steaming, the prayers were not working in my favour. The wait was longer than I expected.

In the steaming station, I had stopped praying. Mama tried encouraging me to continue, but I could no longer do it.

Along with faith, the language of communication was gone.

The herbs ran out alongside the will to steam and continue with the treatment. The job alert emails kept flooding in my inbox and each time my phone beeped, my heart pounded and prepared itself for disappointment- each time the preparation proved to be necessary. I told Mama I would not continue, she did not take it well.

Our neighbour kept shouting her dog's name using her high pitched voice. The more she called, the more it stung Mama's heart. I had also stopped sending job applications. And I was also no longer hearing from the boy I got naked with.

Mama suggested a revisit to bab'Ntuli's shrine. I took the last visit as luck and ducking the bullet. I vowed to never set foot there again.

Another day with nothing to do. The sun was hot and the birds were out singing a song that sounded like a reminder that everything was going downhill. They were annoying me. I closed my eyes and imagined holding a gun and busting their heads off. One by one. I also imagined things would be easier if I had a slingshot to hit one and braai it like we used to do when we were children. I smile at the memory of being a child and shooting birds using a slingshot with my friends, braai them and whoever got the hit was given the biggest piece.

It had me thinking about how much easier life was back then, how we left it all to elders to worry about how the next meal lends itself to over six plates of family members in the evening. I looked to the streets, a kennel of dogs were barking their lungs out to

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the south direction. They were barking at the dog Dipuo. She was out of her wire leash parading in the streets. The dogs continued barking and they ran after her. The barking sound together with the squeaky loud birds created a chaotic sonic in my head, I wanted to punch the ground or scream but held my hand instead. Bab’Ntuli voice in my head “This child feels stuck and lost because she was never introduced to her ancestors properly.”

The dog’s continued barking and the collective sounds felt stuck in my head. The dog Dipuo goes back to my neighbour’s yard and the other dogs stop barking and turn the other way.

My phone beeped, the locked screen showed the email icon. Unlocking the phone with the intention to clear my notification and it read.

In the City

Ring ring...

What do you want!?

Sir you are speaking t...

I said what do you want?

Sir, I am calling from Lobby finances; we offer loans...

Listen, I have over a million rand in my savings account, why would I need a loan then huh? Don't ever call this number again, you hear?

Toot, toot...

It's not accounting but close, it involves money- numbers, debtors and creditors. I am a step closer to getting something in line with what I studied. Mama says it's a good thing that I have a place to wake up to every morning, rather than sitting at home waving the sun, hello and goodbye. She says it is way better than the job she had for years-washing hospital bed sheets of patients who left their hollow bodies as their souls took off. On a daily basis, I sit in front of a computer with a phone next to me- a major upgrade.

We are told to wear white shirts. Two of mine look dimer every week. Every morning I stand tall in front of the mirror ready to take on the day. I console myself that "you've got to start somewhere." Tall, I stand, like the many buildings in the city some standing

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since the late 1800s. Many of these buildings stand on one steady pillar and other shaky ones. I am the steady pillar, holding my family together. If I do not wake up to this job, how will we survive?

Our office is on the 4th floor. The walls are chipped, the ceiling is attempting to dive down, the floor announces someone's presence before they are in the room. It was a couple of months ago when Mr Balasao started renting this place, they painted over the chipped walls, swept the floor and told us to ignore the ceiling. We were given sheets of paper with people's cell numbers, some with names and some without. We were told to sell at least 50 loans a day and we remembered to quickly stop biting our nails and dial the phones when the wood on the floor made a rocking sound.

On the third floor are couples with children, some without. Old and young unrelated people sharing two, sometimes one bedroomed flats with boxes on windows. The same boxes they remove to hang their laundry in the chilly breeze of the city.

Like many other buildings in the city, this one brings in a group of people to pray and pay. They pray on the second floor, for jobs, cars, houses, marriages and many of their hearts' desires. Then they pay... pay for these things to manifest because 'blessed is the hand that giveth.'

They gather in an approximately 15 square metre room where even through whisper one can hear clearly what the other is saying, but the congregation cannot go on without large speakers and microphones. You see them dressed in their best clothes, any time of the day, any day of the week, going into a flat with a banner written 'MEGA MIRACLE'- next door to it is a poster written 'FLORA'S BEAUTY SALON''

Another large building housing different hopes, dreams, people and businesses. Another large one with mirrors around it. The mirrors with sticky brown dirt even the rain no longer has power clearing. The lady frying and selling fat cakes at the corner no longer bothers to check if her doek is still sitting in the way she would like it to.

An inhale outside this building forces the smell of oil in the lungs. The hot oil is all over, used, hot and cold. This is not because of the lady selling fat cakes at the corner. There are a number of vendors whose businesses have relationships with oil; some braai different kinds of animal's inner parts- part of the marinating ingredients is oil. Some different kinds of fish and some dipping sausages deep in oil and let it swim for that crisp.

The air smells of urine too, urine that has achieved decaying ground concrete, zinc doors and polls.

Walking in the city forces the ears to be bullied by the loud sounds of music coming from the speakers on full blast, placed at every entrance of a clothing shop.

In the air, also lingers the fresh smell of fruits and vegetables. In the midst of it, cabbage leaves slide in car wash water and banana peels cause someone rushing and not paying attention to where they are walking to slip.

Or maybe choosing to look like they are rushing somewhere because everyone is running or power walking- no stroll like the ones you'd take at the park. In the city, strangers bump on each other's shoulders. Strangers step on each others' little toes while their bags are pressed on their tummies or chest. Some of these people will never meet again and some will one day meet and not even know their bodies once baby kissed.

Mama says in the city, I should walk like I know who I am and where I am going. I should not dare ask for directions from anyone but a man wearing black patched overall with a stick. If I don't see one around, the best thing to do is keep walking until maybe my eyes lay themselves on anyone who fits the description.

She says if I do not keep walking, I will become a target to pairs of eyes looking for a fix, looking for a meal, looking to sell something or to buy something. Mama says I

need to continue walking. "Do not look back, on the sides but in front," is what she said was the rule.

She says no one belongs in the city. Everyone arrive(ed) because they are going somewhere, they are looking for something, they are onto something, or with something.

There are many moving souls, some move in body frames and some roam in the air and are sometimes only visible in the night time. She says they roam at night time because they are in search- looking for their bodies. The bodies lost in different ways. As children, barely weeks old, left among piles of black bags. As women, in strange passages with blood flowing between their legs, torn blouses and a knife stab on the neck. As men, dressed in leopard print vests and brentwood pants with a bullet right in the stomach, bodies often found in Siyaya taxis. As young men, their wrists tied with wires and needles hanging on their veins, bodies found during the day at the traffic robots next to the building with mirror walls. Bodies usually found while the robots flashing red repeatedly and cars quarrelling through hooters on who gets to drive through first.

Mama says, these souls roam in the city because even though their bodies were buried six feet underground, they are still not at home.

She says, the city ground sings songs of cries and worries of family members who are in wonder where these souls ended. if they are still intact with their bodies or if they've long separated. Mama says when you die, your family needs to fetch your soul where it was last attached to your body and take you home, that's how you can access the afterlife.

It is 18:00 and I have only achieved thirty-five calls for the day. It is winter, another very brief day has gone by.

I tell Mr Balasao I need to leave, taxis to the township end at 20:00 and there's a worm queue I still need to secure a place at.

"How many calls have you done today?"

I tell him.

He gives me a disappointed face but still approves that I can go home using a nod.

I walk out of the building, there he is, that person again. For the past three days, I see him standing next to a rubbish bin wearing a blond curly wig showing very little of his face, pants tight with a confusing colour. If it was not for the grease covered all over them, I swear they used to be blue. The blue has converted to a military green- so is the top he is wearing. His shoes equally greased, the one on the right, a three-stripe sneaker with a peeping big toe. The left shoe, an oversized brownish boot. On his back, carrying a big sack full of something. He balanced the sack with both his hands on the tied knot.

I take a deep breath and remember Mama's rule. I walk past him and he calls my name.

"Dipuo"

I ignore and take more steps.

"Dipuo! Dipuo!"

Fighting my heart not to jump out of my chest and tears not to wet my face, I walk faster.

He follows me and continues calling.

My eyes rotate searching for help, everyone is on a mission of their own businesses, trying to get somewhere and maybe following their own mother's rules.

The faster I walk, the faster he walks too despite the weight he is carrying on his back.

He catches up with me. "Dipuo, I won't hurt you," he says with a croaky voice. I slow down to catch my breath and I allow his words to offer me relief.

He pulls the wig up showing his entire face. "It's me, Tankiso, from Kgutha."

I recognise the name and could locate it with the place but not the blood eyes with abnormally standing out pupils. The fat dried weight of his body. The skin covered with an unnatural black pigment- part grey/part navy. The slow paced voice, dragging each word before spitting it out. The multiple scars on his wrists- evidence to something sharp piercing through the skin. All this does not fit the name and place.

A closer look, I see him. It is him. Tankiso, he is one of those they point and label 'abonyaope'. Known to live on a street drug they say is made of cleaning detergent, ARVs, plasma screen powder and everything possible.

They say nyaope boys when referring to them, sometimes they replace the boy with girl.

They say they roam in the city because they are on the run.

They say they are wanted with axes, match sticks and petrol by community members in the township.

They also say they are in the city because they have cleaned out everything in the township, including wet hung clothes on people's washing line.

They say, because nyaope is so addictive, one experience gets you hooked forever.

They say, there's a story about a guy who raped and killed his mother because she hid her money.

They say, they recycle too, it's another easy money maker- especially with an abundance of plastic bags, bottles and cans resting everywhere were flowers once grew.

They say, R30 of a sack full of recyclable waste gets you a fix.

They say when you see them lining up on the side of the road, do not stare.

They say, the flesh of their skins is no friend to water, the drug makes the body ache when it comes in contact with water.

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They say you identify them with scruffy hard hair capable of swallowing a R5 coin, the one with a goldish colour and Mandela's face on it.

"I saw you last week walking out of this building when a dead body was found by the robots," he says using his face and eyes to point where the body lay. "He was my friend...overdose," dragging the words out of his words as if they buffering because of limited internet access.

"Sorry, I need to go," I say activating the highest walking speed of my body's capability.

That day travelling home, I logged into Facebook and searched for Tankiso. Tankiso Mofokeng, his profile picture, a black and white photograph of Tupac Shukar signing westside with both his hands. His last post, dated from 3 years ago. It was an up close blur selfie with the caption 'thug till I die.' His profile info said:

Born in 1994

Single.

Siblings? None.

Parents? No tag.

Education? Sivuleleni primary.

Under education, his profile also said he went to the University of Thug mansion and from Kgutha.

He forgot to update his home was now anywhere in the city. Anywhere he can sit, tie his wrists with a wire to locate a vein where he can inject the drug and run for a sheltered spot when it starts drizzling.

Stories Mama tells

Mama loves telling stories, she tells me stories once told by my great grandmother to my grandmother around the fire in the village. The same stories my grandmother told to Mama while soaking in heat from the Welcome Dover coal stove. She tells me these stories while we sit next to a two bar heater. The stories she often tells are about rabbits, soups cooked in giant pots and about the zim-zim with big teeth and a base voice. Mama also tells stories that have not travelled from my great grandmother. Like the one she told me about Kgutha.

She says there was a time in our country, black people nervously sat with the tip of their asses on street chairs previously written “whites-only” but when they realised a second black president was serving in office. She says they eased up and put the rest of their asses on the chair, relaxed their backs and stretched their legs.

She says there were many many people in very small houses in the township. She says there were so many people in these four room houses that other people had to sleep in the kitchen, under the table and it was suggested once that some should sleep on the roof.

Mama says these houses were built a long time ago by the apartheid government to accommodate people who were working in the city. These were men, they later brought their wives from the villages, they had children. Mama says it was around the same time that the second president was serving in office that these men and women’s children were having their children and also working in the city and other places like mines.

Mama says in these very small houses also lived relatives who came from villages to find work. It was a new time in the country and the new president had promised to offer people jobs, better houses and other things. Mama said there were a few people who were given houses but there were other people who were on waiting lists. She says there were those who could not register because they were not born in the country and didn’t have papers.

While they wait, the people read the constitution and it said the country belongs to all who live in it, the people said “okay, we will wait at these open lands.”

Usually open lands next to the train stations convenient to their everyday commuting to work or not far from the factories and mines they worked at.

These parts of the country were open fields with no cords of electricity or pipes connecting running water or pipes were human waste travelled. No schools or clinics. These were open land occupied by grass, rocks to the tiniest of stones, wheat and thorns.

After the people had decided these fields were what they would claim their pieces of the new South African pie. They spent days tirelessly digging out all the rubble, raked the ground using the mouths of their reef boots and their fingers widespread.

Mama says when they were done with cleaning the ground, they stabbed pieces of zinc in the soil to plant the foundation of their shacks. Hammers on nails, nails connecting dismembered of zinc varying in sizes to build shelters they would call homes.

She says, every day, more people arrived happy to be part of the composition of a beat evoking emotions of belonging. The hammers to nails, nails to zinc, zinc connect, a metal house becomes a comfortable discomfort place they call home. The house came in their special ways, some were bigger with L shapes and some were in squares, while others were in the shape of a bus or train.

The zinc seed germinated, there were more shacks and a community was born. Usually people with external gaze name such communities “informal settlement” Mama says the people within see more than informality. She says the people usually

name such towns with names that show a badge of hope, names that do not diminish their resilience and perseverance. Mama says they named the one they had built, Thembalihle, beautiful hope.

Mama says building Thembalihle was an act of claiming the basic right of belonging, of owning, and screaming out not to be forgotten. A community born solely on its people sweat and strength.

But it was when Sesotho speaking people started telling the tale of how Thembalihle was built that the name changed. The whole process of finding an open field and raking the ground is Kgutha is Sesotho. The Sesotho speaking people told their friends and relatives who were looking for places to build their shacks that "batla kgutha banye", meaning they will rake the ground until they shit themselves. Kgutha then is the name that stuck with the place I learnt to write my name on its fine soil using my tiny fingers.

Kgutha was built in the late '90s, till date places like Kgutha are still being built in South Africa and follow the same tale with the composition of the same beat; hammers to nails, nails to dismembered varying in sizes zinc, zincs connect and a metal house becomes a comfortable discomfort place they call home. Mama and my father built their home next to Tankiso's grandmother's house.

An ordinary day in Kgutha, I was outside building different shapes like the shacks in Kgutha with tiny stones. Tankiso's grandmother, told Mama there was a woman who kept children in her house, she had toys and she gave them porridge in the morning, soup and bread during lunchtime and squeezed in ABCs and 123s only for R10 a month.

Tankiso and I become friends. Every morning, he would watch me being washed by Mama in the dish. Sometimes when I was early, I'd be watching him getting washed by his aunt Sherin when his grandmother was away working in big houses in the suburbs.

At crèche, we sat together, ate together, played together- sometimes when it was the girls turn to go outside to urine in the lined buckets, the teacher had to remind Tankiso he was a boy. Instructed him to sit on the mat and wait for me to return.

The other children teased Tankiso for carrying a strawberry bag with hanging legs. They said it was a girl's school bag. They would laugh and roll on the floor. This would not only hurt him but it will make me cry too.

On the year Tankiso and I turned seven, we left crèche and started school together. We were placed in the same class and sat on the same desk and shared peanut butter sandwiches during lunch. We also impatiently waited for lunchtime on the occasional days when one of us had polony sandwiches. Opening, pinching the polony and closing the lunch-tin during the teacher's lesson. We were inseparable until a particular first of September.

Every year on this day, the kids came out to play what we called 'summertime.' The gravel filled with kids walking barefoot despite the tiny broken glittering bottles assembled on the ground from the weekend fallouts. Girls in their panties with colourful grocery plastics on their heads. Boys running around with their underwear not bothered by what the water touching the hair on their heads. Everyone with a bucket of water filled from a nearby tank ready to splash anyone who comes their way.

Tankiso was instructed by aunt Sherin not to participate in "summertime" and this meant I could not take part too. Instead, aunt Sherin gave us each 50 cents and said we should keep out the water. In our attempt to spend the coins, we were both splashed with water all over our bodies. We ran at the back of Tankiso's grandmother's house, undressed every cloth we had on our bodies and hung them on the fence claiming division between the gravel were people walked and Tankiso's grandmother's yard.

Mbali Kgame
G19k9611 MACW
Title: A Skin That Took Them Through

While hiding from aunt Sherin, we find ourselves leaning against the zinc, heating the back of our bodies, Tankiso said “I am going to buy a big gun and shot all those kids who made us soaking wet.”

It was in between our hysterical laughs, my eyes closed, hand on the tummy when I heard aunt Sherin’s voice shouting “what are you two doing?”

I opened my eyes and she was already repeatedly hitting Tankiso’s ass using her hands and him screaming with tears flowing down his cheeks.

I ran home, to throw myself into beatings by Mama for being naked and Aunt Sherin’s additions made the beating unstoppable.

Mama told me to stay away from Tankiso. I’d seen what two naked people did. The days my father successfully connected the car battery with the TV. In between the grey lines flowing on the screen, it didn’t look right. How the bodies rubbed, pounded on each other.

The next day aunt Sherin did not greet Mama. Tankiso and I did the same. Days extended. We changed desks and pretended that doing homework was easier without each other.

Ibus labelungu

Apricot tree, grass, here I was a little girl in an orange dress with multiple flowers, printing the word sex on gravel. First I slowly wrote the alphabet S- then-E-then-X. It was a new word I had learned. I had seen it written at the back of every toilet door, different sides of the toilet walls and under my desk at school. My friend said it meant doing silly stuff with boys, doing silly stuff to yourself like rubbing your vagina and feeling something you want to keep doing.

I was having a good time with my gravel art piece when Skwiza called from a distance. I looked up to see her dressed in her favourite brown towel wrapped around her waist, wearing her everyday blue dress almost turning white. She called my name again and waved to indicate that I should come to her.

Frightened, I quickly stomped on my art piece-erased all the flowers. Erased all the hearts. Erased all the butterflies. Erased all. Every little detail that decorated the piece. Erased the piece. Erased the evidence of my mischief.

I then ran to Skwiza's house. She needed my help with unplaiting her hair. Took a glance and saw no sign of braids or cornrows. Confused, I sat on a chair. I watched her clean the back of a CD with her brown towel. She took the remote and played some boring gospel song.

Skwiza hummed along. Just when I thought it could not get any worse, she released a note. I rolled my eyes. The music was playing loud; I didn't understand why. I hated this type of music- I hated Skwiza for making me ruin my art piece, I hated Skwiza for making me touch her dirty hair.

It looked like an old mat deserted at the dungeons for years. Dirty-old-disgusting was its condition. She said she had had her cornrows for 3 months. I thought to myself "what type of human being does that- what kind."

This is because Skwiza did not take the bus like the other women in Kgutha. Clean women. Elegant women. Some have husbands. Some don't. They all leave in the wee hours of the morning and return in the evening. They are always dressed in beautiful clothes- not brown towels. I want to be like those types of women. Not the Skwiza

type. I want to take the bus to work every morning. I want to sit by the window like the women who smile and wave when we sing our song:

Ibus labelungu, langena emgodini, yasuza ibanana yathi beepeeb beepeeb, yathi bobob bobob!

Skwiza would have told on me if I refused to help her. She knew my dad. They came from KwaZulu Natal together. He would have said I disrespect elders. He would have probably known that I wrote silly words on his yard. He would have hit me. I had no choice but to touch Skwiza's hair. Feeling it's greasy gravel texture made me want to vomit. I spotted a tiny cockroach and this made me want to break out of this horrible dream. A dream I've dreamt since I was a little girl.

However, what really woke me from this nostalgic slumber was the sudden stop of the church song Skwiza was playing in the dream which was the same song sung in the bus. When the song stopped, I realised that something had interrupted the powered church service that takes place every morning on the bus. I heard voices scream Kuyasha! Kuyasha! Kuyasha!

I opened my eyes to a mist of smoke. No sight of the pastor who usually stands by the passage and preaches. I looked back for the bus church choir ladies. I could not see anyone. I could only see smoke. All I could hear were screams thrown from different parts of the bus. I looked to the side. Fortunately, the window displayed something. I look out the window. It was still dark. The streets were still empty.

I usually sat by the window on the bus. If I sat right at the corner, I would not get to see all the faces that stare at me with judgement. Judgement at not taking part in the church service. I mean we travel at gad damn 5am. The dirty bus seat had already stained my dress- I was not in the mood. All I needed was a continuation of my sleep rudely terminated by the alarm at 4 am.

The bus was burning. The lady sitting next to me had collapsed. She was fat. I shook her. I shook her twice. I tried the third time. She refused to wake up- don't know if it was by choice.

To free myself, I pressed on her stomach with my hand and stomped on her thighs. Made it to the unseen passage between seats. I walked gently. I was choking- my

throat was dry. I saw very little- vision started becoming blurry. It was dark. I kept walking, I stomped on more bodies. Before my destination- the door. I fell- collapsed.

I woke up on a single size bed, with a half-burned face all the way to my arm. I asked what happened. I was told the hospital had been my home for a couple of days. I didn't make it to my first day of internship. I was never seen getting off at the bus stop that evening- dressed in my elegant black and white dress like the women I admired.

I wondered about the other passengers. All the men and women who commute to work sweat to provide for their children. The people I walked on- that did not move a bit. The people I left to save my own life. I wondered about the bus church leader who is not really a pastor but got the skills to preach and maybe an aspiration. What about the singing ladies who sing their lungs out praising God for blessing them with jobs. Singing to show gratitude for the old skorokoro bus that takes them there. Did all these people make it alive?

I pity all the children whose faces light up when they see busses in Kgutha. I pity them for running after it. For saying to their peers that they will one day also ride the bus like their mothers-fathers-uncles-aunties-brothers-sisters. And that they will bring sweets and other nice things.

I pity them for singing the bus song passed down from generations to generations.

Ibus labelungu, langena emgodini, yasuza ibanana yathi peebeep peebeep yathi bobob bobob!

Emptiness

Her upper front teeth would be loose. Her Mama would tie the one on the right to the wardrobe door with a string and pull it out. The one on the left would later detach from the gums as she bit on an apple. It would be around the same time when community members take to the dusty streets with placards, rocks, and tires to demand places they can release their bowels and bladders.

It is after television news coverage where an elder with a gap similar to hers stands in front of the camera and says “we do not have places to shit, we shit in buckets.” It is after the protest when big trucks come to deliver large pipes, asbestos, plastic taps, and toilet pots and seats.

It is during the building of the long drop toilets of small shelters and taps on the side that the two teeth would start peeping on the open space of her mouth. Not long after they stop peeping and begin to comfortably reside in the gap that the two teeth at the bottom start to also want to detach. The people of the community take to the dusty streets again in the hope of making headlines again. This time, they demand electricity but the news people, do not make it because they are busy covering another shantytown with the same cries.

It is around the same time she cries, pleading with her Mama not to use a string and wardrobe door to pull out the two bottoms lose teeth. She is not ready for the emptiness. Another emptiness she has to wait to fill. Another emptiness that does not make sense to her. Her Mama was not losing anything in her mouth, nor were the other learners in her grade. None of them could fill the emptiness she felt inside of her because of not having Tankiso as a friend anymore. The emptiness of not understanding why. Not being able to retrace what she and Tankiso were doing behind the shack that other year. The emptiness of what aunt Sherin saw that they didn't see. She was not ready to feel lack, lack of bottom teeth, lack of answers, which was why she started to resent Tankiso.

Tankiso, she felt anger towards him for not talking to her anymore. Tankiso, her eyeballs would not bear looking at. Tankiso, she would not find anyone who was like him. Tankiso, she felt guilty for wanting to laugh with him again.

This would keep happening until she felt some itchiness around her nipples. This happened until she started growing small firm lumps under her nipples. While she felt alone, she then identified someone whose nipples were also starring steadily through a pink and white Hello Kitty T' shirt. She would meet Sego and Sego would be the friend she was missing to fill the emptiness. This would be around the same time the people in Kgutha would press on the electricity switch on & off while they wait for the installation of street lights as they were promised would follow.

Sego would fill in the space in her heart. Help her make peace with the confusion which had found a home in her brain. Her and Sego would build, share and go through experiences that would replace the ones she had with Tankiso but the unknown anger towards him, she kept.

Days Of The Banana

What filled an empty bowl with cheese curls every Tuesday was an empty bottle of beer, brandy, spirit or cider. Sego and I had just stolen three bottles from her father's alcohol bottle collection. Three bottles of black label, meant we would get three filled bowls of cheese curls from the Banana Carri.

We both didn't have watches on our wrists or any other device that would advise us of time. But we both knew when the sun got too loud as it hits our backs and braaied our small bums while seeking rest on Mama's red-polished stoep, when the heat burned the soles of our bare feet, the Banana Carri was on its way. We patiently waited.

I sat next to Sego, my left knee, and her right- kissing each other, my hand on my chin with eyes facing the sky, wondering why the car we were waiting for was called a Banana Carri yet it gave us cheese curls, not bananas. Sego disturbed my thoughts. She leaned towards my shoulder, reached for my ear and whispered, "But, why do we call it Banana Carri and it does not give us bananas?"

I turned my eyes to her. We smiled. We both laughed. Our brains went through a storm, blowing out different suitable names for the snack van. Names like bottle car, or Cheese car or the hooting car.

At that time, I had concluded that she was my best friend. We became friends not only because of the bumps that were growing on our chest, what also formed our friendship was the fondness we both had for a dog that religiously visited my home and waited for whatever we offered. After we had given it too many chewed chicken feet bones, isikhokho sepapa, the dog stopped coming for visits but claimed our home as theirs. It had to have a name and we named it Bibo. I was jealous though. Bibo adored Sego more than he did me. His tail would not stop wagging in her presence. But with me, not so much.

Sego was tall, she picked up Bibo by his front legs and put him on her stomach. If I dared to do the same, Bibo would jump on my shoulders and the ground is where I'd end up and Mama would scold me for dirty clothes.

The sound of a dog sniffing terrified me. My heart would start beating in a race. Sego would kiss the dog. For me that was disgusting, but sometimes to impress her I'd also

try to kiss the dog. Its wet nose would touch my lips. I hated the feeling of Bibo's wet nose on my lips. I had seen the places where it went sniffing, some of them were places where people left baby nappies and rotten food with worms.

Sego could do many things that I could not do. She played with dogs, picked up rocks and climbed trees. While on the other hand, I was the soft kind, my skinny little fingers would resort to gently drawing flowers on gravel and building house diagrams using tiny stones and sticks. Putting them in line, piece by piece.

While waiting for the Banana Carri, Sego asked to squeeze one of my nipples to feel if it felt the same as hers. I gave her the stretched wide-eyed look. She promised she would let me squeeze hers too and to be gentle. So I let her but it was painful.

"Not too hard," she said. I looked at her face. She looked scared. This was the only time I had seen Sego fearful of something, holding back and handing over her power to someone else. She trusted me not to press too hard, even though I wanted to because I could not do it to myself. When I remembered the pain I felt when I tried pressing hard, I knew she didn't deserve it. She was a good friend.

Feeling her breast bud was different from mine. Hers seemed bigger. I was consoled.

Those were strange days, our nipples were starting to be visible in our Hello Kitty and butterflies' tops. Older people and some of our peers were pointing out that we were growing breasts. "At such a young age," they said.

But having each other made it less painful to digest the heart stinging words. We were both ashamed. It felt like we had done something wrong, as I had done with Tankiso. We secretly exchanged the words: "I hate them, I wish they could go away."

We felt we were being punished. The pain we felt on our nipples when we touch them or mistakenly forgetting we could not just lay on our chest on the grass was unbearable.

Sego had a solution, she told me her mother had a plan to get rid of the growing bumps. She said they were to travel to Sisonke, where her grandmother stayed. Sisonke was 2 hours away and they were going to travel on the coming weekend for her grandmother to sweep the breast away.

“They will only grow back when I am older,” she said.

I asked her if I can come with her to get mine swept as well. She told me the person who would have to sweep them away has to be Mama’s mother. I sighed.

The thought of having breast while Sego had none didn’t sit well with me. This would have meant that we would no longer be friends because I would no longer be a child. That I would have to get married and have children because people with big breasts are mothers. My breast would have been ready to breastfeed. I was scared.

The Banana Carri had still not arrived and we were bored with ourselves. Our legs were dry. I suggested we play our favourite map game. I wanted to play as many games and spend as much time with Sego before she got her breast swept.

We loved the map game, we used tiny sharp sticks to follow all the cracks on our legs. The purpose of the game was to see who would have the most interesting visible lines. It was a painful game because we had to draw on our un-moisturised dry skin. It was a painful game but the end results were exciting to see, therefore we ignored the pain. Like the people in Kgutha, who lived hard lives but were comforted by the President’s promises.

Finally, we heard the hoots of the banana Carri from a distance. All the kids ran carrying different alcohol bottles: brandy, beer, ciders, and whiskeys. We all waited in a line to give the Banana Carri man our bottles for cheese curls filled bowls. Sego and I each got one and a half bowl of cheese curls. We went back to Mama’s red-polished stoep and let the cheese melt on our tongues. The cheese taste rested on my tongue while I thought about my Mama’s mother who was not around to sweep the bumps on my nipples away.

In The Secret Bag

In Mama's brown handbag, there were multiple papers with different textures. Some were slickly slips with faded text. Some were papers which had converted to a soft touch with dancing inked words. Some were hardcover quarter page with the name Makatara and the year 1930 as a date of birth. Between these loose papers were black and white photographs of the same woman. I saw her in her teenage years captured in laughter. Her joy was captivating, very loud in the photograph, making me share it with her.

In another photograph, there she was with a group of other teenage boys and girls wearing similar v neck jerseys. In the group, her beauty was the most highlighted. Her eyes looked packed with excitement. Her smile gave away the same joy she carried in the first photograph I saw.

There were other photographs of her in her adult years. One where she was dressed in a long floral dress with a belt on the figure. In the photograph, she still carried the joy and beauty from her other pictures.

As I flipped from one photograph to another, there were three colour photographs. The first one, her face with a staring scar from her ear across the cheek to the tip of her bottom lip straight to her jawline. In this photograph, she looked lost, her eyes looked shy and uninviting. The second photograph showed different parts of her body; bruised, scarred, multi coloured, broken. The final photograph was one she took with three other women who look like they were having the time of their lives but her face looked like it had settled in unknown desert graves. She did not give the captivating joy. I did not share it with her.

I was thirteen and studying these photographs reminded me of a story Mama once told to a visitor, about her mother. This was not one of those stories she told me about the Zimzim and the singing mother or the cooking rabbit.

I was lying on the floor pretending to be doing my favourite thing, building house plans with matchsticks and tiny stones. I was working on a plan house, bigger than the one we lived in. It was the same house I drew when my teacher instructed us to draw our homes. It had four bedrooms, a big kitchen, sitting room and bathroom I had seen a similar one in a magazine. Outside it had a triangular roof and was made of brown bricks. "Is this how your home looks?" they'd ask and I'd give a slow-paced nod. I lied, the house plan was nothing close to the shack we lived in. The shack divided with a curtain into two rooms.

The house I drew also had beautiful flowers around it.

That day Mama had a blackish mark around her left eye, Mama's eye looked smaller than usual, her skin had a small part showing the inside of her face.

Her visitor asked, "why don't you leave?"

"I have nowhere to go," said Mama

She peeped at me while I lay on the floor pretending to be fixated on my house plan. Mama began to tell the story about her mother in a low soft voice.

"Do you remember what it was like in the township during the late '80s."

The township was burning, burning of tires, shops, schools, people and their houses. The burnings were signs of warnings by whites for the people to stop fighting against the government. Some of the burnings were signs demanding freedom by the people. The people were tired of being treated unfairly and were dedicated to fighting for what they deserve: freedom.

In between the fight, there was another battle that Mama said had started which had vague origins. The battle between the amaZulu tribe under the political party Inkatha Freedom Party and the amaXhosa tribe under the African National Congress.

She said some speculated it started in the men's hostels where one member of each party got into a misunderstanding about a woman, issues of who she came with and who she would leave the tavern with. Some speculations pointed at the apartheid government having planted the battle seed, seeing that these political parties were

stronger in unity, therefore, they wanted them to focus on fighting each other and not together against them.

In a train coach filled with people, some ANC members and some not, the Inkatha walked in and suddenly threw bullet words, fists, izagila and fire touches. There she was, Makatara inside it all with a big scorch bag filled with bananas, apples, peanuts, boiled eggs, cigarettes, and matchboxes.

She took the same train every day from Pumolong to Moletsane station. Commuters who also took the same train knew her. They knew she was the go-to person for snacks and smokes.

Within the stampede, everyone was fighting for the survival of their lives. Makatara was thrown outside a moving train. She flew. Her skirt waved like a parachute but did not help her landing. Her face landed with force on a fence scarred her for life while different parts of her body took refuge on the steel of the railway.

Makatara vowed to hate 'MaZulu' for as long as she lived.

The attention-grabbing scar on her face. The careless stitch on her left leg. The marks on her chest, arm, and bottom of her back were reminders of that day. References to point why it was necessary for her children to hate the two tribes as much as she did.

She expected them to build friendships and relationships with anyone closer to home. With anyone who was not Nguni.

Makatara never approved of Mama and my father's relationship. She felt deceived by her daughter, especially when a fetus from the Zulu man started growing inside her daughter's womb. She kicked Mama out of her house and threatened to kill her if she ever returned.

Makatara's last days were spent on a hospital single bed, where her body caught up with the catastrophe; stiff and sore knees, arms, legs, and back. She spent her last days scribbling on her notebook with her wrinkled fingers about one event, moment, experience that her brain was not successful at erasing. The battle of the Inkatha vs the ANC.

She scribbled on the blank white pages how it quickly happened. How she was inside the train and the next her ears felt the harsh rush of air, her skirt flew in the air and her face met the fence her body hitting steals like they were enemies.

Her brain had erased the joyful years she spent in nursing school where she met her husband. It had erased the moments she shared with her mother in the village of Wawi. Her brain had erased all. But there were some episodes of Makatara's life that visited on occasional basis. The number of siblings she had and how many of them were still alive. The number of children she had and which one had betrayed her, which one she despised the most and wished not to come to her funeral. Makatara had made peace with crossing over.

As she told the story, Mama's words were starting to limp on her tongue, they were walking alongside the sound you make when tears start flowing from your eyes. Mama took another brief peep at me and I was still laying on the floor rearranging my sticks and stones building a much bigger and better house plan. She leaned towards her visitor who was sitting across the table and whispered.

"When she passed on, I was told they found a purse hung around her neck with banknotes adding to R600 and a notebook."

Mama was told by a family relative that a flip of the first page of the notebook were addresses and names of relatives. As you flipped further, there were multiple grocery lists, Snoek fish was always the third item on the list.

In the middle of the book was a Sepedi name, it was written in shaded alphabets, Dipuo.

"I did not even attend my mother's funeral, my siblings did not want me there," Mama said in a soft whisper.

"I gave birth to my daughter months later and named her Dipuo."

The beautiful woman in the photographs was Mama's mother, Makatara. My house plan was growing bigger and so would my breast. Unlike Segoo, I had no grandmother to sweep them off. They would stay. They would grow bigger and I would have to lose Segoo, lose another friend.

The Selfish Dust Collector

The first time the man came by, we all dropped everything we were doing to respond to his call of taking something for free. We did not care what it was, we all wanted it.

He shouted at the top of his voice "Thatha Mahala" and we all took a chance, ran to the streets to see what was in offering for free.

When we heard him, Mama briefly wiped the soap bubbles on her hands with her dress leaving some on the spaces between her fingers and rushed outside.

Next door, Aunt Sherin dropped a bucket full of water and also rushed to the street.

Sego and I were sitting on the grass. We threw away the sticks we were using to trace the visible lines of our dry legs and joined in the responding of the man's call.

He repeatedly shouted, "Thatha Mahala.'

A man on his stomach with his legs crossed, his hands gripping on the ground, on anything to give him the power to move. "Thatha Mahala" he shouted. When we saw where the call was coming from, we were all confused. Here was a man who clearly had nothing to offer us. We wondered what motivated the sound of his voice to fly out of his mouth with so much conviction. Almost manipulating our minds to think we were blind not to see the offering.

We gathered around him. More people who had heard his call, left their houses running. Some came with one shoe, others still in their sleeping clothes despite the fact that it was in the afternoon.

No one wanted the opportunity of getting something for free to pass them. It could have been food, could have been something to use around the house or something to wear.

One time a van came by hooting and bearing groceries. Some people did not respond until they saw their neighbours running carrying mille meal bags. That became a learning. And so when this man called, many responded.

But to our surprise, his call was very disappointing.

We looked at this man and realised he was just another one of us consumed in the dust, with nothing in his big deep pockets or on his hard bruised hands. He was carrying nothing on his back too.

Like many of us in Kgutha, everywhere he went, this man went on and collected dust with the heavy clothes he wore.

The dust was a part of us. We lived with it. We lived in it. We lived on it. It was stuck on the surface of our oily hair, the hair we oiled in hope to achieve some shine and slick. It was at the back of our ears, the bottom of our knees and the top of our eyelids. The dust was on the tables we ate on, the beds we slept on. It was on the lids of buckets we drank water from. It was between the collar line of our ironed shirts and pants, the clothes we reserved only for Sundays.

Wipe it off.

Wash it off.

Dust it off.

Brush it off.

Were common phrases in our everyday language. Even though we knew we could not escape it, we tried to get rid of it.

But not the man, he was very selfish, he crawled along the streets collected all the dust for himself, every part of his physical appearance resembled it.

Every time he came by, he shouted. We eventually got used to him. We no longer felt the urgency to attain to his call when we heard his voice.

Some people felt pity for him, they tossed coins at him, offered clothes and food but the man crawled along and shouted louder with his cracked dusty lips.

There came a time when people did not feel pity and no longer asked themselves about this mysterious man.

Not getting attention did not stop him. He did not stop coming by, he shouted even louder "Thatha Mahala."

Elders kept their hands covered with soap bubbles. They carried twenty-litre buckets from the communal tap all the way to their houses. His crawling became another activity of the day and his shouting added to the everyday soundtrack that played in the background as we went on to take each day.

But sometimes it was us (the children) who missed him when he was not seen crawling along the dusty streets. When we missed him, we shouted "Thatha Mahala" giggled while others rolled and crawled on the dust to mimic him.

When he came by, we walked along with his crawling and asked questions to put together the puzzle pieces of what had been circulating about him through different mouths around Kgutha.

Some people said he was seen in the early hours of the morning walking on his own two feet. Others spoke of his beautiful house not far away from Kgutha. They said the house stood in isolation in the middle of nowhere.

"The only reason he does not accept any of the things we offer him is that he has an abundance of them and more," they said.

Some people speculated if you get to see his house or him walking on his own two feet and not keep it to yourself, you will not live another day after you have told the tale.

They said like Thabo, who mysteriously died after telling someone he saw the man in a black tuxedo walking with a woman wearing a military jumpsuit, pink heels and had long slickly shining hair. The story was, Thabo even saw two short women who spoke Portuguese walking behind them.

Because of the circulation of these stories, elderly people started to be fearful him, but not us, we wanted to hear all about his life. And we believed he would not hurt us.

We asked, "What are you offering for free?"

"We do not see you carrying anything?"

"What do you mean by Thatha Mahala?"

"Please tell us more about your secret house," we pleaded.

When we asked the man these questions, he smiled, carried his body up to sit on his butt, spread his legs and told us about his house and world.

He told us about his secret house located not far from Kgutha. He said he had been sent by a greater power of the world to come and save people from suffering and take them to a place of harmony. He said the world is free, that was why he shouted "thatha mahala," every day. He said going to the house was also for free.

"What is inside?" we asked.

He told us, inside was an overflowing of water, clean and clear water coming out of gold taps. Unlike in Kgutha where there was one communal tap placed at an open field while the once placed on the drop toilet shelter did not release water.

In his description, the house walls were covered with sparks of glitter from real gold. The man said when you touch the gold, you gain the powers to create or do whatever you want and wish.

"When I enter the house, the first thing I do is touch the gold on the wall and regain my well-functioning legs."

"What else can you do when you are at your house? do you have ice cream, lots of meat?" we asked with excitement.

The man said everything is available in his house and anything is possible.

Touching the gold on the wall can make us fly up, like birds. Eat as much as we can. Have much bigger houses within the same house. We could also have lots of money and no lack.

I thought about my grandmother, Makatara, how if I go to the man's house, the first thing I would do is touch the gold and bring her back to life. For her to return and sweep away the growing bumps on my nipples. Like Sego's grandmother was to do for her in order for them to disappear.

"Will she be happy I brought her to life, will she forgive Mama, will she smile at me and ignore the other part of my blood that is not Pedi." I thought to myself.

Mbali Kgame
G19k9611 MACW
Title: A Skin That Took Them Through

We all wanted to visit this place, we wanted to see it. We had wishes and a lot we would like to have and see. We told the man we will accept the offer.

He gave us a wide smile, showing the brown few teeth in his mouth.

The man promised to return the next day to fetch and take us to the secret house.

We wore our biggest smiles as we watched him crawl and disappear in the flowing dust.

Ice Stones and Bullets

The day my father left it was raining with ice stones. I heard the door bang leaving Mama crying very loud like she wanted someone from far away to rescue her.

Unlike most days when it rained with ice stones, that day Mama was not covered with heavy blankets.

Mama fears the rain, especially when it comes with lightning or ice. She says the sound of ice hitting our shack reminds her of a time she was about my age, her mother instructing them to lay on the floor, close their eyes and pray to God to save them.

She says these bullets would come any time of the day. In the house, they took every step and action throughout the days expecting them. They would start hearing the sound of grinding big car wheels moving, patrolling in the streets then the cars would be accompanied by continuous bullets. Mama says the sound of ice stones on our shack is like the continuation of the firing of bullets. The same bullets that broke in the window and hit her younger brother's back because he was not lying on the floor.

Every time when it starts raining, I see it in her eyes. I see fear comfortably residing in her eyes. Mama has told the story of the bullets a number of times, even when she is not telling the story, I see it, can hear it. I see its visuals on her face.

I see them, herself, her siblings and mother, in a panic dropping their bodies to the floor and pressing their faces on the cold cement, also forcefully pressing their eyes, praying, hoping the prayer would take them to a safer world.

When the ice stones come, Mama and I do something similar, except we lay on our high bed balanced with paint tins and we cover ourselves using heavy blankets. Mama often rubs my back and tells me everything is going to be okay, everything is going to be alright, that I should sleep and dream of a better situation.

Here sleep is seen as a problem solver; we think sleep will resolve every problem.

When there is no bread, we sleep.

When we are sick, we sleep.

When we are sad, we sleep.

When I am being naughty mama threatens that she will send me to sleep.

Sometimes sleep does not solve anything. We wake up to the same lack, the same pain, the same mood, the same behaviour.

Before the bang, they were on the other side. Mama and my father. Their voices loud, competing with the loud sound of the ice stones. Both their words were unclear. After a while I heard a scream, it was in Mama's voice. The voice followed by the sound of breaking plates. Plates followed by the door bang. Door bang followed by the loud cry almost defeating the sound of the ice stones.

Mama was on the other side, crying. I wondered about her fear of ice stones. What if there are real bullets disguised as ice stones? What if one gets through the zinc and hits her chest?

I pressed my eyes tight and prayed she joins me in the blankets. I started not hearing her crying voice anymore. Her cold body joined me in the blankets. I felt her tears tucked inside but what she couldn't keep inside was the mucus running from her nose. I held her tightly in the darkness of the heavy blankets, pressed my eyes and imagined us going inside the house of the man who shouted "thatha mahala."

We touched the gold, Mama's tears disappearing. The round black outside her eye disappeared. In the man's house, the sound of ice stones, started going low until they completely stopped. Mama substituted the tears with a beautiful wide smile she only shared in my father absence.

I was tempted to touch the gold and ask for more but seeing Mama the way she was, looking well and happy was enough for me at that time. And so I allowed the moment to be.

Every time there was a knock on the door, we prepared ourselves to see him walk in. There were a lot of knocks, people selling tissue, steel wools, peanuts, and dishes. Days, weeks passed and none of the knocks were by him. We got used to the idea of him not coming back.

Mama created tiny holes on my ear lobes, I wore gold earrings. She put a cream relaxer on my hair, it became fluffy, fewer and sat on my scalp and flowed to my neck. Mama sometimes tied my hair using colourful ribbons with butterflies and flowers.

When I looked in the mirror, I saw less of him.

Mama responded with excitement when people said, “she looks like you.” She gave them a “really” with a face singing for joy- especially when they said, “her skin is no longer as dark as it used to be.”

My father was not home. I never asked Mama where he was and why he left. We never spoke about him, about the day he left. When the other children asked me about him, I told them the truth, that I didn’t know where he was. Mama’s friends noticed her clear even skin on her face. No blue, black and green around her eyes.

When they noticed, they asked “where is the father of your child?” she told them the truth, the truth, the same truth I told the other children. Unlike me, Mama shared the truth with wandering eyes. When I saw this, it made me sad that the truth seemed to be more embarrassing than the ugly colours he often created on her face. The alteration of her eye size she was known for when he was around.

Mama looked at me in a strange way. She often got lost in a stare. I always wondered if it was me she was looking at and not the man she was trying very hard to forget.

She was determined to erase reminders of him. Saturday was scrubbing day, she made me believe I could not survive without a sun hat and her eyes beamed when they pointed out that I had her small eyes. She also gave a slight frown when they spoke about my round big nose and curved lips.

Mama avoided dressing me in multi-colours, patterns, and bright colours. She dressed me in mustard instead of yellow and dust pink instead of the bright pink I loved. Whenever I picked anything with patterns, bright or multi coloured, she told me South African’s would think I was not one of them. She said, “They will hurt you, my child.”

Some kids would not want to play with Anania. They would ask him his name and when he told them, they turned their backs at him. They'd kick the ball his way and when he followed and kicked it they would give him a funny look.

Sego and I sometimes played with Anania in secret. Around other children, we pretended he was not our friend. Sego's skin colour was not like mine and Anania's, a lot of children liked her better than they liked me. She sometimes played with Anania freely in public. Me, I avoided to, I did not want the other children to think we were from the same country. They would have treated us the same.

I learned to avoid them thinking Anania and I were the same by being generous with the description of my origins. I told the other children that although I was dark-skinned, every trace about my family roots is found within the borders of this country. I overcompensated when they asked for my name. I told them my mother is Pedi when they asked of my surname, I told them my father is Zulu.

I sharpened my tongue to pronounce isiZulu words in their proper sound. I learned to make no mistake. I learnt that the "qa" for "iqanda" is achieved when the front part of your tongue hits the roof of your mouth by force. I learnt to fit in because I needed to always prove I belonged in South Africa. I learnt all of this alongside sitting with my legs crossed and saying "thank you" and "please" when asking for something.

Mama Says I Have Crocodile Skin.

It happened around the time when we started wearing our shoes full time, the time we carefully stepped on soil so the dust didn't stick on our moisturised legs. It happened around the time we were particular about the direction of how we comb our hair; we also used a cream relaxer and oil frequently than before. It happened around the same time Sego whispered in my ear and told me she liked Tankiso. "With all the boys, all those that gave her attention, why Tankiso," I thought. But I didn't say anything to Sego, she didn't know Tankiso was once a precious friend of mine. I could not tell her that I had never stopped missing Tankiso in my life. It was a secret I kept to myself.

We didn't talk, I admired him from a distance. We were all growing, he grew taller and was the most handsome boy in our street. He was mysterious too- hardly spoke and was never in the streets macking on girls or forcefully pulling them to get their attention like the other boys.

After telling me about her interest in Tankiso, Sego whispered in my ear, "I think Anania likes you."

I didn't reply to her silly remark. "why was she choosing Anania for me," I thought.

I mean Anania gave her all the chips and sweets from his father's tuckshop, also, once Anania gave her money. She gave me half of it because she feared she would be in trouble if her parents find out.

Even though she spent the money with me, it didn't make sense why Anania would like me and not her. He barely even acknowledged my presence.

Anania came from a well-known family, they lived in one of the biggest shacks in Kgutha. "You will pass a greenhouse by the corner ha ma Anania," they'd say when giving directions. It was the only shack with a black shiny *stoep* around it.

Anania's family was known for their businesses. A tuckshop were people visited daily to buy the smallest sugar packet and bread. The family had a tavern too. From a distance, you'd know you are getting closer to Anania's home due to generous blasting sounds of music. Playing jams that aroused people's nostalgic feelings. They also played new jams, jams that had the capability to transport one to the future.

At Anania's home, people came in to lay their troubles on tables full of brown and green bottles. They came to bury the wounds of the lives they lived, at least for the weekend. At Anania's home, people came to drink and claim their happiness, temporary happiness.

Another aspect that made Anania's family famous was his father who was an electrician. He fixed and altered electric meter boxes for many.

There was a time when everyone paid Anania's father to manipulate their electric meter box for them to stop buying electricity.

Mama feared being caught and fined, a lot of people were no longer buying electricity and they no longer substituted using the electricity stove for stoves that use paraffin. They cooked mogodu as they wished.

Mama joint in the saving, Anania's father came to our house, after that our meter box reflected 00,00 but we still had light and we cooked.

His mother, fondly known as *Ma Anania* was a moSotho woman. A woman with a presence so demanding, she wore gold chains and rings on every finger except for the thumb. She also never went a day without her oversized earrings and red lipstick. She spoke once and no one would have the audacity to speak against her. Men who were known for their notorious doings, known to stab and kill pressed the pumps of their hands together and faced the ground when they were around her.

On Sundays, everyone wanted themselves at her tavern, she had a magical voice. As children, we also had a secret nail hole were we peeped, watched and later imitate her in front of mirrors.

Anania's home was one you would have never missed even though you tried your best.

It happened around the same time were girls were obsessed with the two holes at the back of our knees. They said the holes reflected how many times you've had sex. Even though we were both virgins, Sego and I would check each other and confirm that the holes were not deep and hallow just to be safe.

A few days before it happened in Kgutha, we were watching the news, people who most of their skin colour looked as dark as night were selected, asked what was an elbow called in isiZulu. When they recognised the confusion on their eyes. When they took chances to save themselves by saying it was a "hand knee" or "the corner of an arm" they beat them. Some were set on fire. We saw them rolling on the floor to save themselves but the fires were too strong like the hate South Africans had for people they said were foreigners.

In Kgutha, it started when they went for Abass, a man from Tanzania who also ran a tuckshop. His tuckshop was the only place where they were public phones to make calls at R1 credit.

They broke into Abass's shop, went in and took what they needed. Young boys carrying tins of liquid glue, young girls carrying baby diapers in see-through packets. Older women carrying bags of mealie meal and tins of beans. In the taking and running, Abass managed to escape, his face wet with blood.

After looting and beating Abass, there was a young guy wearing a navy bucket hat in the group who reminded everyone that Anania's father was also not South African. That he was from Maputo and he had been making money in the country.

"But he has been a part of this community from the very beginning," an old man argued in the crowd.

"We really do not care, we are tired of these people who come here and become well off than we are," said the young man.

"Yes, he should also go down," followed another.

"Wait! People, let us think through this. This man, together with his wife have helped many of us, we have also survived in this community because of their generosity, do

they not loan us money, give us groceries when we are in need?" the old man tried reasoning with the crowd.

There was a commotion, the crowd in division, unlike when they planned to attack Abass. With Abass it was easier, he had only been running his shop for two years and was not as fluent in South African languages as Anania's father.

After a long discussion, half of the crowd marched to Anania's home.

They threw stones and demanded Anania's father to come out of the house. They called out and threatened to burn everything.

Anania's mother in her mighty self, stepped out to speak to the crowd- possibly intimidate them. That day, that moment was one never imagined by many. The crowd did not obey as they usually did.

They demanded her to bring out her husband. We saw Ma Anania's power dripping to the ground. Followed her shoulders. Her face searching in the crowd, searching for a voice to help stop what was happening. No one carried the help she searched for.

We watched her walk the walk of shame. Fear resided in my heart. "These people might also turn and hurt me" I thought.

My skin colour resembled many of those they wanted to hurt. They have known Anania's father for a long time. They smiled and laughed with him. They welcomed him in their homes and let him help them with their electricity. He was a part of them, they never wanted him dead or cared if he was from Maputo but at that moment, it did not matter.

Things had turned, he was no longer one of them, and he was now accused of taking over their country, of making money in their country, taking job opportunities and their women too.

"Get out or we will burn this shack," they shouted.

"We are warning you."

Someone screamed, "here they are trying to escape through the fence."

The crowd turned and ran after them. Anania, his mother, and his two siblings were allowed to run as far as they wished but not his father.

They caught him.

Like a dog, they dragged him by the neck and threw him to the ground. The soil rose, briefly flew on air but remembered it could not defy gravity. It obeyed and landed on his face, inside his mouth and blurred his eyes. Trying to dust his face, every member of the mob wanted to at least come out with a kick or slap.

Just like the people shown on TV, he pressed the palms of his hands together and apologised repeatedly for his existence. For crossing the border over to South Africa. He promised to do better and stop his criminal offenses. He promised to give them everything he owned. He agreed with that, everything he achieved did not belong to him. He promised to no longer work for low rates. To no longer use any of his skills or find South African women attractive.

Tears running down his cheeks, he called some by name, called them brother, even called the sisters and mothers standing and watching on the side.

It was too late. The people of Kgutha were “tired of amakwere-kwere it was time they went back home” and the crowd was determined to send them back at least as spirits. They said they were doing them a favour, they did not have to worry about climbing on crocodiles to cross over.

While others slapped and kick Anania’s father, some went in his shack and helped themselves with beer crates. They emptied the tavern and set it on fire.

The house in flames, he pleaded for help. They commanded him to say his last prayer and ask God to forgive him for he had sinned. He closed his eyes as paraffin flowed alongside his tears. Same colour, we could not see the difference.

Somebody shouted, “the police, the police.”

The young man in a blue bucket hat slid the matchstick on the box and everyone took off.

The next day was another normal day, it had to be. We had school and our parents had to travel to work in the early hours of the morning and report to duty, duties of scrubbing, washing, sweeping, standing outside entrances of big buildings.

We pointed our fingers at the collapsed zincs of what used to be home to Anania, his siblings and all the men and women who had laid their troubles on tables with beer bottles. We pointed at what used to be our entertainment place on Sunday afternoons.

We told, retold and retold and retold the story that it ended up being constructed in a number of versions. Some said Anania, his mom and siblings burned alongside everything that was not taken from the house. Another version was that Anania's father burnt to flames before the police arrived. Some people were shocked that the man was from Maputo, they said they thought people attacked him because the electricity company was fining them for illegally using electricity. Some said he was a good man he didn't deserve to die like that. Some said they saw him with the crawling man shouting "Thatha Mahala". Some said these people are ruining our country, we should get rid of all of them including the children they share with other South African citizens.

Mama says I have crocodile skin with all the visible scales and pores- visible like a map. Like the map of Afrika. Divided into tiny pieces.

We burn each other while singing about joy. We release bursts of cachinnation while the other is on their knees- hands put together- tears flowing like water falls- begging for a chance to live. Promising to return "home"

I ask Mama where their home is. I say Mama they speak indigenous like us. Mama, they look like us. Mama their cries are similar to ours. Mama like us, they were forced out of their resourceful homelands- Mama they too don't have land. Mama their fathers are not home, they since left to look for work in the cities. Some were taken to concentration camps where they were shocked- electrified- beaten to death. Some came back with mental instabilities and they roam around day in and out cheering at the sun.

Mama gives me angry eyes. She hates the father topic.

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Title: A Skin That Took Them Through

First, there were whispers in different corners, but not the kind of whisper that come with concerns or comes with worries, coming with fear or panic. The whispers were accommodated by excitement. The whispers were about a china man who had built a fruit and vegetable mini-market not far from the mobile clinic. “le china!” we said, our excitement untied from our bellies. The younger children said ke legowa. They thought anyone who was not black is white. Indians were magowa as well.

Here was a man who looked nothing like the majority of people in Kgutha, his difference made him more acceptable. Made him more welcomed. We preferred fruits and vegetables from his market and not ntate Sibisi who also sold fruits and vegetables by the corner. We were grateful to have le china in our midst, especially when he uttered the words sanibonani or dumelang. He brought more of ma China, we were blessed.

Shoes Made of Eggshells

They are wearing black & grey rope dresses, walking at a slow pace following a streamline, Sego says, she sees the group; she senses they can hear her. She pats Dipuo on her shoulder and starts speaking in a low voice. She says, there are nine of them. They are all wearing dresses, even men too. They are four women and five men. Dipuo looks closely, she squints her eyes to see what she is pointing at but sees nothing. Sego looks closely and still sees them, still walking in a streamline, she wonders what to do since her friend is not seeing the same visuals as her, she wonders if anyone is seeing what she sees. She goes and taps another friend, Anania, continuing in a low voice, she says the same thing said to Dipuo.

Anania shouts, what? She reprimands him before he can even finish what he intends on saying. Speak lower she says, they can hear you, yes they are not looking but they can see you, they can see your face. They see your family, their secrets, their good, and bad deeds. Speak lower.

Anania is convinced he is at fault. Maybe there is something wrong with his eyesight. He is convinced the nine people are there but he cannot see them. They are fading, she says. They just hit the corner.

Anania raises his eyebrows to the Dipuo. Dipuo picks up her shoulders to signal that she is just as confused.

Sego takes a look again, the nine people are gone. She no longer sees them but she can hear their voices, hear their soft steps, the sound is similar to the slow beat of the djembe. Their feet are hitting the ground at the same time with the same pressure. Although the steps are in one beat, one rhythm, she is certain, there are nine people walking.

Sego wants to follow them but hears one of the nine people warning her not to. But within the group, there are two naughties inviting her to follow and the other seven are not paying attention.

She faces the sky and sees visuals of them walking towards a tunnel. They're almost at their destination, the words jump out of her mouth. Anania catches them. What? he

asks. What is wrong with you? Her hearing aid is occupied, Segó hears Anania but she is concentrating on the nine people and their conversations. Amongst themselves, the nine people are talking about arriving at “the place of peace on time.” Amongst themselves, they are assigning duties that each will have to attend to when they arrive. One of the duties is to listen to the orange & white fish’s guidance for the day.

The visual on the sky disappears, but Segó can still hear the nine people. Can still feel them. Her body is itching; it wants to follow. Half and half. The other half wants to follow and the other is refusing. She is confused but has a smile on her face. Dipuo and Anania take a look at her and call her name. Are you okay? they ask.

It’s time to fetch Gogo’s purse from the Chinese man, they say.

Segó hears the two out of nine say, don’t worry, go, we will see you later. She hears the rest of the group, reassuring her that they will see her soon. She feels relieved. The nine people in black & grey rope dresses are not visible in her eyes but in her heart, she sees them walking in the tunnel. Then she no longer hears or sees them.

Segó shouts, wait for me as she joins her friends and they walk to the Chinese shop for Gogo’s purse.

Last night Gogo dreamt her body lying on the floor. In her mind, convinced, she was no longer alive. She tried to move, but her body demanded she be still. She attempted to scream, but her voice felt like it was tied in knots with ropes connecting it to the insides of her body. The only functional part of her body were her eyes, wide-open seeing all four corners of the room. A monkey appeared behind a bucket placed by the corner. The monkey neared where Gogo’s body lay. It climbed on her chest and looked straight into her eyes; Gogo’s eyes and the monkey’s eyes facing each other like young lovers feeling the desire to go deep into each other’s mouths. Entry, however, denied by fear. The monkey looked in Gogo’s eyes like it wanted to see what lay behind the eyes. The monkey stretched its ears using its two hands, pulled out its tongue and wiggled it, hitting Gogo’s face with drops of saliva. Gogo saw the saliva drops coming her way but felt nothing of their landing on her skin. A door opening sound disturbed the monkey from its playtime with Gogo’s face.

The monkey quickly climbed off Gogo's chest and ran off. Gogo could not trace where it went. It had disappeared.

Next, a lady walked in the room, wearing a sparkling diamond dress, gold lip colour, eye shadows, and gold shoes. The shoes looked like they were made of eggshells, like they would make the cracking sound and collapse if the lady was to run. In one of her hands was a cage with doves inside. On the other hand, banknotes in different sizes and colours. Gogo watched, wanting to move but her body still refusing. The diamond lady waved the money creating wind on her face.

The door made an opening sound again. A man in a leather jacket and leather hat, gold chains and a matchstick in between his lips walked in. The man had the same face as the man who crawled by in Kgutha shouting "thatha mahala". Now he was not crawling and covered with dust but walking on his own two feet and immaculately clean.

The man smiled at the diamond lady and pointed at Gogo's body on the floor. Gogo's eyes were wide open, still seeing everything. The man and diamond lady looked like they were quarrelling about something. But Gogo could not hear the sound of their words, her ears were instead hearing the sound of burning wood. Gogo looked around but could not see any sign of fire flames or woods. She felt no heat on her body, she felt nothing.

The man pushed the diamond lady, and her body hit the floor and immediately disappeared leaving the cage, a cloud of dust and the banknotes swimming in it. Gogo watched the man collect the money and put it in the pocket of his leather jacket.

The man took a cup full of water and poured it in a straight line from Gogo's head to her toes. Gogo's body did not respond to the water, it could not register whether the water was hot or cold. He moved his lips but Gogo could not hear anything. The sound of burning wood was still stuck in the holes of her ears.

The man dragged Gogo with her left foot. This looked effortless. The movement of the man's hands dragging Gogo by the foot looked like he was dragging a collapsed cardboard. The man dragged Gogo out the door, to the car. He opened the door and threw Gogo at the back of the car. Her eyes met the body of her late husband also

thrown like collapsed cardboard at the back. She saw his face and he gave her a silly smile, the one showing all his teeth.

Waking up from this dream, Gogo abruptly pulled her body up and she was on her bed, her forehead covered with beads of sweat. Her heart beating like in the dream. Like she had had a fist and kick fight with her husband in the dream. She had never been able to forgive him for leaving her with five children, leaving her for a younger woman and then finally returning only to be nursed by her in his last days of life.

The long hand of the watch was on seven and the short one on six. Gogo remembered the Chinese van was on the way today. Gogo was conflicted which number to bet on. Her dream reflected various symbols that meant different numbers.

The monkey, two. The diamond lady, forty-eight. The thug, seven. The shoes, twenty-eight. Money, thirty-two. Doves, sixteen. Fire, thirty-one. A dead man, twelve.

Each day in the township, elderly men and women wake up and dig the deepest holes of their memory to extract the dreams they dreamt at night. They use the shuffles that lie within their brains to remove anything blocking their access to what they can remember capturing in their sleep.

Some forget their grandchildren's names and where they might have hidden their last cents. But when it comes to knocking on the doors where their dreams are kept, that is something they are often successful at achieving.

These treasure hunts are important because that is where they will access the symbols that might give them an opportunity to put bread on the table while they wait to earn their pension at the end of the month.

They spend time accessing symbols in their dreams, decoding their dreams-what they mean, what they stand for in moChina and try their luck in a bet.

The moChina usually comes in a white van. A van with tinted windows and buglers. The van will find old people, children, and grandchildren of those who no longer have the strength to use their legs to walk from their houses and queue up at the shop.

They queue while their small round purses with unique numbers are put in a sack collectively. Inside the different small round purses are coins and the numbers they write with their fingers crossed for the moChina to proclaim a win.

The van arrives, as per usual with two Chinese men. One driving and the other in the passenger seat. They look like each other's clones. The van arrives every day but the people who bet the moChina will never tell you anything about the moChina - their names, where they live or how they make the decision of the winning numbers.

When the moChina van arrives, an appointed elder goes to them and hands the sack full of purses through the small burglar slot on the window. They wait while the moChina counts the money from different purses, takes his share and makes the ruling of the winning number. While they wait, elders start sharing their dreams and help each other in decoding the meanings. But this only happens when the purses are with the moChina because they are aware that like the hosepipe left outside or the fancy sneakers on top of the shack, dreams can be stolen too.

Now the three children are waiting for the results and Gogo's purse. Like Gogo, a thug and a diamond lady appeared in most of the elder's dreams. Another common protagonist was a wayward woman. Sifebe, they say in Sesotho. Sefebe ke number fifteen, an elder says not minding the children's presence. The children cringe but don't close their ears or else they would have to explain what the word means. That is an uncomfortable thing to do.

One of the elders shares that she dreamt of the township's well known Sifebe, Phindi. In the elder's dream, Phindi came to her house with the elderly woman's late husband. She says the man was dressed in wretched clothes but had a bag with a lot of money in it. When he handed over the money to Phindi, the money turned to small snakes. Phindi put two of the snakes under her armpits and one around her neck while the rest wrapped themselves around her fingers.

The elderly woman says, in the dream, she asked Phindi where she had found the husband and Phindi said I have always kept him at my house. You think he is dead; he is not dead. I have kept him and I am making lots of money using him.

Sifebe le chelete ke number fifteen and thirty-two, says a much younger woman. The others nod in agreement.

An elderly man wants to talk more about the dream, he asks the elderly woman if she is sure the husband died. What if Phindi really kept him in her house? he asks. When your husband was alive, he never stopped going to her house. We used to see him day and night and suddenly he was gone, he says.

The elderly woman pauses to think it through. But this session is disturbed by the appointed elder returning with the bag and announces the winning number. The moChina releases a king, number one. Sixteen, doves. And a monkey, number two.

Gogo wins one number, out of all the symbols in her dream, she chose monkey. R45 in Gogo's bag. Everyone gathers around the appointed elder and collects their small purses with unique numbers and colours.

The three children walk back home to deliver Gogo's bag.

Sego hears them again, the nine people. The two are still inviting her to join them, while one of them is still warning her not to come closer. They are back, she says. Her friend shakes her head. Anania looks at her with a dislocated face. Eyebrows placed high up and mouth pushed to the side. Are you okay, he asks.

Sego stops, sees them, not with her eyes but with her imagination. Again in a streamline, walking in one beat, one rhythm. The leader is softly calling her name. Sego, Sego, the leader repeats. They are calling me to follow them, she tells her friends. The friends plead with her not to follow. She smiles with her mouth and eyes and says, the leader says it is not time yet but they will be watching me until the time is right.

I told Gogo to go for the doves as well but she did not listen, she says. The nine people told me that number sixteen will be one of the winning numbers.

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She feels the nine people turning back, and smiling at her. The smiles are birthed by the trust she has gained over them. She sees them celebrating her. In their celebration, she sees there are now ten of them. The tenth member looks familiar.

The Other Side of Ward 45

A lot had changed in Kgutha and more had stayed the same.

At least it was a registered legal place under a region, under the initially given name. The one they gave after raking the ground and planted varying size disconnected pieces of zinc. The one they gave after the zinc plant had germinated. The one they used before the Basotho people changed it. The one about hope.

Thembalihle was now the name people wrote alongside their yard numbers when filling forms, except there were no street names yet. Even though they no longer received water at the communal tap and each yard had its own, the name Kgutha could not wash off their tongues. They found themselves saying Kgutha and quickly correct themselves with an “mxm! sorry, I live in Thembalihle.”

Every yard had its own tap and used electricity but the shacks remained. Though there were a few people who had built brick houses.

It had been 12 years and Anania’s father’s life story was still vague. Some said the man was seen alive somewhere, but others swore they saw his body in flames the day of the attack. There were new people occupying the yard that used to be Anania’s home.

Once in a while we pointed at the yard and told the story of how people used to drink and be merry at the same yard. We pointed because memory can be a manipulator sometimes, manipulating one to feel moments they once lived.

The moChina van no longer had a place in Kgutha. Elders had advanced to betting their dream symbols to the show on TV. Taking a chance on winning millions was better than taking chances on R50. The Chinese fruit and vegetable mini-market had also closed down. The Chinese left because people started preferring buying food and vegetables in the city on their way back home from work.

The Chinese man and his cousins had left, leaving a number of dark-skinned, fluffy hair and small eyed little children running around the community and being called ngwana wa le China by locals.

Sego was one of them, one of the girls that mothered a half Chinese child. While the little boy ran around the street being called le China left and right, Sego was in Ward 45.

The week before her admission to Ward 45. Sego sat outside facing the sky in stillness. Sitting on a chair, her body looking like it had been left on its own. As if the life inside of her had left to pay a different body or place a visit. Her grandmother waved her hand in front of her face but she did not blink or respond. Hours later, the life in her looked like it had returned. She said she had gone for a walk with her friends in grey & black ropes dresses while she was seated on the chair.

They have returned, I may not have enough time remaining, she said. That week, Sego spoke of the itchiness of the palm of her hand as a call to touch something great, something herself could not describe but was certain of its greatness.

Sego looked at the sky and spoke of watching visuals of a world where the sounds of waterfalls tell tales of a free world. Where people fly high with eagles. Where there is the ability to walk on water. In the undersea life where humans, birds, water creatures and wild animals live in harmony as a collective. She said it was the other side and that's where her new friends were planning to take her.

She said the other side plays background sounds planting hope that we could be people of power. We will no longer suffer under the hands of a government that does not cater for the people. She said the other side is waiting to welcome her and she was ready to take off. Her friends had returned to fetch her as they had made the promise years ago.

On the day of her taking off, a show was on TV. A show about people looking for their lost family members. The man faced straight in the camera, face fallen, its predicted texture, similar to a bubble-gum. Red eyes. Hat on the head looked like it had been walking for days, tired. In the background a house made of stones and red soil. A voice coming out like a scratched CD. Pleading. Begging to be taken home. 26 years, the exact years since his departure. Left home with a group of men to seek for jobs in the city. Narrating the story to the camera and not sure about the location of his home but

remembers he left his father sick to death. During his telling, the man complains of paining legs. Camera's continue rolling. Man releases tears. The camera shows cutaways of him walking around the yard with his voice in the background pleading to be taken home. Man is certain his death is near. The camera shows the man in the car, facing out the window, far in thought.

At that moment, Sego said she also needed to go home. "It is time; I am leaving" she said in a cheeky voice as if someone had denied her to leave.

Sego's body landed on the floor. It started vibrating, releasing water through its different pores. In a panic, Gogo jumped out of her chair and instructed the little boy to bring a glass of water. Gogo held her ankles tight to stop the vibration, but she didn't win. Sego's body vibrated in a higher volume and her eyes rolled, hiding the brown of her eyeballs. Gogo screamed Sego's name and started chanting her everyday prayer.

God, please protect my child!

God save my granddaughter. Forgive her for her sins, please save her against evil, against demons.

Let me go Masibula, let me go. I need to go; my time is now! the words flew out of Sego's mouth.

She addressed Gogo with a different name, her name was not Masibulu. But this was the day Sego met Masibulu for the first time. She learned why her grandmother was fond of the colour yellow. Most items in her wardrobe had a bit of yellow here and there. Masibulu is known as the queen of bees in her family line. Sego saw her inside Gogo. She saw her spirit living inside Gogo. Masibulu was Gogo's guide. Gogo carried her- her queen-ship, her calm self, undying stinging spirit, a spirit that builds and joins the disconnected. That's what Gogo was known for. She gave the little she had to anyone in need.

That day, Gogo voice landed in Sego's ears as Masibulu. Her face was Masibulu's face. Gogo didn't know this but she was Masibulu and Masibulu was her- they were one.

Even though Gogo didn't know this, she was aware that she didn't walk alone but Gogo refused to acknowledge it because at the church they said acknowledging the dead was demonic.

Sego shouted, let me go Masibulu while Gogo held Sego down to stop her from taking off. Refusing to let her go, but no prayer or chant would stop Sego from her mission of departure. She defeated her, vibrated in the largest volumes.

Upon her departure, her body stopped vibrating and gently resting on the floor. Her eyeballs converted to their normal state and faced straight at the roof without a blink. Sego's body frame lay in stillness. It looked light, like how it usually looked when she went for those walks she took with her nine friends without leaving the chair. She was gone.

It was in a couple of hours, a drifting sound of the ambulance wheels was heard. The people from Ward 45 arrived. Gogo and le China watched the two-man in wearing lime green reflective jackets, check and confirmed she was still alive. Gogo and Le China's chests rested in relieve. Gogo and le China watched the man from Ward 45 chaining her. Sego also watched everything in stillness, in her staring at the roof.

My child, what is happening to her, cried Gogo.

Gogo rolled on the floor, le China in his small body tried to pick her and embrace her.

The little boy normally did not have many words to say and so he released a silent tear, fighting to respond to what he felt on the inside. He was torn.

He looked at his mother's body chained on the hands and ankles and being carried to the ambulance. In her silence, the little boy heard her say, don't worry my child, I will be back soon.

He whispered in Gogo's ear, my mother won't be gone forever, she needs to fix something, she will be back. Be at peace.

Gogo, her face wet with tears and dressed with confusion, said nothing to le China.

Upon my arrival on the other side Dipuo, I was approached and welcomed by an old woman standing on the surface of the seawater, she was surrounded by four eagles flapping their wings continuously. The old woman wore a red turban, she stretched her hands reaching out to me to join her. I feared walking on water but nothing in me thought it was an impossible act. And so, I walked towards her and we were then swallowed by the water.

Under the sea, there were many different people and creatures dressed in royal regalia, it was a gathering, my gathering. I was the special one. One of the chosen ones. I was presented with a dish that was specially prepared and kept for me. Stamp, pomegranate seeds and water. I was starving and I knew my hunger could only be filled by this dish. I indulged.

After I was done eating, the woman in the red turban brought a heavy golden kist and presented it to me. Inside, there was my special regalia- it was red, white and glittering black. The Kist also had heavy gold jewellery which I wore on my ankles, my wrists, and neck. The woman in a red turban smeared red clay on my face and she named me Mahlabahlabane.

The people in the grey and black ropes were there. The tenth one too, you know him Dipuo, he was the crawling man. The man who used to tell us all about a world of selflessness, where we could be anything and do anything. Thatha Mahala was there wearing a black & grey rope, he was so handsome looking like he fulfils duties of being a lawyer under the water. The special house he told us about really exists, it was also there. I saw it. Dipuo I have been given something special.

Guess what, you know when I was done with my mission, they sent me off with the rolling of drums, birds hit me with an epilogue tune alongside chants of my new name. I took a victory walk straight to where I am right now, Ward 45.

Sego's face lit up when she told the story of her journey about going to the other side of Ward 45.

There were many of them. Many who had been to the other side but were locked up in Ward 45 dressed in cream white old clothes with faded blue prints. They each had

a different story to tell. Stories of how they travelled. Who welcomed them, what they got up and how they travelled to Ward 45.

They were each kept in and given titles such as: confused, depressed, bipolar, anxiety disorder, schizophrenia, traumatic stress disorder and all.

Gogo did not stop shedding tears since the day Sego was taken from the house by the men from Ward 45. She visited Sego with Le China at least once a week. During her visits, she sat across Sego and watched her, in those clothes, happy, sharing about her journey on the other side of Ward 45. I am okay, don't worry too much, Sego said to Gogo with a settled smile on her face. but the words made Gogo burst into tears.

When that happened the little boy knew his duty was to press Gogo's hands to offer her comfort. It created even more confusion for Gogo, why the little boy was not sharing the sob with her.

One of the patients in Ward 45, a lady generous with her presence. The lady had been transferred from one hospital to another but everywhere she went she served her assigned duties from the other side. She was a messenger sent by the great power to communicate, reason and make those who have not been called to the other side, the world Sego and the other had been to, to understand.

She was sent to communicate what needed to be done for Sego and the others in order to complete the journey they were on.

The lady moved around in the ward delivering messages to each visitor who was close to the special beings. She also came to Gogo during her visit and told her she needed to take Sego to the sea, feed her stamp and pomegranate seeds. She also said Gogo also needed to give Sego a glass glass of seawater to drink. After that Sego's mission would be complete.

Gogo gave the lady the same look she gave Sego, the look that said, you are not okay. The one often followed by a head shake.

Le China also offered a head shake when the nurses gave Gogo a report that they had to keep Sego in because she was not getting better, she was still talking about the other side. The little boy shook his head because he understood everything, the

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ten people in black & grey ropes had made him understand it all. Her mother was special and so was he.

Seeking for a better place

Year: 2015. Street name: Njabs. How he found a better place? Subject to mob justice, his decayed body was found in a one-room shack with his mouth wide open, he was missing three of his gold teeth. What did they say? We will finally rest, ihambile lenja.

Year: 2016. Street name: Sister to Njabs. How she found a better place? Witnessed her brother brutally beaten by the community, health condition was then triggered. What did they say? Ah, it could not have been that she was hiding something.

Year: 2017. Street name: Teka. How he found a better place? Found in a dingy passage with a wire tied on his wrist, tight on the veins and a needle next to him. What did they say? His parents will finally live their lives in peace. Teka's body was put underground two days after death, it was on a Wednesday.

Year: 2018. Street name: Dede. How she found a better place? Slept with a married man on the bed he shared with his wife. Dede didn't wake up again. What did they say? They will learn to stay away from married man, especially amakwere-kwere.

Year: 2019. Street name: Fresh. How she found a better place?

It was half past dead. A part of me had accepted that Fresh was to meet the others soon. I visited her house the month before she left for a better place. The sight of my visit is something I will forever dread. Fresh was sleeping on a single bed with a frame made of steel. There was no ray of sun forcing itself into the room. The darkness of the room made the walls look dirtier than they actually were. Walls with hand prints looking like they dated to a decade ago. The room was a dark musty place and had no mercy to the nose.

In there, I contained how my face would naturally respond to a saint of that nature, instead, I forced it to wear a voluntary cheer just so Fresh's aunt who was sitting on a torn couch not far from the bed would not be offended by my presence.

The room had no place for my bums to occupy, everything was everywhere. Wena dirty pots and dishes on the floor, wena clothes- red, pink, denim, fur and parka you name it. Flies having their own stokvel, it must have been a turn yomshayelo for one of them.

I stood not far from the door, on the side was a stove dripping of grease. I greeted "HelloFresh"

She said hello, her degenerated body facing the wall.

I asked how she was doing and she didn't bother turning to meet my face.

"I am good thanks, how are you?" she responded.

I guess it has become natural for such words to fly out of our mouths without even tripping on the tip of our tongues. Even when carrying the heaviest loads in our heart, when asked how we are doing, we are good. With the deepest sores, we are good. We are good when we have nothing of tangible or intangible to point why the good. We are good just because within our bodies still lies the soul, therefore it is expected of us. None of the consumption of any pain we endure can stop us from being it. We're good. Be good.

What I was witnessing, in that room, on that bed, covered me with overwhelming sorrow, my body felt the intensity of my feelings, and the eyes become wet. Despite it all, I followed suit and gave the automated response. "I am good, too," I said.

Fresh's body looked nothing close to how it used to be. In fact, she no longer deserved that name. It lay there, the bones of her skeleton peeping through the skin of her arm, leg and side of her neck. Peeping in all the places where there was no cloth cover. The bones peeped as if I had come to pay them a visit. Her skin that used to be home to fat had loosely fallen on the thick brown blanket she lay on. Her skin was covered with numerous blistered. I could tell that the thirsty bed bugs were having a feast. Her head hardly covered with hair, stings were rooted in isolation, and I roughly counted seven.

Her truth came, she said in a pressed voice, "I want to die and follow my friend Dede." Even though she still had the voice to utter such, Fresh was no more. She had long died. Twelve months ago since the body laid on the single bed with a frame made of steel.

The ticking clock on the wall was probably the cruellest object next to her. She said everyday laying on that bed. The clocked seemed to be taking its precious time, half

past of every hour took 5 hours to come. The clock moved slowly and her soul remained intact.

On the day her soul separated with the remaining of what used to be her body, they said it was a good thing that she was finally gone. She suffered but now she is in a better place, she can finally be free of the pain she carried, free from the troubles of the world.

Fresh leaving her loving aunt who carried her from the first day she was born to the day of the singing in harmony of amagugu. Fresh's mother, a mentally disoriented woman who had the brain and the voice of a child. Her father, a man whom one day invited her to his house for sweets and raped her. Fresh, a child conceived right during the negotiations of the release of a man who later became the first black president of the country.

Fresh, a child born within a country better with possibilities. No more teargas, no more patrols of mellow yellows in the township. No more Group Areas act. A country with freedom of movement- of speech- of being. With all her freedom Fresh traded her vagina to men in exchange for a meal and covers for her body.

With no trace of wealth in her family bloodline, this is how she chose to survive. The sex would give her the total freedom she deserved living in a 'free and fair' country.

Every weekend, she warmed different beds and faked orgasms when the men had exhausted the time equivalent to their money.

People in the community knew what her business was about, they knew and threw names at her. "Sies such self-disrespect" they said. They predicted, "that body will be wiggling side by side if she continues."

Fresh was later raped by a group of men. They raped her to "fix and put her in order from her doings." When these news travelled, the people said she deserved it. "She is a loose girl anyway."

A visit to the clinic handed over a paper with her name and HIV status results.

Fresh, Njabs, Njabz's sister, Teka and Dede were five in many young people born and bound to survive right at the center of decay. The rot is in the conditions of their homes. In the street corners they occupied looking for ways to survive. Spending days rotating -in search of something to save them. Whether it comes dressed in the form of filling the Z83 form multiple times or marching to the community hall multiple times because "sizwile bayaqasha," or the saving coming in a form of education funding or sometimes the return of their runaway parents because, like them, they are in search.

When everything is staring at you and the stare pierces right at the center of your heart, all you need is a form of escape and sometimes the escape comes in the form of self-violence and violating other people- like Njabz. The escape coming in the form of giving up on your life because the one person who helped you see through the days is gone - like Njabs sister. The escape coming in a form of "the nomayini bozza yam" -like Teka. The escape being claimed in someone else's bed- like Dede. Or like Fresh, the escape coming in a form of giving up on your life with all the lingering information on different mediums of communication telling you which medication to take in order to save it but because stones have been thrown at you, you choose to duck them by choosing the unknown 'better place'

The place no one has ever returned to tell the tale of the better it holds. Better than the place we call home, where we kill ourselves and each other. Bit. By. Bit. When we are asked of life, when the question comes, how are you? I am good is the answer.

It's the Little Things That Make a House a Home

E e e ss d lee-t-e-el dt-g-s dt m-m-h-ahh-ke a hee-ou-se a hou-mh-me

The year 2000, my curious self-faced up at the gold glitter frame containing words written in bold black. The frame hung on the wall of my home and it had been there since as long as I can remember. I remember staring at the words until they would start dancing. I would be swamped with the frustration of not being able to read the words, never mind not understanding what they meant. As a result, when I learnt how to read the alphabet, I made it my mission to learn the sentence on the frame which became one of the few sentences I first learnt to read.

I read the sentence countless times until I was confident enough to read for my cousin- no my sister. We were a group of children living with our grandmother. We were all under the age of 12 and I was the youngest of them all, they called me “Nana”. All her children’s children under the same roof, we addressed each other as brothers and sisters- that is how she taught us. She’d say “you are supposed to love and protect each other, Lebana ba motho.”

After reading for my sister, she excitedly ran to tell my grandmother that I could read “Ma Ma Nana can read the words on the wall,” she said. I read for Ma, she smiled, opened her arms for my tiny body to enter her embrace. She gave me multiple kisses on my cheeks. Multiple kisses on my cheeks made me excited because they were always followed by a 50c coin which I could buy five sweets and give one each to my siblings and still have two for myself.

Despite not being able to buy a lot of toys for everyone or sometimes eating snoek fish soup for supper, and that even though our house was small and we bathed on a small yellow dish. That sometimes while other children played in the streets, we knocked on different houses selling buckets of peanut butter and buckets of stoep polish- me carrying one bucket, while the others carried two each. Ma explained that the words on the frame meant that even though we didn’t afford much we had love and that’s what made the house we lived in a home. How we lived and what we had, made our house a home. But I knew deep inside that in actual fact, she was our home

She was the warmth in the home- The coal stove would not fulfil its duties when the fire was not made by her. We would cough and nobody wanted to secure a seat at the corner for a maximum blaze. She was our safety, the house felt endangered in her absence, but in her presence, we giggled through the storms and flashes of lightning. When Ma was home we also slept through the night despite the blood-curdling sounds of steps that walked in our yard.

Ma was our first teacher, she taught us everything we knew, including the love and unity we carried with us. The love we shared with strangers she occasionally brought home to give a place to hide their heads. This would be for a day and at times it would be for months.

*It's the little things that make
a house a home*

Christmas day of 2002, the gold glitter frame was still on the wall, this time a picture of my sister's primary school graduation was hung next to it. She was to go to high school the following year. Ma bought her a white dress, the kind you wear as a flower girl at a wedding. On the day of graduation, she looked like an angel and her happiness was detectable in the size of her beautiful smile on the picture. I'd admire my sister's picture boiled with excitement that mine too will one day hang on the same wall, I imagined it to be on the right side of the frame.

That Christmas I woke up early to witness the sun singing, I always missed it. Ma told me that the sun sings and dances when it rises on Christmas day to celebrate the birth of morena jeso. Unfortunately for me, that year there was no sun but rather the ground was wet, it had been drizzling rain since the early AMs.

Mamani Snetla called me outside, she had just started living with us a few weeks ago, Ma found her searching for a tall big building in Jozi while surrounded by a number of

tall big buildings. Mamani Snetla had no money- no plan, Ma brought Mamani Snetla home on the day she brought with her our new clothes we were to wear on Christmas day.

“Nana e tla o tlo bona, matha!” Mamane Snetla said with a cheer. I ran outside and saw two headless chickens dripping blood and running with confusion around the yard. Walking in the store on valentine’s day has never been easy. All those red and white decorations give me flashbacks of that Christmas day.

It was our sporadic ritual to slaughter two white chickens on that day. She cut out their heads and they would wander in the yard before the living in them to completely shut down.

Ma cooked a full meal and we enjoyed it with different people who knew that Christmas day was “Christmas” at Ma’s home- from the township’s biggest saints to its delinquents. She bought different coloured balloons. I usually chose blue but that year, I went with pink because my Christmas attire were pink shorts and a white vest with a pink flower, the ribbon tied on my hair was also pink.

We ate, laughed and listened to Ma’s story about the singing bird that won competition but because of not listening to elders and being disrespectful, the bird lost its singing talent. I promised Ma I will never disrespect elders, especially because I wanted to become a musician like the bird. My sister said she wanted to be a doctor, my eldest brother, a pilot and my other brother said he would be a policeman to protect Ma from criminals. We all promised to do special things for her like building her a big house where she would shelter her stranger friends and a car she would travel with to stock a lot of buckets of polish and peanut butter. Hearing us speak like that made Ma to be in her happy state. She cupped all four of us in her arms and gave each one of us multiple kisses that were followed by 50c coins. We then waved our coins on-air dancing to Makhendlas “Iminwe”. Like her Ma’s home, our souls were the shelter of joy.

Little did we know the 2003 Christmas day would be the last spent with Ma. She passed on in May the following year.

After we returned home and washed our hands at the communal tub placed at the gate with water and pieces of aloe. After the giant tent, chairs and tables were collected by a van written Kupane Funerals. After all the neighbours fetched the knives they used to peel vegetables for the funeral. We were all alone, all four of us to navigate life without Ma.

It's the little things that make a house a home.

It had been 7 years since Ma's passing, the frame was still on the wall. I gaze at it with the realisation that it is one of the few pieces left of what we called home. My sister's picture was no longer next to the frame. The father of her three children pushed her on the wall and the picture fell, its glass frame broke into tiny pieces. As for mine, it never made it to the wall, in fact, it was never taken, I never attended the graduation. I read the words on the frame picturing what it would have looked like had it been taken.

The house is occupied by 10 people; myself, my sister, her three children, and her boyfriend. My older brother, his child, and girlfriend and my other brother who has not spoken much since Ma's passing.

With all the voices exchanging with anger, my sister's screams when fists land on the flesh on her face. The loud cries of children demanding a fill in their tummies. With all the different coloured clothes worn by the ten of us and my elder brother's customers commuting in the house to purchase a fix. With the torn couches- the cracks on windows- the dirt on the wall, on electric switches and all white appliances. With all the smell of beer combined with cigarette and children's nappies, the hollow frame we lived while feeling empty because Ma is no longer.

The chair she loved sitting on looked bigger in size compared to when she was around. The coal stove no longer served the heat we know, the one that warmed our bodies, the heat that cooked comfort food that warmed our tummies. The heat we all wanted to sit next to in winter while listening to the story of the singing bird. When the storm and lightning came, I hid my head under thick blankets and squeeze my eyes tight

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together until I fell asleep. The sound of steps in our yard at night was blood-curdling. My sister's children slept holding onto their mother's skin the same way their father grabbed her clothes when he was drunk.

Itsthelittlethingsthatmakeahouseahome

2019. Unlike many other things that have broken, stolen, that we have sold, the frame remains, its gold remains, the sparkles remain. Today I stand in front of it, slowly scanning the texture of the gold glitter with my dirty fingertips. A part of me wishes it was pure gold so I can exchange it for a few rands, R32 to be exact. I need it. My body aches- it is shivering- I feel like I am going to die if I don't smoke in the next 15 minutes. My arm wrist is home to different sores- a trace of parts I've injected myself- sometimes Bluetoothed with my own brother's blood.

It is exactly 10 months since we buried my sister. Her children roam around the house with oversized t-shirts. My elder brother is in jail and my other brother still doesn't say much- even worse when he is high.

Ma took with her his voice

She took with her the warmth

With her went our safety

Our fearlessness against the lightning and the blood-curdling steps

Dreams of becoming a doctor

A teacher

A pilot

Like the bird, a singer

Ma took with her the little things that made our house a home.

Beloved

This is the last letter I am deciding to write to you. Unlike the last three you didn't reply to, I do not expect a response because I might be long gone to the land of the dead by the time you receive it. With the record of my life doing, I will be stepping into a dark place of torment and punishment, if hell really exists- as they say in the church, I am sure to meet you there one day.

The last and only memory of when my eyes laid sight on you, remains. I was a boy of 10 years of age. I still remember those wondering big eyes that capture visuals of a mystical world were you could genuinely love me the way I've longed to be loved. The taste of chocolate still remains on my tongue when I think of your slickly smooth skin. The perfectly round shape of your lips, I still recall. I recall them alongside the forgery smile you gave me when I attempted to hug you. Your sweet hibiscus saint still lingers when I think of how you rejected my hug and threw arrows of words with that grating sound of your voice. You said you don't know me- want nothing to do with me.

How do you not want nothing to do with me when all I am is through you? You once kept me inside of you- warm, safe until I was ready to be a part of this world. This was an involuntary act but my arms and legs stretched while inside of you. My heart learned how to pump from yours, every beat- the coming together of flesh- the hair with it, it all happened in your womb.

This being the only record to trace of a time you and I were one. The only record of a minimal love I ever received from you- or was there ever love? Gogo said you left me two weeks after birth because my father was shot by white boys two months before I was born during the student riots.

I refused to believe her. After that only time we met- the first and last, what Gogo told me proved to be true, you hate me. You probably hated the thought of raising a child of a deceased man. I am probably a reminder of the promises he made to you while you sat under the stars imagining what a free South Africa would be like.

Is it my eyes? The clear white eyes with a touch of green on my pupil, the green that charmed you the most about him. Gogo said you wept until the day your water broke, because you were there, you saw him tripping from a bullet shot on the leg. When he

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fell, they finished him- two bullets- on his chest- right before your naked eyes and raised stomach. I mean, if there's anyone who should be resented is the white boy- not me but only you know, only you have all the answers to why you have directed all this anger and hate at me.

You never bothered to return to trace the grounds where my umbilical cord was buried, for the day I took the first step or the day I smiled toothless in front of the mirror wearing a white shirt and ready for my first day at school. You never came back for me at thirteen years even when you were told your mother was gone and her house would be sold. Your uncles, they went looking for you and returned with a report, you said Gogo should have let me die and you never asked for her to raise me, what kind of a beast would vocalise such.

As you might know, they sold Gogo's house and took me to an orphanage home which I never stayed three years- if I stayed at that place, those people would have killed me before age fifteen (I'd rather not say). I escaped.

I write this letter sitting on a hard single mattress, dressed in an orange overall with prints of black facing a zinc toilet covered with yellow stains and a gathering of flies around it. There are burglar bars on every point of exit in this night hue room, including the only high up window forcing light. The glinting light on this letter and on my two-word tattoo, an imprint summarising the life I lived in your absence and guide.

The day I used a hot wire to scar these words on my arm, I was listening to Tupac's "Life goes on"- having a throwback - reminiscing about the day my friend Chippa died. He was someone very close to me- a brother I found walking, seeking for life in the streets.

I am aware that this is the only letter I have written to give a background of how I have been journeying in this world, I have never wanted to bother you about my dejected life because I thought there could be a chance for us. In the last letter, I mention a man who keeps appearing in my dreams saying I should join him, that man is Chippa and he still appears- he appeared last night as well.

Chippa and I were physically different but very much alike. We were both abandoned by our parents, school dropouts and missioned to survive even if it meant subscribing

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to the thug life- which we performed well at it. We took on the streets and every adventure in the costumes of Timon and Pumbaa. Myself, the skinny extrovert meerkat from the outskirts who always had a plan. Chippa a shy large warthog who hardly laughed and when he did, he was loved by many and was a danger too.

I tattooed "Thug Life" reversing memory tapes to the day I heard a gunshot cracking in the roof. The day I confused the shot to a door slam and the first time seeing blood flooding from someone's chest outside the TV screen. My heart officially slammed and I wondered how many brothers fell victim to the streets- it could have been me. I lost my brother- my reliable associate- a literal partner in crime.

I was high- floating on imaginary clouds- Tupac was preaching and "Thug Life" were two words that would best define the days I lived with Chippa. The days I spent grabbing purses day and night, breaking into houses and shops. I shot two people, one of them - a young man (he died) and his girlfriend (but she lived). He refused to give us what we wanted so, bekumele abode and thina bekhumele siphile.

This is the life I blindly dived into. The life I sometimes thought of getting out of but the reminder of no love and home kept me in it. You know what they say about comfort, it makes you a coward, locks you in and kills your attempt of imagining outside of it.

After your mother's passing, the streets took over what I learnt going forward. They became my dominant institute of learning. I write to you behind these bars with a 25 years sentence, yeah the one Tupac raps about, the one with an L (you probably wouldn't know this).

As I sharpen the tip of a toothbrush to cut deep in my veins, I want you to know that even men cry "Mama" in the darkest of times. I long for the warmth of your chest, the assuring sound of your voice that survival is worth fighting for. I've waited for a long time. You are still not coming. Beloved.

Your Son.

The Stars that Fought for Their Rightful Place

The story is hardly told. Most people whose eyes were activated that night have packed it in far inaccessible places of their brains. Though there are those who are courageous enough to visit these inaccessible stories and tell the story. When they do, they unpack it in the same tone of voice used to sing the sorrow comforting song that doubles as a lullaby 'thula mama'. The song is softly sang in a low tone that often slides alongside tears, keep quiet Mama everything will be alright, is what the song conveys.

Like the song, they unpack the story in a tone that says, listen, take it in and go to sleep with it. When you wake up, do not think too much about what put you to sleep but be comforted that things will be alright. Eventually.

Mama was one of them, one of those who witnessed the ordeal of that night. The night of the battle of the stars. She was one of those who wanted to forget, who tried to forget. Who kept it far away in their brains and made sure it never travelled to the tongue. She kept it to herself. She kept the story. The story of the night of the battle of the stars.

She kept it to herself until the day I noticed the difference between Day Off Mama and Working Mama were two different people.

Working Mama carried her back like she was stopping it from escaping her body. The skin below her eyes were often collapsed like it had given up on a task it previously believed would save it from its misery.

Working Mama's hands were often cracked, dry and had the same grey colour like the ashes of the mbawula - the mbawula my friends and I created to make our own lunch in the outskirts. Lunch put together with collectively stolen tomatoes, onions, salt and mille meal from our homes. We called it ho phevisa or ukuphekisa. The same lunch we testified to be more delicious than the food we ate at our homes.

The testimony might have been caused by a proudness at exploring something we were denied to do at our homes. Maybe the delicious came from the collective efforts of setting the fire, rushing to blow the wood and paper when it attempted to fade while

the smoke tinted the colour of our eyeballs. Maybe the delicious was because of the tins we thought using washing powder to wash off the rust would make them less harmful. Maybe the deliciousness came because we were together. As children. Living what we then defined as our best lives.

Mama hands, between her fingers, around the beginning of her nails lay the grey that resembled the one similar to the one that left the evidence of the mbawula. The one that was also blown off by the wind in the night time. Clearing the space. For another exploration. Another lunch gathering. Other moments of giggles.

Working Mama smiled less too. Working Mama was always angry at something. She was often also angry at the streamline of ants that bothered nobody. There was this day Working Mama used her flip flop and killed every last one of them. After all the ants body were squashed on the table. Working Mama turned and looked at me with scary eyes. Eyes that warned me not to spread the jam in her absence.

I liked Working Mama less, I wished I stayed with Day Off Mama more. Day Off Mama was kind, she smiled with excitement when I showed her my drawings of flowers and big houses. Day Off Mama gave hugs too. She cooked delicious food for supper. With her, there were never episodes of choking and scraping burnt crusts of food. Day Off Mama walked straight, her back never wanted to escape her body, it balanced it well.

But, it was Working Mama who told me the story of the battle of the stars. That evening, Working Mama had come home and she was her usual Working Mama self.

Mama had never told me she never completed her school but I knew. I thought maybe if she had, she would be Day Off Mama more often. She would come back home early and stay on weekends too. I thought she would sit on a desk like my teachers and not carry loads of luggage or spend days cleaning the hospital floor. Blood drops, vomit and other scary things is what Mama dealt with. That evening, Working Mama was lying on the bed, she interrupted my game of putting together diagrams using sticks and tiny stones. She commanded I get a comb, climb onto the bed and scratch out the dandruff on her scalp.

I didn't like being interrupted when I played my favourite game but I also enjoyed scratching the dandruff out of Mama's scalp. How the crust that laid on her skull would

convert to flour. Even though working Mama was not friendly, when done with the task of scratching out the dandruff, she would allow me to create loose unstructured cornrows on her hair. I enjoyed that.

In my shaky voice, I asked Mama about school, what happened for her not to complete. Waiting for an attack at me for my question and maybe a slap on my thigh which was closer to her dry rough hands, Mama surprisingly activated her story voice and began the story about the night of the battle of the stars.

That night. There was conflict in the sky, it was a battle between the rainbow coloured stars versus the bright colourless stars. The stars were quarrelling, the rainbow coloured stars had dominated the colourless ones for a very long time. They said they were better than the colourless ones and they deserve to be the only ones occupying the night hue sky. They had labelled themselves supreme, wanting to chase the colourless ones away but that particular night, the colourless ones had had enough and they were not willing to go down without a fight.

As a result, the sky was brighter than usual that night. The battle was about who would shine brighter. The brightness denied the night to fully exist. It defied the time that reflected on our clocks.

The brightness still shines in my memory Dipuo, when I close my eyes, I see them vividly fighting, all showing off almost giving the image of daytime. The image of less fear. Of less watching over your shoulder, of walking side by side with your shadow. Trusting its appearance. Unlike in the night time where your shadow can easily be your enemy. The shadow that makes you unsettled. One that might, just might help the perpetrator to catch you. The day time is friendlier than night my child. We get to live more in the day Dipuo. For that I will always be fond of brightness. Don't forget to chase it alongside with me my daughter. it favours us better.

That night we gathered courage because the brightness was with us. The stars were in conflict but in actual fact they did us a favour. For the first time, we felt loved by the night time all thanks to the stars.

There were a number of us. We gathered together and marched to his room. We had all been there. We knew the unique trick of opening his door. To insert a stick on the

key slot and carry the door up to open. We'd seen him using the same technique after him and his friends burst in between our lessons and choose whomever they felt like choosing for the day. When this happened, our teachers held their voices within to save their own lives. They were scared of what gangs might do to them or their families. My child, this was a time gangs were roaming in different corners and had no mercy on anyone. Our teachers knew better than wanting to make the headlines 'Another one gun to death by gangs in the township' the Sunday newspaper would report.

At our school, they had a free pass. Anytime of the day. even after school, the gangs placed themselves in the different places they knew we would seek refuge. They took us in their cars while we screamed and kicked and shut the mouths of our parents by a gun point. "I am so sorry my child, take a bath and go to sleep, do not worry about making the fire on the coal stove" were the only words they offered us while it arched between our legs.

Staying at home became better than going to school or going anywhere for most of us my daughter. We were scared but after the night of the battle of the stars. We feared less. We thought things would become better, we thought we can freely go to school without disturbance. but you know what we fooled ourselves. Things became worse, those of us who marched to the bad man's home were most wanted. But this is what happened. This is how we got to that point.

After we opened the door, we found the bad man lying on the same bed he did bad things to us. He was in deep slumber. More than fifty of us, we grabbed different parts of him and left him with no power of movement. We carried him outside chanting 'enough is enough'.

Our mothers, fathers, brothers, uncles and aunts ran out of their houses to join us. There he was within a circle of human beings. Different shades of black. Begging to be forgiven but the stars were in our favour. Their brightness, lit up all of our memories. The memories of times we had begged him for forgiveness but he continued denying us forgiveness.

A hammer placed on his neck. His neck divorced the body. A pool of blood for swimming if one wished. We took his head, plugged it on a broomstick, proudly held it

on air and marched to his mother's house. We left it supported by the same poll we held on when refusing to enter the yard. The yard most of us left our innocence unwillingly.

Like the stars, we brightened up the corners were light feared to enter. We were heroes that night. They applauded us for planting the same light of the stars for future generations who would have also been in thread of the gangs. Victory was ours.

Mama said the night was bright throughout. The stars battled throughout. One group had to conquer. Mama says the colourless stars took the crown. She says the ruling was made by the sun. It was the sun's turn to come out for the day and the stars were battling all night and lost track of their ascribed time in the sky. The sun then chose the colourless sparkling stars because they were humble and were willing to share a spot on the sky but the rainbow coloured stars bullied them to a battle to see who was the best. The sun ruled that the colourless stars were the best.

The rainbow coloured stars lost rights to reside in the sky. Mama says the sun was kind enough to give the rainbow stars a chance to reside on soil as flowers. She says all the rainbow colour flowers we see blossoming on the ground. The red, yellow, green ,blue, indigo and violet were once stars but they were punished with a learning to treat others with fairness and to be humble at all times. The colourless stars sparkle on.

I was already done with scrubbing the dandruff off Mama's hair and already plating my crooked cornrows. I then asked Mama if her and the other girls went back to school after the bad man had died.

She said they went to school for a few weeks and then heard a rumour that the dead man's friends were in search for them. In search of each of their heads with broomsticks.

Mama said, she and most of the girls had to escape to save their lives.

"I was taken to a village. Far away from the township and unfortunately there were no schools in that area then. I never went back to school after that Dipuo," she said turning her head on the other side of the pillow in order for me to plat the other part of her hair.

The Other Story

Her uniform under her home clothes. An oversized purple dress tasked to hide that she was on a mission to report for duty when she was supposed to be on strike like the others.

Body on the ground, neck slit by something. Could have been a sharp knife or the tip of a panga. Whatever it was had left her with blood running until there was none left. No more life. She lay there. Anania found her but it was too late to do anything.

It was Anania's first up close and personal encounter with a dead body. An unknown dead body that left his heart arching, his mind seeking for understanding. "Why me?" he thought to himself. A face, her beautiful face convincing him she might have lived an honest life. She might have left behind children who have not made it past ten years old.

Three nights before meeting the lady's dead body, Anania saw an owl flying above his head, his heart jumped and he convinced himself it was just in his imagination. But the owl insisted on being recognised. It made a hooting sound. Anania saw it from its back flying away.

The last time Anania saw or heard an owl with his naked eyes and ears was around the time his father passed on.

There was an owl which had claimed the tree on the corner of their yard as its every evening residing spot. He remembered his mother telling him and his siblings that an owl is an indicator of death. An announcer of a death coming. On its way to take someone in the family.

Anania remembered not believing this until the day they had to escape from their home using the back fence and thereafter never seeing his father again.

That year, the year of separation with his father, the year of moving from Kgutha was the last time, he saw an owl live. Therefore, it puzzled Anania why he had to see the death of the lady with whom he had no relation with. His mother had told him the presence of an owl, not only symbolises death but the death of someone close to your heart. But Anania knew nothing of her or about this lady. Sindiwe Malele, her name he learnt later. Anania was on his way to report for duty. To do what he was hired for.

“A normal security job is what I initially hoped for,” he thought to himself. “You know the one where you stand at the door and scan customer’s slips and then pretend you are checking in their plastics even though they are detectors installed at the door.”

“I honestly just wanted to deal with shoplifters and make sure everything was placed where it needed to be. Answer questions when necessary, give directions and sometimes help with getting them customers items that are not within their reach, especially the short ladies” Anania told the prosecutor.

But it was too late. His dream had taken a sharp curve.

How did you arrive there? It was my first job since the training, since I received the certificate. In fact, it was my very first job in my life. I saw the call on a poster. In the advertisement, the last word of the sentence communicating the call was ‘NOW’. The word was followed by multiple exclamation marks. I think there were seven. I thought to myself that the call was urgent and so I applied on the very same day.

I received a message about an interview. Like I had anticipated, I was told I had to report for duty the same week. In two days to be exact.

So you get the job and what happens? We were told the mine needed extra security because there were vandalisers. So we were to go and protect mine facilities against these vandalisers. The pay looked good and we were promised accommodation and food. I packed my bag and waved bye to my siblings and mother.

Where you told who these vandals were? No, before we got there, they had no name, colour or creed. They were described as people who were destroying the mine facilities. Destructing working conditions and they had to be stopped.

When does this change for you? This changed when the riots started and we were sent out to do the job we were briefed about and brought to do. In our red and black uniform. Bulletproof and pistols, we marched out to meet the vandalisers. This is also when we learnt we were not the only security company hired. There were about three security companies. Uhm... sorry what is the question again?

When do you learn that you were sent to... Oh, on the very first day of reporting to duty. The air was covered with smoke. Tyres were burning everywhere and a group of people were coming our way carrying weapons.

What kind of weapons? I saw sticks, knives, spears, panglers yah traditional weapons. When they were coming our way, we released fire and the people took off and it was all clear. We went back to the hostel and it was only through looking back on the day with the others that some of us heard for the first time that the people who were labelled as vandalisers were actually mine working. Protesting for an increment. A standard salary wage of R12 500 to be exact.

How did that make you feel? I felt sorry for them, these were people with families to take care of. Children to take to school, bills to pay. They were hard working men and women. It saddened me that I was on the other side. But I was on the other for the same reasons as them. I was their enemy and that scared me.

The miners were attacking us too. One of the guys was hit with a brick by the miners, he immediately fainted. He stayed in hospital for two days. We laughed about it at the hostel. I guess we laughed about it so we forget about the danger we were in. Upon his release, he immediately resigned.

You say the situation frightened you, why did you not resign as well? The food. The food was delicious.

This is not a joke sir (interjects the judge with a smug on his face). The food was delicious but what made me stay was the food I would take home after my pay. My mother was not working, still isn't. We live on my siblings' grand money. My mother took me to security guard training with that money.

I called her every day, my mother. Telling her I didn't want to live by the gun. I feared taking a life and I feared my life being taken. Although my life was on the line, my mother never encouraged me to return. I stayed.

Take us through the day when YOU found Miss Sindiswa Malele's dead body?
Through the day?

Yes, sir your day. I was to report for duty at night. Because it was clear that our task was to protect the mine facilities and coordinators from the miners. At the time, they were retaliating hard. Our presence caused a lot of rage. The miners were angry that the mine was able to hire three security companies but denied them the R12 500 they

asked for. The R12 500 they were risking their lives, going underground to dig for gold. The gold they were denied even the tiniest piece of it when they work so hard for it.

So they miners were willing to destroy anything.

I just received my guide sheet and it instructed that I would be placed at the palm station, to patrol. There was a rumour the miners were playing to dilute the water used to clean the gold. So I was preparing myself for later.

That day, I called my best friend and informed him of what was happening. He sounded as scared as I was. He suggested I come back home. It had been a month dealing with this and I was under serious consideration of returning home. I called him to let him know what was happening in case something happened to me. In case I returned home as a cold body. I did not want my death to be a mysterious one. Everyone was talking about the miner's missions to hurt anyone who was against them. If the tables were turned, I would have been on the other side but I was not. I was confronted with the task to deal with whatever there was.

I stumbled on the woman's body on my way to town. She was a mine worker too.

How do you know this? The uniform underneath her dress. I suspect she was on her way to work. I also suspect that is the reason they killed her.

Who? I would rather not say.

The court will give you another chance to answer. Who Mr Mshara? I suspect the other miners. The miners who had commanded no work. She was one of those that went against that. This means she was their enemy. They had spread the word on what they do to their enemies.

What makes you say it could have been the other miners and not one of the securities? She still had her wallet, phone, everything with her. It could have not been anyone who wanted to take anything from her.

but what would security guides have done with all the items you've mentioned. You were tasked to protect the mine and its facilities from the miners who were surpassingly dangerous? She could have hidden her uniform to protect herself from security guides?

Did you witness any security taking a life? Uhm yes but that was out of protection. The protestors had fire torches and all sorts of weapons. It was either them or the miners and so he fired and a body dropped dead.

Do you agree that the same might have happened? Maybe YOU felt threatened by her? No.

Why did you then resign after Miss Sindiswa's death? I could not take it anymore. I wanted to break free from it all. All the violence. All the hurt. All of it.

What about the food, the food they offered you and the food you'd take home? I didn't care anymore. I am the first born at home and I didn't want to be the first to die. It would leave my family with nothing. I think that was the best decision.

I could have lost my life too. When I saw the news, how the violence escalated after I left. That picture of the miners assembled on the ground. The picture of the man wrapped with a green blanket captured while chanting. From the picture I could hear the chants packed with the eyes of innocent children who were to grow up without fathers and mothers. I could hear his cries in the image. Crying for a minimum wage to maintain a living. To earn what can sustain them and their families. The miners work very hard. My heart leaked of sorrow when I saw the news. I was at home and I had never been so grateful to be home.

This was my first security job and my very last. The day I undressed that uniform was for good and I do not imagine myself there again.

That woman, I swear I did not do it. I found her lying on the ground. I did not kill her. She died by something sharp. She pleads with me in my dreams. She asks I find it whatever weapon that took her life and take it to her home for cleansing. I am not sure where to begin.

No further questions my lord.

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PORTFOLIO

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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Introduction

The following is a portfolio consisting of reflective journals built from the beginning of the course. The reflective journals aim to highlight the main learnings and exploration of the course. These are packed in months however, cover different parts of the months highlighting specifically books and some seminars that stood out for me as a candidate in the course. These capture my expectations, running thoughts for the specific month/week. They also capture a thread of fragments in what I aspire to build and what I have built in my creative work.

The portfolio also comprises of a poetic essay aimed at tracking what writing is and what it means to me as a young black writer who is in search for language and voice that speaks for people who form my everyday reality. The essay also argues how stories are tools of restoration and healing for the black community.

This portfolio also consists of reviews of three books that are of interest to me for different reasons reflected on the reviews, *Friday Black* by Nana Kwame, *Freshwater* by Akwaeke Emezi & *On Earth, We're Briefly Gorgeous* by Ocean Vuong. There is also a writing community report capturing my community work as required by the course to facilitate writing workshop and read my work from the thesis to an audience of choice. Lastly, the portfolio consists of a list of books I have read this year and have influenced my writing.

Brief History & Writing Mission

I come into the course with a love for storytelling. My trace for writing creative work dates from the year 2006 where I was twelve, wrote a play, gathered children who

were younger than I was, we rehearsed and performed at the community hall in front of a large audience, which consisted of our parents, neighbours and friends.

Having identified the love for stories and writing, fast forward I enrolled at the University of Johannesburg and studying journalism. The idea was to travel within the African continent and document interesting stories about people's culture, talents and interests. Though I did attempt to write what I then defined as poetry in high school, it was in my second year (2014) I started writing short stories. The short stories would always come when I have observed something that had made my heart the heaviest. It was in the same year I started reading material outside school prescription. I enjoyed reading material that was about the lives and realities of black people in past and present times. Black people in different parts of the world. I resonated a lot with what they captured in their literature. Reading authors that touch on political and social issues has been home for me.

After having had the opportunity to work as a journalist at Design Indaba & Global Citizens, working as a community manager at Native VML, I also doubled as an Afrocentric education facilitator for several community-based organisations. Last year I reconnected with creative writing again. I wrote short stories and children's stories. I come to the course crawling along, yearning to harness my creative writing. To sharpen it. For the year, to only breathe, talk and live writing so it can grow and become something real for me to pursue. Not just something I do on the side. I came to the course in search. In a search for tools that will help me dig out ideas and creative ability in spaces that are hidden. Capture the lives and voices of those who are forgotten, those whose lives have had darker days than shines. How the injustices of the past have influenced their realities today. I am crawling to capture different experienced the lack of tools to survive are limited in the new South Africa, however some soldier through and make it each day even though they are misunderstood, they sleep on sidewalks with the thought of better days. I want to cover who they are and how they came to be.

Poetic Essay: Writing as the 'subject'

Kwasuka sukela, A long, long time ago, when giants roamed about and chickens talked, a poor woman lived with her daughter, Tselane, in a little house. Since she had nobody to look after Tselane, the woman was forced to leave the child alone when she went to plough her fields each day. Of course, Tselane's mother wanted her to be safe, so every morning when she left home, she reminded Tselane never to open the door for anyone. And every time she came home, she sang this song to her, "Tselane, my child, Tselane, my child, come and open the door!"...

My memory of the earliest stories I have ever learnt lands me to a winter evening, my brother and I sitting next to a bar heater and my mother telling us the story of Tselane and the Zim Zim (the giant). This a story she (my mother) was told by her mother probably next to a coal stove during the late '70s and my grandmother told by her mother in the late 1940s around the fire.

Underlining the importance of folktales transmitted from one generation to another to teach life's valuable lessons, to alert and to make sense of the world. My memory takes me to time the story of Tselane was a reference to times my brother and I stayed by ourselves. Every evening, dressed in dread of what might come in a form of Zim Zim to harm us- the Zim Zim in the early 2000s dressed in a custom of a bugler or a child molester. Like Tselane, a familiar sound was an indication that it was safe to open the door, For Tselane her mother's voice and the song. For my brother and I, the sound of my father's car and the bright light on our window frame put us at ease. The story of Tselane is one of the reasons we survived.

A scan in memory tapes takes me to frustration because none of the 'original stories' I know, told to me by either my mother or grandmother are not covered with butterflies and glitter. Even though some have successful conclusions, they are mostly stories filled with darkness and scary supernatural descriptions of characters. This brings me to the conclusion that these stories were told to me because they reflected my immediate reality, that they could have been chosen intentionally because they were supposed to awaken me, teach me to survive in a chaotic world I belong and might not break out of.

Here, my attempts are to note growing up under conditions where every step you take should be taken with caution, that black communities are places one can easily gamble with their lives by just simply choosing to live. Where the scream of children has become a harmonizing sound when parents lay them down to pop blisters caused by the water they drink. Where a family of seven lives in an RDP two-room house- the uncle penetrating the child this going unknown for years. Where schools wait until the middle of the year to get learning resources from the government. Where after a long search for employment young man finds refuge in street corners and need to stay intoxicated for each day to move. Where a bright young girl is forced to drop out of school because there is no trace in her bloodline of anyone who could happily offer to pay her fees if the student aid denies her financial assistance.

These are a very few, scope on the top indications attempting to paint what black communities look like in the new South Africa. The new South Africa that I have known all my life. The South Africa I have lived and this is how my writing comes to life, my writing taking on a responsibility to draw the faces that through history have been made faceless, write in attempt to scream louder for black voices to be heard, write to remember where we come from what we have done- what we deserve. I write because stories have protected me.

Like Zhuwao (1996:1) "I write from, it's my own experiences, personal experiences. What I have seen. What I have felt. My relationship with people. My loves."

However, unlike him (Zhuwao) my confrontation takes special attention to the "ordinary man in the streets" my understanding is that I am not the only person who feels sorrow when I see a childhood friend with their mouth wide open, eyes semi-closed and confused whether the sun is rising or waving goodbye in the robots of Johannesburg. I write with the critical-ness for myself, however, the self belongs and is formed by a social structure. I write for self in a collective, therefore I am concerned about "ordinary man of the streets" because he/she has felt my pain- my suffering.

In Collective Amnesia Koleka Putuma writes a footnote:

"Storytelling

How my people remember. How my people archive. How we inherit the world"
(2017:46).

This note for me summarises what storytelling has been, what it becomes and ought to do in communities- restoring what has been lost for black people. It is a summary that aims to give acknowledgement to the power of storytelling, the importance of recollecting the missing words in disrupted voices and a recreation of more voices- demanding to be listened to, to be heard. The note also awakens in me the importance of tracing history and how in the present history can be a reference point to living and understanding the current. The current that through writing or story telling black people can remember, can tap on the continuous mission of resistance in becoming "subjects".

Bell hooks (1990:45) introduces two concepts the object and subject arguing, the object are those who leave it in the hands of others to define their identity and let their history be named in ways that serve their oppressors. On the other hand, she describes the subject as those who take on the right to define their own reality, establish their own identities and name their history. Therefore, 'subjecthood' attempts to mark writing or storytelling as an act of taking responsibility to get back the power that was and still is denied to a people.

In *Plantation memories*, Grada Kilomba (2008:12) writes "the passage from objecthood to subjecthood is what marks writing as a political act. It is furthermore an act of decolonization in that one is opposing positions of becoming the 'valid' and 'legitimate' writer and reinventing oneself by naming a reality that was either misnamed or not named at all."

Subjecthood then becomes a place where the power lies for writers and storytellers. Power not only in movement and flesh but how through choosing to become a subject in our writing as black people we are rewriting, re-molding our image and restoring our power in pursuit to heal and reproduce stories, as Patuma puts it to "inherit the world."

My desire as a writer is to go head to head in opposition with the concept of 'objecthood', is defying the myth that the new South Africa presents better conditions for us "born frees"- my writing desires to look into the different ways to give the human face, story and background of the young and black.

“Writing is attached to the body.” This is a powerful and shooting opening sentence to Bettina Judd’s essay writing about race from the racial imagination (2015:265). This I felt cut deep in me because it acknowledges how I come into writing. Carrying Judd’s view, my body in itself is a form of literature or a story model. It is in its physique, the experiences it has had to endure, and what through the naked eye it represents and what it seeks to become.

“I like seeing my round brown hand typing, scribbling away because this moment is not by accident. It was fought for” (Judd, 2015:265).

Here I submit to a recognition that through writing I am confronted with the responsibility to write paying homage or rather not defying what the body, mind and soul represent. I submit to my truth, which is: black- poor- women- dark skinned- affected by the injustices of the past coming from a broken family- deceased childhood friends due to drugs- related to living drug addicts- financially excluded in university. All these are attached to my body, mind and soul. These are attached to my body, mind and soul because they are embedded by an oppressive system.

Like Tamiko Beyer noted in A slanty kind of racial(ised) “I am participating in this project because I know that allowing my unease to silence me is one of the reasons racism persists and thrives” (2015:245).

To qualify this, in the Narrative of Struggles, Bell hooks talks about taking on writing with the dread of not being able to do justice by not fully articulating her own or the experiences of the collective black struggles, therefore she steps into writing with the awareness that “wounds inflicted by the oppressive structures of racism, class exploitation, and sexist domination mark me/us; that political self-recovery, the development of revolutionary consciousness heals but does not erase” (Hooks; 1991:53).

Here, Hooks reminds me that again, as a black subject, writing for me becomes a medium of being present, a form of resistance, a voice of speaking to recognition and continual active participation in fighting because “remembering makes us subjects in history. It is dangerous to forget.” (1991:54).

Moving with Hooks' positions if the danger of forgetting where and what we come from as black people, here I bring in question the question of why writing from a place of acknowledging one's blackness is important. Why the necessity to "inherit the world"- borrowing from Patuma.

Judd (2015: 266) brings in critical site of looking into certain things, for example, she talks about how certain content that we are fed through literature of visual mediums like TV, does not explicitly say that the material is meant for white people and their experiences- there is vividly telling their stories come from a position of thriving to become the subject. Hence in backgrounds of storytelling mediums, black people are street sweepers, criminals, barbaric dancers and sidekicks to whiteness.

These are narratives reflecting the reality of our (black people) positions in society, that we are a marginalised racial group that this is how whiteness comes in confrontation with blackness, whiteness in produces stories that depict their truth and it produces for themselves.

To qualify this, Judd recalls that literature that didn't praise her blackness as a child had white faces in them and it was not about race. This brings a critical note that she writes about race "the same reason people write about God, or nature, or their mother's wedding dress. It is in and around me like air and it is in my presence of mind and memory"- because this is a part of her reality and how she exists.

In pursuit of writing as a way of reconstructing, repurposing and reimagining narrative of blackness (in self and collective voice) the writer or storyteller takes on what can be seen as 'experimentalism' because by note they are defying what is normal and what has been largely projected about black people. My answer to the posed question becomes, I write because of blackness for black people because that is my truth and in my writing, I aim to restore the image and narrative of blackness.

To define what experimentalism Christine Rivera Garza notes:

"I am convinced that writing is a critical practice: true, bold, brave, formally adventurous writing should have the ability to change perceptions, experience; the disordering of the senses talked about by [Rimbaud], inextricably linked with the disordering of everyday life as we know it" (2018: 1).

For Garza “writing expands the senses of what is possible. Imaginable. liveable.”

By writing from a ‘subjecthood’ perspective, as a black body, the writing is going head to head-challenging societal conditions and binaries of self vs the other- white vs black. The labour then becomes an involuntary act of taking on social or even political responsibility of sorts.

Garza argues that when we write, we write in debt because writing is a community-making practice. If we write. We write to others.

Borrowing from Fred Moten and Stefano Harney’s argument, in the Undercommons, Garza notes, “a debt that is or will become unplayable. We cannot hide it or deny it. The only thing left to do is increase it.”

For example, when I take on the position of writing a story about an individual who experiences prejudice due to his/her dark skin. This is a personal story of the individual, however for me becomes important not divorce the fact that these prejudices come to play because in the black community there’s an aspiration for whiteness- because whiteness is privileged in different ways, therefore anything looking closer to whiteness qualifies as acceptable. This then makes my story larger. A story that is not in confrontation with the individual self but collective self. The debt here is the connection that does not divorce the self to the other. This then becomes a crucial activity for me as a writer who through writing is aiming at connecting my writing with healing and restoration in different forms of fictional writing confrontations.

In an interview with Alan Finlay (1996), Phillip Zhuwao opposes the idea of writing as a form of collective responsibility. His argument is that he does not care about the man on the street but the self that is penning down to paper, the struggles of self never mind how they relate to the other. I then hold boiling questions such as, how many have gone through the different themes your work touches on, are you destroying or perpetuating stereotypes, are you fairly responding to a social dilemma? Again writing for me is responsibility, I then take on what I feel is an ascribed responsibility that I am not willing to betray.

I agree with Craig Santos Perez, in the piece, *Unincorporated Poetic Territories* when noting that writing as a way of seeking access to ‘territories’ previously and presently denied. Whether it is space, voice or language.

“When I think about accessibility, I think about growing up surrounded by fences. I think about what my people no longer have access to. I think about who controls the armed points of access,” writes Perez (2015:254).

In Perez’s placed focus on how the imposition of English to a people is synonymous to the border gates that deny physical access. In this case, language is power and “access is power”. In gaining access to that power, Perez had to claim that power by “indigenising” literature as an instrumental way to address Chamoru people, through the *tsamorita* ancestral poetry form and writing her poetry in Chamoru and in English. This is how a position of ‘subjecthood’ brings in the ability to remember people and reconstruct a narrative and most important speak to a change that attempts to lead towards ‘decolonising’. As a defined concept ‘decolonial’ ways of thought aim at restoring that has been lost and healing what is wounded.

Recovering the Undercurrent

Carrying the idea of ‘subjecthood’ here I present what Njabulo Ndebele (2006:45) describes as employing “analytical approach” in writing. Where the writer takes the position of presenting the undercurrent- that is giving background and solution to the situation written about at hand.

Analysing *The Conversion* by Micheal Siluma, which is a story about how in the eyes of the oppressor a black person remains a black person irrespective of their social class and position. Ndebele suggests that with the story “Siluma moved away from merely reflecting the situation of oppression, from merely documenting it, to offering methods for its redemptive transformation.”

With this, Ndebele is not against black writers writing from documenting their mediate struggles what then becomes a vital standpoint is them writing with critical-ness of what births their struggles and through the stories present ways can solve the struggles presented by the story. He puts it “a story designed to deliberately break

down the barriers of the obvious in order to reveal new possibilities of understanding and action,” (2006: 46)

This can also be explored through tracing the history and consideration that as the ‘subject’ a writer is rewriting what has been previously written and re-narrating to other forms of understanding.

In 1993, an American Fulbright postgraduate Amy Biehl was murdered by a mob of youth in Gugulethu. Due to the one-sided story that populated media, the story erasing the face, story and feelings of the youth who were recorded as murderers. Sindiwe Magona writes *Mother to Mother* as a response to this, not to justify the actions of those who took part in the killing but to respond on what could be the reasons behind such taking part.

In *Mother to Mother*, Magona tells a fictional story of a mother of the young man who murdered Amy, in the book she draws in the struggles of black women during apartheid time-of how there was a demand to not be fully present in their children’s lives due to single motherhood which is also caused black men’s participation in the liberation struggle. Magona brings in these themes not to defend the young man’s actions but not to erase his story, the anger he carried which could have influenced the murder of Amy. While presenting these reasons, with the story, Magona takes the reader back into time while speaking about the current, she brings in the land question underlining how the mother as a child had succumbed to the violence of forcefully been removed from her homeland. Magona brings in the conditions of her upbringing due to colonialism. Which are then threaded in the reasons she could not give her son the life that could have prevented him of becoming an angry young man who saw Amy fit of taking the fall of what the system has done and been to black people.

The story takes an analytical approach, instead of carrying the narrative of the young man as another thug from the slums. Who could have not angry at the system but probably wanted to murder the woman for her belongings, the reader is drawn through who he is behind that ordinary narrative.

Through the story, the reader is initiated in imagining how solving the injustices of the past can help us imagine a better us(blacks) getting back the land will give placement

to a number of blacks. Here I learn that analytical approach of writing marries well with critical fiction.

Hooks notes Ivan Van Sertima's comment on black liberation struggles globally, "he asserts that it is not just our minds that are colonised, but our imaginations. Thinking about the imagination in a subversive way, not seeing it as a pure, uncorrupted terrain, we can ask ourselves under what conditions and in what ways can the imagination be colonised," (1991: 55).

With this, imagination then becomes a tool to breaking out of colonial being and thoughts by writing in indigenous languages or by spotlighting politics of hair, gender, space and skin to take back people's knowledge and 'power' back to them. This leaves the idea that storytelling with a purpose and the why remains important.

A brief scan on South African storytelling reveals that stories have moved with time, speaking of the struggle of a life different ways. How to praise poets were previously marked as important voices of society to speak on different matters or alert people of the community on dangers. Writing about the times of Bhambatha or the Sharpeville Massacre or looking into how struggle songs were the composed- to keep miners underground in solace. Or an emerging writer like myself who through the work aims at revealing how under the usage of a destructive drug- nyaope lies the undercurrent of lack of opportunities, racist structure, wounds of 'fatherlessness'.

In exploring this, I aim to address how nyaope is merely a symbol portraying the decay conditions in South Africa. This as a reminder that storytelling is connected with what lingers in the air- what we live.

Through the attempt to capture, the undercurrent packed under the idea of 'subjecthood' acknowledging that nyaope addicts are people and do have frames of unique stories that lie at the back of forcefully grabbing women's handbags in the city. In my writing, the attempt is to paint these realities awakening the fact that these realities exist because of the broken condition of black conditions- black homes. A condition that has come to life because of force removals- because mass killings of young people on June 16 and killings in Sharpeville just to scope from the surface.

Mbali Kgame
G19k9611 MACW
Title: A Skin That Took Them Through

In conclusion, the concept of 'subjecthood' becomes a defense mechanism for me as a black body who writes who carries pain and is seeking for a possibilities of healing and restoring the image of myself that is black- the black that refused to loosely move with the assumption that everything is fine when the order of our condition is screaming the opposite. I write to resolve an internal conflict of the self who is part of a people who are conflicted and clustered by past historical events that continue knocking at our doors reminding us that we have healing and restoring of self to do as individuals and as individuals belonging to a larger social structure.

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Reflective Journals

February

In the first seminar, we are told by Stacy Hardy that the Poetics of Punctuation seminar will be on punctuations. We are assured by Stacy that the seminar is not a reintroduction of punctuation from early days of schooling but a seminar that is a potent offering in teaching how we can create rhythms, musicality, pace and face of a story using punctuation.

We are exposed to different excerpt by authors who explore different punctuation style in the making of the story. The learning is that, based on the choice of punctuation and ways of punctuation utility, the story has the potential to sound and look different.

I was grabbed by a number of texts that show an interesting way of building imagination through punctuation. One of them is an excerpt by Fiston Mwanza Mujila from Tram 83. The text consists of longer sentences and there's a repetitive use of the word 'and'- this creates a rhythm and the existence of the self (the reader is part of the story world). Reading the text, I could imagine myself in the 'chaos' described by Mujila through the long and recurring sentences that do not allow the reader to pause or take a breather. I enjoyed this technique and I aim to employ it in my work as I usually write in longer sentences as well. I do think my sentences tend to be broken and become 'lullaby'- this should help me keep them awake.

Another except that was read in class which employs a similar technique is by Laszlo Krasznahorkai, however, in Krasznahorkai's text, there are commas included. This allows the reader to breathe even with the long length of the sentences. I enjoyed the analysis that was shared in class about this text and different people felt the text was slightly irritating which creates discomfort to the reader.

In as much as the longer sentence caught my attention, Lesego Rampholokeng's short sentences are very grabbing and create an interesting beat to the text. I was fascinated by how short sentences can move a story in a way that keeps the reader moving and captured. Rampholokeng & Dambuzo Marechera's excerpts did that for me.

Mauro Javier Cardenas's technique of using slashes to replace commas grabbed my attention. Not only is this style eye grasping, but I also found it to be a smart way to

connect sentences, ideas, and thoughts in a uniquely beautiful way. In the excerpt, Cardenas writes a scene of internal thought- dialogue that plays out as a way of interacting with the reader as well. This was slightly confusing in class, however, when I read it on my own it made me really excited and I found it to be a genius way to keeping the reader inside the story and captivated by all means.

As a result, I incorporated this in my assignment and it turns out not to work as well, as how Cardenas employed it. However, I will give it a go again; this is due to my fascination with creating flashback scenes in a text. With my assignment, I took the risk of exploring the flashback and internal dialogue; I mention a song that plays in the character's dream, which was also a song, sung in the reality of the characters who were in a bus while the character was asleep. My attempt was to make a connection for people to note that the song in the dream is the same song sung by the church members in reality.

Susan Steinburg's *Cowgirl* took me on a reading pleasure; first, the storyline is one I would like to explore further than what the excerpts has to offer. I enjoyed the 'pointers' ways of writing. The text consists of a list of events that are different but connected. The character's voices in the text are also connected. Here Steinburg defies what I know, as the rules of writing, there is a lot of back and forth carried out through the usage of semicolons. There is a feeling of enjoyment I experienced as I moved through the text.

March

I am drawn particularly to text that seeks to capture and address personal and political struggles in ways that are unimagined or rather in ways that are out of the 'norm'. In this week's assignment, I deliberately explored the destruction and chaos of the township life, theming this around 'fatherlessness' and xenophobia. In my writing, I aim to explore the binaries of the world state: black/white, self/other. This I do through the eyes, ears, and understanding of a child. I am attracted to this strategy for a number of reasons: 1 because of my interaction with children who have shown awareness to such binaries but lack the normative expressions to voice these issues out. 2 I find what they articulate filled with humour which makes it accessible and less

traumatic to explore. 3. I am also inspired by my last week's read (NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*) which caught me in its simplicity but a very kicking way of writing and addressing issues of the state of Zimbabwe/Africa and realities of immigration.

In my writing, I attempt to explore personal and collective realities of post-apartheid South Africa in a voice I find fascinating (child and humorous). The *Milka Cow* reading from the reading session caught me; in the text, the author draws us in a fantasy world. Adele King captures a busy and chaotic world (mermaids, milking cows, moving swimming pools and fridges) - the unreal occupy and become real. I like how she uses certain figures in conveying double meaning, for example, she speaks of an insomniac sun. In my interpretation, she aimed at conveying that it was in the wee hours of the morning when the sun was not fully out but slowly opening up to its relevance. I am also drawn by the reintroduction of 'bananas' in the story which at first it feels like the author is referring to 'bananas' to capture the madness that is unfolding in the story. She later notes, "in the pool, the bananas are howling about how painful it is to be peeled alive, without anesthesia, without analgesics, without epidural." This for me was manipulating, it could also mean that madness in itself is not fairly examined by psyche practitioners or it aims to keep us in the imaginative world where nothing is questioned. This specific way of offering text compliments this week's seminar which touched on writing as a way of talking (and incoherently) to find clarity. The *milky cow* is incoherent in its nature.

Another read that stood out in the reading sessions and introduced something new to me was 'What you are?' by Katelyn Hemmeke, the list fiction technique drew me due to its simplicity. This style draws the reader to follow the story, the technique works for scannability. In the story, we follow the author drawing us in the ordinary setting of her birth to the end where she deals with her dilemma of not identifying with herself or the world. Even though the story seems brief, the author has the potential to keep us in the story through images through giving us faces and identity of other characters for example,

"... the fair daughters of good Dutch farmers who inhabit west Michigan..."

In the mission of capturing political and social issues confronted by individuals and collectives in post-apartheid South Africa, I appreciated Joel Matlou's short story 'Man against himself' I liked the story for drawing us in a personalised bigger world or story of the mining industry in South Africa. As a fan of simplicity, this text offered me that. We are taken to the mining world and given details about the interactions and conditions that occur in the space, some of it is familiar and generic, and some of it is new. I am, however, not happy with his style of word packaging, for me it's too relaxed and does not make me excited as a reader. Matlou however, captures a feeling of longing very well. Longing for a better and less stressful life, longing for a return home. This, I highlighted in how he describes his lover that is packed in a bit of a poetic form:

"When I saw the beautiful girls I thought of my own beauty sweetheart, my bird of Africa, sea water, razor; green-colored eyes like a snake, high wooden shoes like a cripple; with soft and beautiful skin, smelling..."

During this week's seminar, we were introduced to a number of poets, there are two poems which I felt I could relate to and serve the purpose of my literary goal. Again to find unfamiliar ways of capturing struggles. 'My first lover' by Sharon Olds, in the poem, Olds speaks of terror and violation while painting a picture of beauty. The poem sends a message that in all the 'terror' of the world there is always love and love is what keeps us going. I am attracted to this text because it makes us aware of the unjust and questionable conditions of a people but also does not leave us there. Like how Toni Morrison speaks of racism but in her text, in her stories, I always find a light of hope that regardless of everything people still survive. I am not into pessimist text, because authors who follow this, just leave us in the dark- with heavy hearts, it's depressing.

Reading both Nathan and Ronelda S Kamfer shared work for class preparation gave me an idea of the type of themes explored in their writing which is not isolated from my own, my interpretation is that they aim to capture the social and political unjust happening to different racial groups in the now South Africa. I enjoyed both their poems which have an individualistic stand of both writers even when though they are writing about the same world and setting.

The writing centers individual life but not in isolation of the influence and order of the system. I am drawn to literature that aims at capturing this even outside racial and sexuality conversations. During the reading session, I enjoyed the short story 'You can't cover up the sky with your hands' by Oscar Lewis, the story was distributed by a fellow colleague, Mziwonke Qwasha. It spoke to me for two reasons. 1. The strategic way of writing employed by the writer. In the beginning, the writer draws us by introducing a nonchalant woman- the exaggerated description of her character through lines like "I would rather be a man than a woman." However, as the story progresses we learn that she is soft at heart- this is through helping people in need. Due to certain events and confrontations in her life, she was led to masking her softness as a point of survival. How the story starts created a certain hunger to go through it and learn further about the woman. This reminded me of Tsitsi Dangarembga's well known opening in *Nervous Conditions* "I was happy when my brother died".

In Lewis's text, the repeated 'I' create what feels like a dialogue which arrested me to the story more- reading this story felt like being in conversation with the author. The second reason why the story spoke to me was the storyline which gives us the background of how the character comes to being, this we see through being taken through her upbringing and confrontations with people in her life like her grandmother and father. I am attracted to stories that highlight how primary socialisation builds a person- which is something I have had an interest in exploring in my work. For example, when writing about drugs I would also touch on reasons the character comes to drugs, reasons such as 'fatherlessness' and poverty.

After concluding the *Freshwater* by Akwaeke Emezi. My reading adventure led me to the anthology 'My mother, she killed me, my father he ate me' edited by Kate Bernheimer' here I am attracted by the universality of folktales, how they move from different parts of the world with a similar narrative and storyline. There's one story in particular that I enjoyed reading by Ilya Kaminsky 'Little Pot' the story reminded me of Amos Totuola's *Palm wine drinkard-* a chapter was a special egg feeds the entire community and can only be activated and controlled by one person. Something similar happens in *Little pot* where a pot feeds a starving community. I also enjoyed the style of writing employed by Kaminsky in this

read. Kaminsky narrative is conversational in a humorous way for example instead of finding a way to remove a certain character for the story to progress, she writes “the old crone smiled and vanished from the tale” and “he escaped from the story.” I like how a text can stand between seriousness and have humour, this for me keeps the text alive and encourages the reader to keep going.

In the anthology (Black, Brown & Beige) chosen for the reading session, there is a poem by Alex Wilder, Put. The poem consists of only five lines and draws the reader to an image of pain and wonder using flowers and the floor as a symbol. I enjoyed its brevity and the poet’s ability to just say many things without being overly descriptive and creating the image for the reader.

In the reading session, the piece shared by fellow classmate, Eddie. The reading was very interesting and provoking. I am interested in stories that draw on into a different world and leave one with knowledge and realisation of that world. Caping Scopuli.com by Brian Oliu is a well-written piece and very complicated story on IT activities and it consists of IT jargon. The story got me thinking how on a daily we are utilising a creating through technology but not aware of the different activities that happen in the backend. The story brought an awareness that our communication using apps are not just limited to what we see, I think this was a good story in that regard because it pulled me to a different thinking and motivation that we can write about anything that is of interest to us without being apologetic but knowing that there are people who will understand the text and there will also be people who will learn something new from it.

This got me thinking if the course will introduce to us a creative text that takes formats outside, short- long stories and poetry, for example, how essays, journalistic pieces, and academic papers can be creative work. Is this a possibility?

My chosen read for the week was informed by an interest in exploring surrealist literature. I am interested in how reality can be tweaked in unimaginative ways. In ‘The Palm-wine Drinkard’ Amos Tutuola incorporates imaginative unreal realities in a normal world. I found it interesting in how he builds images and breaks them to move the story. For example, he describes mysterious creatures- how they look and character. Reading the book was like playing a video game, how one goes through all

these laps and is presented with a certain challenge in order to conquer and move to the next level. In the book we see the creatures live and die and the protagonist moving to the next stage (next town with its own challenge). It is a very interest collection of African folktale that holds different teachings that are applicable to our everyday reality- for example how life is a battle and there are going to be a mystery to fight- there will be people to fight, build or people who will help you. The book created a childlike excitement in me while reading I was excited to find out what will happen in the next chapter and town.

In terms of his writing style, I appreciated the usage of the English language most. I imagine Tutuola writing the book in the same way he speaks or the same way locals in Nigeria speak. Although the book was translated, I think there is so much power in writing the way you speak. Because I am not fluent in the English language and it is also unfortunate that I cannot write in my mother tongue. Reading this book gave me the confidence to understand that being a writer is merely about the ability to build and break images-to keep the story moving and not necessarily about the type of English you speak and the usage of bombastic words. 'The palm wine Drinkard' can be defined that it is written in broken English (maybe by a South African reader or someone outside Nigeria). This is a very good read and I enjoyed it, however, I could not help but find it problematic in the sense that the female character (wife to the drunkard) was meek in the entire book until at a later stage we saw her being active by starting to advise her husband on how to confront certain challenges. This was a bit disturbing for me like she is present and absent at the same time.

The week is kicked off with an eye-opening seminar which by far is one of my favourites. Mishka Hoosen's deliverance on a desire not only made me aware of what has drawn me to one of my favourite authors (Toni Morrison) but also taught me that as a writer, you write to leave sparks of feelings and remembrance in description and packaging of storytelling. First I didn't have the proper wording on describing what I enjoyed most about Toni Morrison, but after the seminar, I have identified that what has drawn and kept me in her text is how well she introduces and writes on desire in her stories.

In the reading *Finding the Edge*, the writer speaks of desire as “an issue of boundaries” the writer later notes that desire is something that keeps the beat of the heart. When one has stopped desiring, then they have confirmed to a certain kind of death which can also be looked at in ways of writing, once a story has lost the element of desire or keeping the reader desiring for more of what is offered, then the story is dead. In the reading the writer notes, “all desires are for a part of one self-gone missing” this is something we were encouraged to draw out and attempt to produce this week’s assignment.

As previously mentioned, the reading sessions also remain an empirical part of the course because they are an introduction to voices and other text that one would not choose voluntarily. With my interest in searching for literature that highlights creativity outside fiction. I found the science fiction anthology *Semiotics* edited by Rudy Rucker interesting. In the anthology, I chose an essay by Colin Wilson, Maslow Sheldrake, and the peak experience. I chose this specific reading because of 1. I liked the philosophical topic it tackles. Which is about human’s thirst to find happiness and the journeys of achieving it. 2. I chose the essay based on the creative ways in which the reading is packed in writing. In the first sentence, the author writes, “the other day in the local pub” this already takes us to a setting- the look and feel of it. I think putting a location to a story gives it life. I also enjoyed the stories that exist within the essay, the story about the visit to the university and about the monkeys. I enjoyed Wilson’s reading and I am still in search for other non-fictional text which has visibly strong creative voices. I chose the essay to interrogate what is defined and seen as creative work which I believe could also be academic, report & journalistic if a writer likes.

In the missions of looking for text that speaks to me and will help me become a better writer, *Redemption in Indigo* was my reading for this week. First, I am attracted to Paama’s character, in African stories that I have read, the woman does not take center stage as Paama does. Paama is dominant and is plugged with power- I admire how Karen Lord wrote Pamaa’s voice in the story. In my review about the *Palmwine Drinkard*, I mentioned that the woman’s presence was meek, this is what I did not like about the book. Karen Lord answer’s my desire of reading text that paints African women as powerhouses and Paama is that from leaving her embarrassing husband

to taking on the Djombi. What I also enjoyed about the book is its simplicity in language, again, I like accessible text through the simple usage of the English language especially if the writer is capturing black or African experiences. Redemption in Indigo is an adult story but told in a way that would be delivered to a child (the once upon a time). I enjoyed that about the book. The supernatural figures were also interesting models to read about, they were written in the story in a way that does not undermine the reader. For example, the spider god, even though I know that it is a nonexistence figure, I did not feel the author is being “too much”. This book has made me interested in reading South African folktales and see how I can incorporate them in the stories I have an interest in telling like how Lord has done with this Senegalese folktale in Redemption in Indigo.

With the different readings, I was able to identify my ‘writer’s family’ that we have been encouraged to seek as told to us at the beginning of the course. My identified writing family is one that seeks to write in hopes of healing and restoring the image and culture of black bodies. Bell Hooks talks about writing from a critical perspective. Writing about the self with an acknowledgment that the body writing is black and comes from a history of being alienated and lose.

My interest is to capture the mundane lives of black people's experiences in post’94 South Africa weaving history, politics and social ideas. I aim to capture these stories through literature for children and literature for young adults, for example, I have written a story on hair politics for children. The story teaches the importance of self-love and that different hair types are beautiful, this I do through weaving history and the now attempted to bring awareness.

My learning is that I can only write about what I know- the social settings I am well familiar with and the type solutions I imagine being implemented in healing and restoration for black people in working class levels. The different forms of writing and confronting writing will be fairly explored in the essay. Reading as a class helped with tracking the readings and understanding them better. This technique worked best, as Paul said going through the pile of reading individually would have been challenging.

April

Still, in pursuit of finding my "literary family"- this week was dedicated to reading the anthology of short stories by writers from different parts of the continent on the anthology Gods and Soldiers which consists of fictional work and non-fiction. I chose the book based on my interest in reading what other writers within the continent are tackling in their literature- particularly because only south and west of Africa are most dominant when we speak of 'African Literature.' I enjoyed reading Laila's Lalami's essay on the Politics of Reading- which Lalami touches on some of my similar experiences when it comes to reading- which is being exposed to literature from western countries- through school and through commercial spaces. This is, of course, a reflection of the world order like how we consume music mostly from the USA and know more about the USA than countries like Togo or Guinea Bissau.

The book opened me to an interest in researching what is happening in the unpopular African countries and what are writers from those countries say about love, drugs, past, and present injustices and how does their literature speak to literature to an African experience- or that of their country. What was also an interesting discovery to me is reading content from Arabic African countries, it is shocking that the unjust of governance that we know of countries like Sudan today come from a while back. How the literary world in Sudan is censored to fit the political agenda by its leaders. In the book, I also enjoyed the fictional short story Woman at point zero by Nawal El Saadawi from Egypt, this evokes thoughts of wondering about women activists writing from Egypt. I have noted this as my task. Overall I am looking forward to this term.

May

According to Kerry Hammerton writing about place starts with the inner association of what we know place to be and that lies in the sense of the brain, the visuals, the sounds, the taste. The brain processes from the limbic system to neocortex and reptilian brain- pretty scientific stuff, and however they make sense.

Writing about place in this seminar is writing the individualistic and collective person as place and place as we know it. Here we explored poetry that explores 'self-portrait'- that is how one sees themselves or how they are seen which can be in contrary to what they are and sometimes complementary, analyzing body parts and experiences. We also explored intimate spaces that are the home, the relationship we have with others and transition.

Under this section of exploring the place as self -a poem by Ricardo Alexio titled My Man caught my attention. First, the format on the page is what appealed to me, I am at times intimidated by the 'normal' format poems, you know with stanzas and all. My man talks about the stereotypes that are pinned on black man, how by virtue of being a black man one does not have ownership to the self. The first line, I am whatever you think I am, draws me into an understanding that the poet is addressing someone outside the self. I used this specific poem as a guide to writing about the intimacy of self in relations with other people. Like Alexis, I often felt that I have no ownership of my body or self-portrait.

I've learnt that writing about a place can be tricking two writers can write about the same place but have different layouts of what it is and it looks like, again this draws back to the writer's brain storage. Kerry said something interesting that we decode and understand based on past experiences and knowledge. A poem One small boy longs for summer by Mafika Gwala awakened in my experiences of visiting my grandmother and not being allowed to play outside due to the cold weather, a very protective woman, my grandmother made us stay in the house next to the coal stove while the kettle hissed.

As we read the poem, I could hear that sounds and inside of me, I felt present in the poem. People interpreted the poem in different ways that he was longing for freedom and he captured the scenery very well which I agreed with but the poem dragged a past meaning experience of my childhood. This was pleasant.

The week's read The Amputated Memories also awakened a lot that I want to explore my childhood, in my assignments, I usually revisit the child I once was. Revisiting experiences of my own and those that are outside of my mine. The book takes us back to how Cameroon was conquered by the colonists but what strikes me most is the

conversation Werewere threats with the child her and the people around her. How she relates to them and how she relates to the activities happening outside her home. She centers everything through a gaze of the child she is (the part I am still reading) and how things make sense to her at the time.

I am attached to the book, therefore I will still be exploring it further this coming week. Although the book may seem that she is telling her father's story and laying down her disappoints towards him. Werewere is also telling a story of her grandmother, her aunt, her own mother, and self.

This highlights my point explored in the essay connectedness of self and the collective and penning for the self but taking special attention to the other that also resemble the self.

It is ironic that this week we explored writing the functionality and feel of the body but this has been the most challenged my body has felt. This is in terms of cooperating, responding to course requirements, doing, and hearing. The week has been the most challenging since the year began because my body was demanding conformity to a slumber.

I enjoyed Stacy Hardy's seminar, it also gave us some content that we can access on the long list. She references a number of authors who are also found on the longlist and this has built an interest to look them up and read. I am particularly interested in Theresa Hak Kyung, how the author writes about the body are moving for me. In the excerpts, she explores the face, in its description, I could feel my face wanting to respond to what the brain is consuming. This aspires to do that with words. I have learned that we can write and explore different forms and ways of writing, for example, writing about desire or about a place in ways that creates feels through exploring the body itself, giving the body life of its own. In my inability to write, I produced a story which I am very excited to better craft and build on.

A story about girlhood and how body exists and responds to its changes and how that influences behaviour. My produced work for the week made me realise that I enjoy writing from a point of nostalgia, with all the social and political issues I aim to reveal in my work and the style I have echoed to employ in my work (writing in a childlike voice). It all comes from past experiences, remembering and revisiting the child I once

was. One of the major joys this course has brought in me is having to explore that. I enjoy it and have realized that it is where I want to be.

As I page through Werewere Linking's *The Amputated Memory*, I am enjoying following through as she gently takes us through her child's mind and experiences. I notice though that as the story moves, as the character grows the voice of the narrator also matures. She tells the story from her early days of not being able to write or read to days when she is an expert at such. I am attached to the book and I am afraid I might need to let it go before finishing. This got me thinking about how many books need to reflect on our final reflective journals because some books seem to have what one needs and are pulling to the reader and it is also unfortunate that some are big in size.

I like the book for how the author weaves the individual stories of the family members through one of her own. We are invited into the lives of other characters within her family study through her story/ her parents, grandparents and aunt and uncle. I also like the fact that the book paints a picture of how this family and village was conquered by colonists but also is about interrogating the family structure and how the outside world has influenced such conditions. This is about how I have been aiming to paint out in my work as well.

I am constantly seeking for work that reveals such, for Tuesdays reading I found myself snooping on *God's and Soldiers* and found a story by Yvonne Vera *Dead swimmers*, which I think paints out the relation of how we connect to our mothers, our grandparents, and sisters. How each experience is passed down to the younger generation by choices and experiences of the old. What I appreciated more about her writing is her ability to tell the stories of all for women in one. I would like to further explore that. Tell my story as an individual but highlighting those of the collective.

One of the readings shared in the reading groups helped me craft my theme for the piece, Vonani Bila's *In the name of Amandla* helped me think of the theme my piece was to explore. This proves again that the reading groups are an imperative part of the course because they add to the reading marathon- this time at least we get a

breather because we are not by ourselves. The poem brought to class by Pura Visa, interrogates the state of SA townships and the government's negligence. With themes such as poverty, death, lack of service I was able to craft my piece using young people as a symbol to note the 'brokenness' of our conditions.

My story was guided by two readings, the *Blind Owl* by Sadegh Hedayat, *Blind Owl*, in my opinion, is a brilliant book, it draws one in. I identified so much of my writing style in it- like how the author does not directly name things, for example, he notes through the rectangle hole leading outside" he uses this expression instead of simply writing the door. I have practiced that in my description a lot. Another aspect that blew my mind in the book is how well he writes fragments of thoughts- a part that left my heart beating was a part where he describes his search for this mysterious woman he writes about. That part incorporates a description of the now and borrowing from memory. He goes on describing the woman and describing his own action. I had to stand to read that part because it is good. This I incorporated in my work, I wrote about a young girl who is sick and is in her last days of suffering. I write from a point of an observer of how the body was degenerating and as someone interacting with the body as well. Because I could not produce a piece that satisfied my desire of being a great writer, I carried last week's seminar and continued exploring the body. A piece from the anthology *Sisters of the Revolution* by Anne Richter. *The Sleep of Plants*, the piece explores the body as a protest strategy, the woman becomes a plant. The story in my interpretation means that woman is also seen as plants- expected to live according to standards and was placed by man.

I like it specifically for the storyline which states that human has a deep connection with plants. In terms of her writing, I am also attracted to exploring characters without dwelling too much in them in terms of description of how they look or adding dialogue yet their presence in the story is heavy and unforgettable. In the story, there are three characters, the mother, the woman, and the fiancée. We only see direct interaction of the two lovers yet the mother's presence is there and creates an unsettling feeling to me as a reader. I think my attempt to incorporate this was achieved because the feedback I received from my classmates qualified this. I am to further explore this strategy. Anne Richter, her form of language is interesting, like Hedayet, she also has a poetic voice and way of description that one sits with envy wishing they should have

come up with such. I am slowly adopting this, also reading some bit of poetry for a guide. I read the poetry brought by my classmates and Werewere's Amputated memories gave me a dose of the same form of writing prose.

Lastly, this week refreshing in different forms, I also stumbled upon Mariam Tlale's anthology Footprints in the Quag, I was initially looking for her recommended book on the list but found this one. Her style of writing is relatable to me, she writes mostly on black experiences during the apartheid, reading her feels like sitting in the heater with my mother while she tells stories. My mother is actually the best storyteller I know, her images are very vivid, she takes you there right, in, the, moment, and that's where Miriam takes me. I am yet to explore her more.

June

Exploring death has been some sort of organic task for me because I have an undying interest in writing about hardship- this for me is a reflection of things that I want to make sense of about myself and also about my surroundings. As challenging as it was, I enjoyed this week's assignment, it evoked an interesting image in terms of understanding how one's death is connected to different living things and people. My story explored that. How an elderly's death influenced other forms of deaths within the home. This story is by far one of my favourites. This is something I intend to explore the more and better craft in my writing. Carol said there is no standard rule to it but a consideration of sensitivity because essentially when we write about a death we write to reflect and heal from the writing.

In the reading session, I enjoyed reading brought by Eddie in class Mtutuzeli Matshoba. Although the reading was short, I like the style the writer employs in his work. His descriptions are vivid and the experiences he writes about are close to home for me. Writing in metaphors is also something that I enjoyed about the reading because in my writing I try to honestly paint out the township picture and feel using metaphors. Every week I have been learning in this and reading Mtutuzeli's piece

made me excited about exploring it further. I will be reading the book this week. He is definitely my “writing family”.

On the note searching for a “writing family” this week I read Helen Oyeyemi’s *What is not yours* and *What it Means When a Man Falls From the Sky* by Lesley Nneka Arimah, I noticed that both writers have a similar style and tone, however, I resonated more with Nneka. I enjoyed her writing, very calm and simple read in language and understanding. There is nothing super amazing I found about either books or anything new from other “popular” African authors. However, I appreciated the stories, for being able to read something simple and something that breathes. Through the different short stories, I read, I was able to write. I noticed that the main thing about writers is reading a lot of text before getting into the actual writing because I get to new words and ways of narration. This has been preached to us from day one, however, I find that the more I read the easier it is to get on the writing and to also come up with a plot and other things that feature in a story.

On capturing time, I adored the story 'the future looks good' by Lesley Nneka Arimah I like the way she plays with time in the story. Writing from the past and sort of placing prophecy to the future. Capturing the Nigerian Biafran war and centering what its consequences are for future generations - this is something I also like to reveal in my stories. My center point is writing about young people in post-apartheid SA and I also attempt to throw in history, decisions and times of when we (the subjects I write about) were not present. I like how she played with that in her book. Another interesting act of symbolism she employs in the story is the opening "Ezimna fumbles the keys against the lock and doesn't see what came behind him."

The opening comes with a new story or character. Because the author is playing between the past and present, this ties the story together. I was also interested in how well she captures broken community state through exploring the history and relationships of the family- which is something I am interested in. Her way of capturing the sibling relationship. In the reading session, we also read Stacy Hardy short story, *my Nigerian dealer*, like Arimah, she also employs a repetitive passage that plays as an interlude or a start of a new story within the story, she incorporates the phone call. This for me is genius. Last week I did something similar, however, I used a word frame.

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I will be employing this more. I think it's an exceptional way to bury the reading right in the story.

In the reading, we also read, Repetitive from the pink institution 92 by Selah Saterstrom. I am in love with the voice in this story- which is childlike but very tense and serious as well. The other day I was thinking if I am going to run with the employment of this voice, it needs to try at least to be funny, add humour. I realized that with the type of stories I write, adding humour is not easy because they are about the most heart-wrenching stuff. The story showed me that it works even without it. Also, my attraction in the story is a sharp way of writing which presents vivid images of the grandfather, his stories and the chair.

This week I read two stories by Mthuthuzeli, my view remains, his brilliant in painting pictures and making the reader feel the presence of place and character. He puts us right inside of them and their struggles. This he does through the narrator's relationship with the place or the character wrote about. For example, the first story, My Friend, the Outcast, he first draws us to the type of relationship he had with the character then we learn of his family violation by the police. Matshoba's apartheid stories are beautiful. Love them.

Another love is directed to Nana Kwame's Black Friday, wow the stories in this book are interesting and well crafted. He captures the stories of immigrant beautifully. He also writes the most surreal, things which just come out to sound and look normal in imagination. I think this is because he carries us through from the very begin that this is not an ordinary story. In the story Finkelstein 5, he plays with a scene. There's a scene where we follow the character Emmanuel and there's another one where we are in court with my Dunn. How he plays this is brilliant. I noticed that most of the stories give me a thriller film-like image, I imagine his stories on the big screen, with tension and suspension- I'm not sure how the archives that. There's on that I liked the most, it's a story about abortion, in the story, and the father gets to meet the aborted infants which are twins. He has conversations with them. It all sounds so normal. I want to explore that, explore the real world vs the dream world and it all follows a voice that settles the reader, makes the reader feel that it is all real.

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This week's seminar was a bit of a shutdown for me, I did not enjoy the readings much, Beckett's obsession with death and wrecking the world through monologues is not a technique I enjoy. I enjoy when such themes are explored in the narrative, involving characters, places, and feelings. Reading Beckett felt like listening to an old person of the community who has no optimism in life. However, I did enjoy, certain techniques that are employed in the monologues like the inward dual conversation of self, asking questions and the collection of answers. This taught me ways in which a reader can be taken into the mind of the character, I think it also gives the character more personality.

In this week's reading, I read *White Dancing Elephants* by Chaya Bhuvaneshwar. I enjoyed the book because it centers on race, identity, gender, and religion. I think it is interesting for me to get exposed to other writers who are tackling the same issues as I am writing about and who come from different countries and races.

Though her writing did not make me jump out of the chair with excitement, I particularly enjoyed the story 'the women who fell in love with death' the short story uses a folktale to tell the contemporary. Unlike *Redemption in Indigo* where the story is further developed or rather converted to the now, in *The Women Who Fell...* The story exists within the story as is and further reflects the main story. I enjoyed that the writers take us through a story within the broader story. In this, I also enjoyed how Chaya explores a relationship, the feeling of longing and waiting. In the characters' longing and waiting as a reader I was there with him. The story reminded me of one of the stories I submitted for my portfolio in applying for the course of a young man who was unsettled due to missing and wishing for the return of the sister. How this story is written and the theme at hand, I am inspired to revisit that story and further develop it.

Personally, I think this seminar has been put to practice by a number of people in our class. Through observation, I think most of us are somewhat writing on memory and past experiences. This qualifying our work as memoirs or autobiography to some extent- maybe.

I must applaud Stacy Hardy for a well-prepared lecture, it was so effective and I for one learned a lot even in her physical absence. The nature of the lecture drew me to

thinking of the power of digital, how books might one day be limited to text and audio, is that realistic? I believe in the power of print and I don't ever see it diminish though even in the next century. This was just a brain teaser.

For me, I personally think the writing itself is confronted with a larger task of creating and through writing we are giving past life experiences to live on. This for me qualifies the power of writing and I personally do not think there is anything as power. This week's seminar also installs comfort by showing us that personal stories can be a driving force to address the political. In the reading pack, there were a number of readings I enjoyed but I particularly enjoyed the excerpt by Eduardo Galeano 'Will our memories give us permission to be happy?' often the type of memory that dominant in our minds are those that carry sorrow- those we can't seem to forget. I enjoy writing about things that I struggle to make sense of, through the writing I sort of resolve internal conflict.

For this week's assignment, I decided to experiment with list fiction inspired by Carmen Gimenez Smith excerpt from Milk and Filth. I enjoyed how she writes fragments of self and life journey with her exposure to writing and other people's literature. She writes inside of the listing stories of herself, mother and self-connectivity in chronological order. Some sentences are longer and some are short. Others are connected while others are disconnected. I enjoyed the texts' ability to make one wonder and confused yet also it gives the reader the answers they might be seeking for.

Employing this for was fun for me, it gave me what I'd like to define as sentence discipline because I had to remember that I am merely giving points and not taking the reader through the character's movement and activity. I think exploring with list fiction have me an idea on how I can discipline my sentences better- write them in point form and later connect them. In that way, what I am conveying will become clearer and more powerful (if I am the intent). It seems what I was hoping to achieve by exploring with the form was achieved because most feedback received in class was positive and I was encouraged to consider exploring for it.

July

In week 1, I read *Meggie Nelson's Bluets*. I was attracted to the reading due to the numbering form explored by the writer. This reading was recommended to me based on my last assignment. Not only do I find the form appealing as a writer- I think it makes reading easier as well. It allows the text to breathe and exists outside chaos. I enjoy the flow. *Bluets* for me is a depiction of how I can develop my writing with this form. That the sentences don't always have to be brief. Like in essay writing, one can explore a theme with multiple sentences under the number. I also find it interesting that the writer writes about her relationship with the colour blue in such a multilayered way. This brings me back to a previous note about writing around symbols. Where the story is about different things but rotating around one symbol. I am still to further explore this.

On Earth, We're Briefly Gorgeous by Ocean Vuong is indeed a GORGEOUS book, it creates all sorts of beats of hearts inside of me while I read. I am failed by words to describe the book and what it does to me. I enjoyed the letter format explored by the writer- capturing feelings and experience through the letter. I like how some letters play as an eraser to the others and how some are a continuation to others. How they allow the readers to travel in time and space with two characters (mother and son) as they move within themes of death, immigration, struggles and intergenerational relationships with writing. I am still visiting this book.

Last week I visited the *Anti* people by Sony Labou Tansi, at the beginning of the reading I felt like my reading joy was being killed bit by bit. The story didn't scream 'keep going' for me. At my disposal, I had Dambudzo Marechera *Black sunlight* and other digital readings from my supervisor. I felt like a feel book experience so I sought solace to Dambudzo Marechera but found myself back to Tansi. I kept going and ended up seeing and feeling the beauty of the book. I enjoyed reading about Dadou's character, how it emerged from being most loved to most wanted dead by the soldiers. What I take from the book is capturing contemporary stories about modern Africa- today struggles and battles outside of those of the past. This is a dominating theme in my work. Also how in the book there are flashes of how present political and social struggles are born from those that occurred in the past. I also appreciated the book for

its simplicity in language and sentences- which is something I am constantly seeking to bring in my work.

August

The thesis has become an integral part of my existence. Every movement, every thought, every action is somehow connected to the thesis. I am constantly in thought thinking about how I can navigate and create stories that bloom and become flowers to admire. I am constantly thinking about how I can achieve what I had initially noted in my abstract.

I realise that the child-like voice is quite challenging to achieve. In my scribbling, I sometimes feel regulated, sometimes I want to paint out certain images- which I have the words but when I think about 'is this what a child can think/say' I often feel stuck. I find following that voice interesting but I have concluded that realistically-especially with the themes I want to explore in my work, I would have to create a child whose imagination is wild, who is also smart in reasoning like a 25-year-old like myself would do. I think with regards to this voice what I am comfortable with, is how I have managed to harness a playful voice, I am looking to run with that.

My understanding is also that the child voice and way is something that I have to constantly have to work on. I was thinking what would reading folklore do for my writing, would it help me with imagining ways of telling the story in an obsessive child wild voice. Stacy, please recommend some books I can look at to feed this desire.

In terms of reading, I also read *Things we found during the autopsy* by Kuzhali Manickavel, I appreciate most of the short stories in the book. The writer explores a number of forms and voices. Personally flash fiction was not something I found comfort in exploring or reading but this book made it interesting for me. Manickavel is a very rich writer, the narrative and imagination are very rich. Also, the language is welcoming and kind to read and understand. I had attempted to explore list fiction again and I find that it did not work out, there is a lot I was longing for in my own writing, which I felt list fiction form does not grant me the opportunity to bring out. In my writing, I could not

give myself that opportunity. There's a thing that Manickavel does with the listing or number, the writer is very brief and shoots straight while Maggie Nelson in the novel *Bluets*, runs and runs with it. I am conflicted which way works but I think for me Nelson does it better and give me the meat of the story while Manickavel just offers the bones. I am not giving up on list fiction though, I see it coming in my thesis some way or another.

These past weeks I have been exploring with reading books that have utilised the interlink story tool. The purpose of focusing on these books is because I was worried if I was moving in the right line in terms of my interlinking. I find myself moving with the same characters and voices and experiences. I read *Touch* by Adania Shibli, *Drown* Junot Diaz, *The House of Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros.

A highlighted similarity about these books is the continuity voice and thread of characters the authors bring within the stories. The stories are about the same people, however, going through different channels of experiences. Even so, I noticed the authors maintaining a link in the stories. However, some authors do not use the same strategy like in *The House of Mango Street*, although the stories are carried through out with the same characters and voice, most of the stories do not have a link in the narrative. This gave me consolation because I think I have been obsessed with wanting the story to move according to time and to make it a whole big story and not snippets of a big story in one. Going forward, I would like to explore other stories using the same characters and not insist on moving with the same story throughout.

In Sandra Cisneros book, I also enjoyed the child voice and narrator that she employs in her writing. I have discovered that writing in a child's voice and view is not the easiest thing I am however consoled by Sandra's child voice that tackles issues and views that are not normally associated with children's gaze. Again, I am reminded about the power of fiction and creativity that not everything should be associated with reality.

On *Drawn*, I am interested in the tool of dividing the stories according to years and time. Most of my stories move through time and space, I was thinking about putting the stories in orders of their time and make the time visible as the main centre of the story.

At first, I was only open to reading “African Literature” but I am happy to be growing into an open mind and hunger to consume literature from different parts of the world. I find that reading literature by people who do not have the same reality confrontation as yours give you more ideas in terms of coming up with a story because you start thinking of how you can use their ideas and the way they’ve gone about to tell the story to tell a story that is closer to you.

September

The working together of the thesis draft was not accommodated with in depth and serious reading. I revisited, *Fresh water* by Akwaeke Awezi to trace playing with different voices and narrative but following the same story. I remembered how the book has different voices that form part of the makeup of the story. I was attracted by this and wanted to explore it, playing with time, playing with different voices, going in and out of the story by introducing other stories that are lined up to it and within.

Because of the different elements, the story did not come out as it existed in the brain. In one of my previous RJs, I expressed that sometimes, the ideas that fill my mind and fuel my heart with excitement do not come out the way I imagine or felt them. I partly blame it on language but I have also reached a recent understanding that It is mostly because I do not pen them immediately they plant themselves in my mind- while they are still fresh and willing. This is a learning that has taught me about the sensitivity and delicacy of writing, maybe the duande, maybe the spiritual aspect that accompanies writing. Like most soul music artists reflect, the songs come when least expected them and they come barring an important message. They say as singers if you don’t listen to the song while it within and not pen it you will miss it. I believe this has proven to be true in my journey as well.

After a re-work and re-work and re-thinking and structuring of the story, the brain eventually remembered what it was supposed to be, though it still needs to be revisited and re-worked. In that week I also read bits and pieces of *Eve Out of Her Rains* by Ananda Devi for similar reasons I revisited *Fresh Water*, for the different interlined voices that form the story. In Devi’s book I appreciated how the different characters

that form the story speak for themselves and for each other. They allure the reader into their brains, in their personal histories and relationships with each other. This gave an idea; I am considering to develop one of my stories 'Seeking a better place' following this form. There are a number of characters in the story whose voices and in depth stories the reader does not get to hear about, maybe following this form can help build a bigger and better story.

Part of my reading this week consisted of a few pages of Happiness Like Water by Chinelo Okparanta, I am not sure what it is but the writing did not snatch and made my concentration its own. I only read a few stories and I was not captivated by them. The stories lack wordplay and the exploration of image. Reading the stories felt like listening to a friend telling a story when they are not ready to. A part of the first story 'On Ohaeto Street' reminded me of my own story 'Sounds from the Ancestor' this was a wakeup call to work on its simplicity and bring on an energy that would want the reader to demand more. Although I do think Okparanta is a rich writer but in terms of speaking about a world she is most familiar with, I like the usage of terms that are popular to her people. Without looking her up, I already could identify she was from west Africa- specifically Ghana. This got me thinking about the seminar we had on writing about place using the places description and language. In my opinion, the tool is effective and locates the reader in the story, with the people from that place even though they've never set foot there.

On Readers Report

The readers report comes at a time when I was starting to feel less confident with the work due to having been working on it for a while and not fuelled with excitement anymore. Though my supervisor (Stacy Hardy) had expressed that the work is headed to the right direction is was encouraging to receive feedback from someone outside the course. Someone who had not interacted with any of my work before and still believe is good and original.

Receiving the report prompted me to revisit the abstract in order to trace what the initial vision and mission was and I found that how the reader saw the work is how I had imagined anyone reading the work to see. Though, there are elements about the thesis that I would have appreciated for the reader to highlight, like the fact that I was

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aiming for a childlike voice and gaze. The reader did not highlight, they however, noted that it is a collection of stories that aim to tell stories of young people growing up in post-apartheid South Africa lacking options to survive.

Incorporating the feedback and suggestions from the reader has help see and experience the stories differently and in a more neatly packed way. For example, there was a story where I did not mention the character's names and the reader said it was important to consider because it would make the story flow better. This was the same story my supervisor and I were going back and forth trying to see how we can build it in a way that would not be messy.

Though the report is filled with praises I was not comfortable when the reader suggested I consider putting translations or building a glossary. Not over explaining non English words was intentional because part of writing about the type of people and experiences I write about, I wanted the story to be more authentic and if google does not help then non-isiZulu or Sesotho speakers can make the effort to find meaning and understanding to the world. There is quite an interesting element about language can build and how it can grow. My supervisor advised me to look into writing English in a way I would speak in my language. Exploring this showed me how certain expressions can be mind blowing. This is also what the reader highlighted about the work.

Overall, the readers report build faith and courage onto me about my work and help better craft it and see it differently.

Book Reviews

Friday Black by Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah

Each page is home to words capturing dark and strange tales of young people's experiences in modern-day America. Young people who are dealing with the crisis of being black in a world where blackness is not accommodated, at least in its loud form. Friday Black, named after the day where retailers from all over the world are offered a discount on several consumer goods. It is also recorded that the day's origins are traced back to the 1800s Southern plantation owners could buy slaves at a discount on the day after Thanksgiving. Although this can be argued not to be based on a factual stand. With a twist in the name, the short stories in the book are closely related to the shakey status of black people and other people of colour residing in America. Relating to modern-day slavery and the power of white supremacy.

In twelve stories Adjei-Brenyah captures experiences, voices, faces, skin and feelings of young people who are placed in a social setting where their existence is in threat and moves unsettled. With some stories following a fantastical narrative, some not the book boldly screams on behalf of those who are voiceless and does this in a male lens.

One of the stories that were striking interesting in their nature of language and packaging is The Finkelstein 5. In the opening story The Finkelstein 5, Adjei-Brenyah uses a technique of scale numbering to outline the thread of blacks when they activate or are at their utmost black. The story follows a character Emmanuel who is disturbed-hurt by the gruesome murder of five innocent black American children by a white male who felt his life and the lives of his children threatened at a library park.

Adjei-Brendyah's writing in this story creates vivid visuals of the scene, while we follow Emmanuel's blackness escalating from a 1.5 to a 5.5 depending on whether he wears a tie or sags his pants. In the background, we are also placed in a courtroom where the man who murdered the five boys is being questioned. The two scenes read like they are playing at the same time. What is interesting is the writer's ability to not make them clash. How he builds the imagination does not cause collide, the words breath through the pages and we are woven to what feels like moving visuals.

In this collection of beautiful twisted fantastical book, while some stories are longer short stories, Adjei-Brendyah also hits us with shorter stories that are a kick and leaves the reader dismantling the ambiguity in the messages. One particularly that does this well is the short piece Things My Mother Said. Though the story is read through a male narrator's voice, the story is carried by the mother's voice. There is more of her than the narrator. In this regard, this gives the woman's voice a gigantic presence. As a reader, I feel more of her than the narrator, this created through direct quotes that dominate the story. In the story, Adjei-Brendyah also plays with settled messaging: the struggles of single mothers, the struggles of poverty, of living in a country where you are a misfit.

Carrying themes of being an outsider and being pressed by it. In the last story, In Retail, the writer explores the idea of not having a way out but death seeming like an option. In the story, the narrator takes us through the story of Lucy, a girl who committed suicide at the retail centre. Lucy death penned to highlight how submitting to suicide as a way out has become the only way out for frustrated young people. The story also plays with the idea of language limitation, how on a daily we form relationships with strangers, they go on to mean something for the convenience of the day. The end of the story leaves the reader in a dark place, feeling helpless for the narrator, possibly for themselves for feeling stuck like there is no way out.

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Friday Black does something with following a more magical realism voice, that is convincing. In reading the voice makes you feel safe in that work comforted that the story is not real but it can be believable because its 'unrealness' it plays honestly with social reality. This Adjei- Bendyah also offers in the story, Lark Street where the character interacts with his aborted fetuses. In the conversation, the writer draws us in what a conversation with an aborted child would be like. Would you feel remorse; would you explain the circumstances that led to choosing to abort. What would they say? How would they feel?

This book places center stage to young people's dilemmas of depression, financial desperation, suffering and seeking for immediate approval in the black skin. Though they are set in the United States are told dominantly through male voice. I identify myself in these stories, in South Africa. As a female.

Review 2: Ocean Vuong, on Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous

Written in a letter form, *On Earth, We're Briefly Gorgeous* is a novel with elements of its writer Ocean Vuong. It follows the life story of Little Dog, a Vietnamese boy growing up in a foreign country with foreign parents. In the coming-of-age story of Little Dog, we are drawn into the stories of other members of his family, how they come into existence and how they move in America with Little Dog as their navigator.

In *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* the story is woven through fragments in the narrator's voice as he remembers, as he attempts to make sense of his surroundings, his grandmother Lan, his mother Rose and himself.

In the letter to the narrator's mother who is most likely not to read the letter due to not understanding the English language, Vuong outlines the limitations presented by language. The limitations faced by non-English speakers in a setting where the language is spoken. The characters writing of the letter to his mother in its way are highlights of how English creates a disconnection between people who are in intimate relationships.

In the letter, Vuong draws us in how Little Dog moves as an outsider in the community he grew up in. Being bullied at school for being a foreigner, for being different but also being at an advantage for being able to communicate in the English language in some instances. For example, being a translator at a grocery store for his mother.

In between passages of poetry, which can be noted from the fact that Ocean Vuong has released poetry before *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*. The book threads Little Dog's family history how they land to America. The history and their journey are placed in one frame. How the Vietnamese war against America influenced their journey, their current lives and names. The book highlights an imperative note of interest how history gets to influence the realities of the current.

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The book for me is an honest rendition of class, race, sexuality politics. Vuong brings these topical issues together in the most creative form, captures them through conversations and picking from memory. The letter Little Dogs writes is a try to create a language to explain his sexuality to his mother.

In an interview with The Waterstone, Vuong said apart from attempting to interrogate the power of language he writes the book at the heart when several young people were falling. Mostly killed by drugs. In the book, Little Dog's teenage lover is a victim to the falling.

In Vuong's rendition of many beautiful images and poetic flow. We see how love is a winner of all trials and tribulations. The love is vivid from the very beginning with the naming him with a distasteful name to protect him from evil spirits. We see the love win right at the end when he testifies to his mother about his sexuality how even with the lack of language to catch the understanding. She accepts. The writer is not a comforter, the book is filled with punches packed to hit you hard and awake the thinking behind the metaphors, the imaginative description. Vuong is a rich writer who feeds you so much but leaves you with greed. He is amazing.

Review 3: Freshwaters by Emezi Akwaeke

The book reminds me of soul-afro pop singer Thandiswa Mazwai's song, Abenguni. In the song, Thandiswa talks about how as human beings we carry with us different spirits that have made a return from the spiritual world. The spirits that live within guides our thinking, decisions and protects us in our confrontation with the world. Like the song, Freshwaters suggests that we are not individuals but beings with many other spirits as we move.

In Freshwaters, Akwaeke takes us through the different voices of these spirits. In its fresh way, the book takes us through each of their voices, their reasoning, their evils, their good through the body vassal of a character Ada.

The book opens with a trip of the different spiritual beings as the 'we'. In the chapter, they take us through the story of Ada. Through the story of Ada, we get to learn about them and how they form in Ada and why they form in Ada. Conceived as an answer to her Catholic father's prayers, Ada is a response from an Igbo deity – Ala – whose ways and worship her father has all but forgotten.

In its poetic nature, we given the background of Ada's life. Born of a Nigerian father and a Malaysian mother, at 16 Ada leaves Nigeria in Virginia and being chosen to be a ogbanje- which is a spiritual conjurer. Though the spirits have lived and communicated with her for a long time. Ada gets to know about them during her college years. The spirits have different strengths & weaknesses. They come in different gender as well. In the text, Akwaeke plays around with how the different traits of these spirits display themselves through Ada in how she relates to people and the decisions she makes in the relationships she forms.

As the reader is taken through the different chapters, the reader is transported through the different spirits and their nature. An interesting aspect of the book is how the mythical theme of the fact that people are multifaceted. The story gets richer and more alluring when the spirit communicates directly to Ada. This happens in a scene when they conflict with each other, fight to dominate Ada.

This factor can be pinpointed in the part in the book were after Ada realises her potential power on the spirit, how she would exploit them and that she has the right to activate either any of them. A part when Ada realises that there is a male spirit she wanted to move with creates jealousy in another spirit Asughara.

This is interesting to note with regards to spirituality, to be people who believe, the assumption is that spirits always evoke the good in us. However here Akwaeke shows the different side of spirituality and how it is link issues of mental illnesses.

Another intriguing part about the book is the unshy detailed sex scenes, unlike most books I have read where the sex is rushed. Akwaeke has a very strong ability in making the reader travel with the characters everywhere they go. With the sex, as a reader I travelled with her. The detailing of the body moves the dialogue gets you there.

What forms the drawing part of the story is the fact that moves with different voices, different observation and setting. Some voices feel like home and some are delivered in a way that shows they are passing by and not staying. Akwaeke also digs in issues of immigration, "fatherlessness" hair politics but weaving it in a voice and gaze of a spirit. The enjoyment of freshwater is also achieved because it is current and explores a life lived by a young person living in the now. It is more relatable in that regard. There is an important element to appreciate in the style of writing which is poetic, Akwaeke builds these brief scenes in the story and they keep moving poetically and rhythmically. This keeps the reader awake, the different voices that narrate the story kept me in

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wonder and energised to find out on how Ada moves in the story and her different confrontation given her condition. This book is beautiful.

Writing in Community Workshop Report August 2019

Introduction

The writing in community workshop was facilitated at the Curtis Nkondo School of Specialisation in Emdeni Soweto. The school has a well-functioning book club with learners from grade 9-12 where they have developed a culture of exchanging books, reading and sharing their writing creation. The Curtis Nkondo Book club meets every Wednesday during their prep session for 1 hour. The book club is supported by the Wits University writing centre which they provide reading material and also help with the facilitation. I was granted the opportunity to facilitate two sessions in August. The 7th & 14th of August. The first workshop entailed writing activities and the second entailed a reading of my work with the learners and feedback session by learners.



The first session aimed to introduce the learners to free writing and other writing activities on creating a story using different elements namely: smell, observations, touch and sound. The second session aimed to share my work with the learners and allow them to give their thoughts and guidance if they wish.

The purpose of the two sessions (as instructed by the course facilitator Paul) with the writing exercises, was to see what other people outside the course can create and how would they receive the activities and the work. With the second session, the purpose was to share work created within the course, work that is part of the thesis with an audience outside the perimeters of the course. This, to see how the audience would react to it and what would the learning for me (the writer) be.

The main objectives of the two sessions were:

Introduce free writing if there are not familiar with it yet.

Share material created during free writing and other writing exercises.

Build my own and learner's confidence in writing and sharing their work.

Reading of thesis work for confidence creation purposes.

Reading of thesis work for feedback

- Feedback to incorporate and build a better story.
- Feedback to point out my strongest points and observe techniques used to build strong points to exploit them further.

Session one: Writing workshop

In the first session, there were 11 learners. Three grade 9. Six grade 10 & two grade 12's. Since this was the first session, we spent the first 10 minutes doing a round of introductions. In the introductions, everyone introduced themselves by name, where they are from and what they are currently reading. My introduction opened a conversation about studying creative writing and learnings. The learners were particularly interested in the idea of studying writing and what one would pursue after it as it was something new to most of them.

We kicked off the writing session with 5 minutes of free writing with the sentence 'in my community' as a kick-starter. Sharing the written notes was voluntary. In the produced writing, most of us wrote about social ills within our different communities in different parts of Soweto- Nyaope drug abuse being most dominant. Personally, this was interesting for me because it gave some sort of affirmation that part of what I would like to voice out is a collective 'worry'.

In the remaining 30 minutes, we took part in another writing activity where we were given 10 minutes to spread in the school premises and build a paragraph or two-story based on what they see, hear, smell and touch. Upon their return, they could not read out their work but gave feedback on the activity. The overall sentiment was that it was interesting to take note of objects, sounds and smells of things that are in their reach on a daily but they do not pay attention to them. Another feedback for them was that they noticed that a story can be built from anything around them.

Session two: Reading workshop

The second session was short. It lasted for 30 minutes and there were only 10 students. Grade 12's were writing term national papers hence their absence. I read two short stories from the thesis. Days of The Banana Carri & Stories Mama Tell. I

choose the two stories particular because they both centre the element of coming of age. In their linking nature, they place the idea of how history can affect the current. During my reading, I felt their learners losing concentration and interests in employing some attentiveness. They poking each other and having low conversations. There were instances I paused and asked to be given attention but when it did not completely stop, I continued with the reading.

During the feedback session, the majority was positive. I judged this based on the fact that they were mostly not listening. However, there was a number who gave me in-depth feedback on my style of writing. The use of metaphors and personification, touching on a familiar experience through the movement of bodies and they pointed out humour that I had no idea existed in my work. Another interesting thing they questioned was the historical event noted in the story *Stories Mama Tells*, the story briefly touches on the 1980's battle between the Inkatha and the ANC. Some were not familiar with it and some had heard of it. The discussion of this event led to discussion tribalism which led to a conversation about xenophobic attacks which were dominating the news at the time. I was happy with what my work created. In my writing, I hope to create work that would make awareness of a social or political issue and spark conversation and possibly an action plan.



Outcomes

- Sharing the work gave me the confidence to share the work with other people. In the next week, I was invited to a Toni Morrison memorial at Siyabonga High School which I shared the work with teachers and learners. The group also gave confidence in fueling feedback.
- Running the two workshops with the learners created a relationship with some learners who are already pursuing writing, they have sent me some of their work to give them feedback. Reading their stories and giving recommendation has also highlighted my learning in the course. The different writing techniques learnt through the seminars.
- The experience also planted more ideas in the writing, what to explore and how to go about exploring the stories. For example: After the discussion about xenophobia, I produced a story looking at the experience of young people born with one parent who is a foreign national.

What Worked Less Well & Recommendations

- Reading two pieces all in one go. The learners lost concentration. Maybe if I printed a copy for each of them would have been better. Listening and following a story on the page is easier to grasp and follow.
- Although the learners were freely engaging me about different things, they might have been intimidated by the fact that I am an MA student hence all the feedback was praise opposed to also pointing out my weakness as well. I liked the idea of sharing work with a group that is already engaging with literature. Next time, I might want to take the work to University level. At the writing centre perhaps.

Conclusion

Overall the two workshops went well and they each sparked excitement in creating and sharing more on my end. Apart from the grade 12's absence in the second session, everything that was planned and intended to be met was met. The learners were on time and they stayed throughout the sessions and participated. Through this experience, I have built literature relations with the Wits writing centre and the learners.

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Reading list

NoViolet Bulawayo, *We Need New Names*

Fiston Mwanza Mujila, *Tram 83*

Susan Stainbeig, *Cow Girlology of Contemporary African Writing*

Adele King, *The Milka Cow*

Katelyn Hemmeke, *What are you?*

Joel Matlou, *Man Against Himself*

Freshwater, *Akwaeke Emezi*

Kate Berheimer, *My Mother She Killed Me, My Father He Ate*

Amos Totuola, *Palmwine Drinkard*

Black Brown & Beige: Surrealist Writing from Africa and the Diaspora, Franklin Rosemont and Robin Kelley

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Redemption in Indigo, Karen Lord

Gods & Soldiers: Anthology of Contemporary African Writing, Rob Spillman

The Amputated Memories, Werewere Liking

Blind Owl, Sedegh Hedayat

Sisters of the Revolution: A Feminist Speculative Fiction Anthology, Ann Vandermeer

Footprints in the Quag, Marriam Tlale

Mtutuzeli Matshoba, Call Me Not a Man

What is Not Yours is Not Yours, Helen Oyeyemi

What it Means When a Man Falls From the Sky, Lesley Nneka Arimah

A White Dancing Elephant, Chaya Bhuvaneshwar

Bluets, Meggie Nelson

On Earth, We're Briefly Gorgeous, Ocean Vuong

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Anti People, Sony Labou Tansi

Black Sunlight, Dambuzo Marechera

Things we Found in Autopsy, Kuzhali Manickavel

Touch, Adania Shibli

Drown, Junot Diaz

The House of Mango Street, Sandra Cisneros

Happiness Like Water, Chinelo Okparanta

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